

# *Waiting for the wind*

*Pentecost (C)*

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Between 1831 and 1844, William Miller--a Baptist preacher and former army captain in the War of 1812--launched the "great second advent awakening" which eventually spread throughout most of the Christian world. Based on his study of the prophecy of Daniel 8:14, Miller calculated that Jesus would return to earth on October 22, 1844. When Jesus did not appear, Miller's followers experienced what became to be called "the great Disappointment."

Most of the thousands who had joined the movement, left it, in deep disillusionment. A few, however, went back to their Bibles to find why they had been disappointed. Soon they concluded that the October 22 date had indeed been correct, but that Miller had predicted the wrong event for that day. They became convinced that the Bible prophecy predicted not that Jesus would return to earth in 1844, but that He would begin at that time a special ministry in heaven for His followers. They still looked for Jesus to come soon, however, as do Seventh-day Adventists yet today.

From this small group who refused to give up after the "great disappointment" arose several leaders who built the foundation of what would become the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Standing out among these leaders were a young couple--James and Ellen G. White -- and a retired sea captain named Joseph Bates.

The Seventh Day Adventist is a descriptor for the movement that arose in the early 1840's. By this I mean, the name is the description of their two great distinguishing beliefs. First that the church fathers got it wrong when they worshipped on a Sunday – The real day for worship is the Sabbath or Seventh Day, and Second that there was a belief that the day of the Lord's return was imminent and predictable and this was set down as occurring in 1843. Many Adventists drifted into the off shoot cult – the Jehovah's Witnesses. The continuing SDA church redefined the event as a spiritual rather than physical one and have continued on to this day.

Now there are a lot of admirable qualities in the SDA but the fundamental premises that are the basis of this group are flawed. The misuse and misinterpretation of Scripture is typical of many of these groups who offer for us a new improved way of faith. These are dangerous because not only beliefs will be held on to even the face of evidence to the contrary, but the apparent good qualities are used to overlook the bad. Many of us will have encounter the so-called Pentecostal church in our daily life. Although these are often incredibly zealous in their faith and their proclamation of it, like the SDA the Pentecostal movement promotes an interpretation of the events which is not supportable by a closer examination of Scripture, Theology or Church History. Just because there are some spiritual things happening neither means that they are from God nor that they are right. Pentecostalism is dangerous, because it is easy for us to be caught up in the enthusiasm, that we no longer read the scriptures

critically. Pentecostals in general seek to target those with existing faith and often a hunger to see God in action. But the end result, is that many leave the Pentecostal group and because of the teaching that they have received are unable to return to where they have come from

It is important that we distinguish the Pentecostals from the charismatic experience. Charisms are the gifts of the Holy Spirit, exercised by Christians among the faithful. Like the Pentecostals, they expect the activity of the Spirit in the life of the church, but whereas charismatic Christians see the legitimate role of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Christian, the Pentecostals would see that these events would define it. “Speaking in Tongues” which is what we heard about in the second reading is not a measure of a persons Christianity, but one of the many ways in which the Spirit can invade our space. The spirit can be just as evident in a person who seems to speak with the wisdom of God, or the one who touches the lives of others with the love of God.

The key phrases from the story are that we are to wait and expect. This was the command of Jesus at the ascension. The Holy Spirit likened to the unpredictability of the wind is not something that we can control, but rather like the wind can come and go. But like the wind, we ought to expect it.

Perhaps the most enduring image I have is that of a church in which all the windows were open. This is the church ready to receive, waiting in expectation. The wind blows in, and it disturbs the papers, just as the arrival of the Holy Spirit will disturb the order – yet we have a choice here. To live with the chaos, or to shut the windows. All too often, we are more concerned with keeping order rather than seeing God in action. Anglicans in particular are often fearful of such a thing. I know that there are many who are uncomfortable when in Bible Study, I ask them to join in the service from memory rather than providing them with a book. What if we get it wrong?!!!

The challenge of Pentecost is that we ought to expect God to break in, to challenge the way we view things to see something new – exciting – effective. The end of the story in Acts is that 5,000 were baptised and became followers of Jesus – 120 became 5,120 and the church was born.

I am constantly challenged by the continuing belief that things will stay the same or decline but they will not grow. Even among the priests of the church, few seem to work from the framework of Growth. Pentecost tells us to get ready and to wait. To expect that God will do something. We are to throw open the windows to let in the wind. But not according to our timetable. The disciples after three Years on the Road with Jesus, 40 days with him post resurrection had only to wait ten days. But they were ready and waiting expectation. What about us?

May God make us ready to receive and expectant of his action

**AMEN**