***Joel 2:28-32 Acts 2:14-21 June 8, 2014***

***Day of Pentecost***

DEAD IN THE WATER OR ALIVE IN THE SPIRIT?

***Let us pray: Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, our rock and our***

***redeemer. Amen.***

The sterling silver bottomless ewer is the oldest international sporting trophy. Before the first modern Olympic Games were held in Athens in 1896, nine contests had already been held for the trophy.

The trophy was first awarded in 1851, when the U.S. sailing ship, *America*, beat all other competitors in a race around the British Isle of Wight. Supposedly, when Queen Victoria asked one of her attendants at the finish line, “Who came in second?” he replied, “Ah, Your Majesty, there is no second.” The sterling silver trophy was named the *America’s Cup*, in honor of the first winner.

During the next 132 years, all twenty-six challenges for the *America’s Cup* resulted in wins for the USA. In 1983, the U.S. sailboat, *Liberty*, was skippered by Dennis Conner, who had successfully defended the cup in 1980 on a ship called *Freedom*. The 1983 challenger was an Australian team, led by skipper John Bertrand, on the boat *Australia II.* The Aussies had a radical keel design, which they refused to display.

*Liberty* won the first two and the fourth races in the best-of-seven contest. *Australia II* won the third, fifth, and sixth races, to force a seventh, deciding race. This was the first time in the 132-year history that a sixth race had been required, much less a seventh.

The final race on September 26, 1983, was delayed for 55 minutes

because of light winds. Finally, the wind increased to 8 knots, and the race was underway. When the boats finally started, the crews were cautious. As the US skipper said, “Neither party wanted to make a mistake and end up in the protest room.” *Liberty* bolted to a 57-second lead, but *Australia II* was able to make up the time and crossed the finish line with a 41-second lead.

This was the first time the U.S. had lost the *America’s Cup* in its 132-year history. Australian Prime Minister Bob Hawke gave his countrymen permission to celebrate when he said, “Any boss who sacks anyone for not turning up today is a bum.” Meanwhile, skipper Dennis Conner didn’t feel like getting out of bed. He said, “I am usually full of life and energy . . . I just wanted to hide.”1

Skipper Conner probably felt “dead in the water.” The race organizers were certainly concerned about the *Liberty* and the *Australia II* being “dead in the water” because of the light winds, so they delayed the start of the deciding race.

“Dead in the water.” It’s a nautical term that describes a sailing ship that is stationary in the water, with no wind in its sails to make it come alive. The phrase has been transferred to everyday life to mean “not going anywhere.”

On this Day of Pentecost, we remember the story about God’s Holy Spirit coming upon the disciples with “a sound like the rush of a violent wind” and “all of them were filled with the Holy Spirit.” In other words, the disciples and the church “had wind in its sails to make it come alive.” The church was going somewhere!

With an emphasis on God’s Holy Spirit on this Day of Pentecost, we might be tempted to think the Holy Spirit didn’t arrive on the scene until fifty days after Easter. Of course, we would be wrong! Listen:

\* In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind (or, the spirit of God) swept over the face of the waters (Genesis 1:1-2)

\* Then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being (Genesis 2:7)

\* O Lord my God, when you hide your face, they are dismayed; when you take away their breath, they die and return to their dust. When you send forth your spirit, they are created; and you renew the face of the ground (Psalm 104:29-30)

\* In the valley of dry bones, the Lord said to Ezekiel, “Mortal, can these bones live?” Ezekiel answered, “O Lord God, you know.” Then God said to him, “Prophesy to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. Thus says the Lord God to these bones: I will cause breath (or, spirit) to enter you, and you shall live (Ezekiel 37:3-5)

\* An angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take May as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins” (Matthew 1:20-21)

\* Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit” (John 20:19, 21-22)

\* But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you . . . But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead

because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you” (Romans 8:9-11)

If we Christians are “dead in the water” and not going anywhere, it’s not because God hasn’t put wind in our sails to make us come alive. God’s Holy Spirit is alive and promises to make us come alive. The scoffers in Jerusalem that Pentecost Day dismissed what they saw and heard by saying, “Ah, they’re just drunk!” Peter, however, knew they weren’t drunk — it was only 9:00 a.m.! Instead, Peter said, “No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel: ‘In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy.” (Acts 2:17-18)

If we think God’s Holy Spirit was only for Peter and the first apostles — or even only for the 3,000 who were baptized and joined the church that day — we’re “dead in the water.” If we think what we do in this church is all up to us and our own best efforts, we’re “dead in the water.” If we don’t open our church’s sails to God’s Holy Spirit, we’re “dead in the water” and we’re not going anywhere.

Since I don’t know anything about sailing, I Googled “The technique of sailing” and found a helpful website about “Learn how to Sail a Small Sailboat — Basic Sailing Techniques.” Here’s what it said: “One of the most important things to remember, when learning to sail, is to always know where the wind is coming from in relation to the boat. Knowing how your boat is positioned relative to the wind direction is crucial for how you set the sails and how you position your body weight.”2 What if we edited those sailing techniques for an article called “Learn how to be a church that is

going somewhere.” It might sound like this: “One of the most important things to remember, when learning to be the church, is to always know where God’s Holy Spirit is coming from in relation to the church. Knowing how your church is positioned relative to the Holy Spirit is crucial for how you do your ministry and allocate your resources.”

Think about the apostle Peter. God’s Holy Spirit filled the sails of this fisherman’s life and blew him onto a course he never expected. Just 52 days earlier, Peter had denied even knowing Jesus — the third time with a curse! Now, here he is, standing before a crowd of at least 3,000 (minimum, based on the number of converts Luke reports — but probably many more), boldly preaching that “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

Maybe Peter and the other disciples felt as if they were “dead in the water” during those fifty days between Easter Sunday and the Day of Pentecost. Maybe they were tempted to set sail on their own, even if the winds were light and not favorable for their mission. But they waited. Remember? They waited for it and they prayed for it — God’s Holy Spirit. And God’s Holy Spirit came upon them with “a sound like the rush of a violent wind.” And the disciples came to life and set sail on their mission for Jesus Christ, “in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (Acts 1:8)

Where might God send us if we unfurl our sails and position our church relative to the Holy Spirit? Dr. Tom Long tells a story about Pentecost from his experience as a pastor in a small church. Listen to him tell it: “Many years ago, when I was the brand new pastor of a small church, I announced to my congregation one Sunday, ‘Next Sunday morning at ten o’clock, I’m going to start a pastor’s church school class on the basics of the Christian faith. If you are new to the faith, or if you would like a refresher course in the faith, I invite you to join me next Sunday at ten.’”

“The next week, I went to my classroom expecting to greet a throng, and I was immediately disappointed. There were only three elementary school children, three little girls, waiting on my for the class. I tried to hide my disappointment and over the next few weeks to do the best I could to teach them about the Christian faith. The week before Pentecost Sunday, I said to them, ‘Do you girls know what Pentecost is?’”

“They didn’t. So, I said, ‘Well, Pentecost was when the church was seated in a circle and tongues of fire came down from heaven and landed on their heads and they spoke the gospel in all the languages of the world.’”

“Two of the little girls took that rather calmly, but one of them got her eyes as big as saucers. And when she could finally speak, she said,‘Reverend Long, we must have been absent that Sunday!’”

Here is Tom Long’s reaction to that little girl’s disappointment at missing Pentecost: “The beautiful thing about that is not that she misunderstood. The beautiful thing is that she thought it could have happened in our church, that God’s Spirit could have come even to our little congregation and given us a word to speak that the world desperately needs to hear.”

This morning we use two Affirmations of Faith — the Apostles’ Creed as we help the choir sing the anthem and a portion of “A Brief Statement of Faith” from the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). As we think about what it might mean for our church to unfurl our sails completely so we can be filled with God’s Holy Spirit and come alive, let us affirm what we believe. Would you join me?

We trust in God the Holy Spirit,

everywhere the giver and renewer of life.

The Spirit justifies us by grace through faith,

sets us free to accept ourselves and to love God and neighbor,

and binds us together with all believers

in the one body of Christ, the church.

The same Spirit

who inspired the prophets and apostles

rules our faith and life in Christ through Scripture,

engages us through the Word proclaimed,

claims us in the waters of baptism,

feeds us with the bread of life and the cup of salvation,

and calls women and men to all ministries of the church.

In a broken and fearful world

the Spirit gives us courage

to pray without ceasing,

to witness among all peoples to Christ as Lord and Savior,

to unmask idolatries in church and culture,

to hear the voices of peoples long silenced,

and to work with others for justice, freedom, and peace.

In gratitude to God, empowered by the Spirit,

we strive to serve Christ in our daily tasks

and to live holy and joyful lives,

even as we watch for God's new heaven and new earth,

praying, Come, Lord Jesus!

***Let us pray: Almighty God, at the feast of Pentecost you sent your Holy Spirit to the disciples, filling them with joy and boldness to preach the gospel. Empower us with that same Spirit to witness to your redeeming love and draw all people to you; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.***

NOTES

1I read many sources to gather this information. Much of the information is taken from Joanne A. Fishman, “America’s Cup to Australia II as 132-Year U.S. Reign Ends,” The New York Times, September 27, 1983, at [www.nytimes.com/1983/09/27](http://www.nytimes.com/1983/09/27)

2Tom Lochhass, “Learn How to Sail a Small Sailboat — 3. Basic Sailing Techniques,” at [www.sailing.about.com](http://www.sailing.about.com)

3Thomas G. Long, “What’s the Gift?” at www.day1.org.