

Sermon
Smyrna UCC
March 12, 2017
Second Sunday in Lent

“Blowing in the Wind”

Scriptures: (Lectionary)

Old Testament – Genesis 12:1-4a – “I will make you great, Abraham.”

New Testament – John 3:1-8 – must be born again – Nicodemus, born from above, water and Spirit, flesh and spirit, wind – “The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

Grace to you, and peace, from God our Creator, our Redeemer, and our Sustainer. Amen.

In the movie *White Christmas*, there is a scene where Rosemary Clooney, Bing Crosby, and Danny Kaye recall the days of the minstrel shows. Singers, dancers, and comedians were all at the top of their games, they show and tell us. Like this exchange:

(And by the way, an “Interloctor” was the host of a minstrel show.)

“Mr. Interloctor? “What is wrong with you?”

“Well, I know of a doctor... “Tell about him, do.”

“Sad to say, one day he fell, right into a great big well.”

Oh, that’s too bad!

“Well, not at all!”

“Why speak in such a tone?”

“He should have attended to the sick, and let the well alone.”

I love that movie! We watch it every Christmas....

Here's another favorite scene, this time from the Pink Panther. Peter Sellers, giving his name as Professor Guy Gregoire, is checking into a small hotel in the Alps. After getting the key to his "room" he asks the desk clerk if his dog bites? The man shakes his head, "no." Of course, you *know* what's next. He reaches down to pet the dog, which promptly bites his jacket.

"I thought you said your dog doesn't bite," he protests, with a pained expression.

The clerk replies. "That is not my dog."

It's precisely this kind of play of words that is taking place in our text from John today. The Greek word, "*anōthen*" has two meanings. It can either mean, "from above" or "again." John wants you to know that Nicodemus is one of those Jews who "don't get it about Jesus." Nicodemus don't know that Jesus is "from above."

When Jesus tells Nicodemus he needs to be born "*anōthen*," he means that he needs to be "from above." But Nicodemus, the foil in this story, hears Jesus saying that he needs to be born "again."

So he asks, "How CAN I be born again?" To which Jesus replies, essentially, Nicodemus, you don't get it. What is born of the flesh is flesh. What is born of the Spirit is spirit.

Jesus says, "You must be born from above. The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." Be open! Be open to the Spirit!

Many Christians still hear this like Nicodemus. They hear that one must be born again, have a conversion experience like Paul on the road to Damascus, speak in tongues, and be a Pentecostal. That's hearing it born "again," not born "from above."

Let's look at where Jesus was coming from. Our Old Testament reading will give us a clue.

Abraham was born "from above." He was a fairly good age, married to Sarah, and living in Haran (an ancient city which is in modern day Turkey). One day God said to him, "I want you to move, Abraham. I know that you're comfortable, here in your home, in this country with your family and friends. But I have a plan for you."

If Abraham had not been "born from above," he would have replied, "Are you out of your mind, Lord? I'm 75. I'm happy here in Haran. I'm settled. I'm comfortable. I'm good. My father lived here before me, and I really like it here. It's a good place to be. Thank you, good Lord, but no thanks."

But, Abraham was "born from above," and he felt the *pneuma*, the Greek word for wind, or spirit, or breath of God blowing and he said, "Yes, Lord."

So Abraham left, on faith, blown forward by the wind of the Spirit. He went with Sarah, and with his nephew Lot.

Who knows where the wind comes from? Who knows where the wind is going? But here it is. And you have to make a choice. Are you going to respond to God's spirit?

What is God calling you to do? To move? To start something new? To repair a breach, to foster a child, to meditate and pray?

Sometimes, you have to set everything down and walk forward in faith, into the wind, into the journey. The Spirit will change you as you go – you will be transformed. Your thinking, your life, will never be the same. You will be born from above.

One day, Julie Winokur, a filmmaker, experienced a new spirit blowing in the wind. She heard it in the words of her teenaged son. He told her, a self-described liberal, that she was the most politically intolerant person he knew. He said, “If the other side had a good idea, you wouldn’t know because you’re not listening.”

Julie went on to say, “I realized in that moment that I was as responsible as the people I was pointing fingers at. You have to take ownership of your own contribution to the negativity.”

So Julie launched a project, called, “Bring it to the Table.” She got in her car and went around the country with a card table, a star-spangled tablecloth, her camera, and questions. She asked people about the economy, about jobs, about immigration, about healthcare. And she started on this project last summer, months the election. You can watch clips she made on YouTube. “Bring it to the Table.”

As you watch her videos, you can hear people from all points of view, and you can see as they start to listen to each other, as well. You see them start to move together on camera.

“Why are you surprised,” Jesus would ask? The wind is blowing where it will. So does the Spirit....

You must be born from above, like Abraham, like Jesus. What is God calling *you* to do, to say, to be? What do *you* hear, blowing in the wind?

THANKS be to God. Amen? Amen.