**Sermon 12-2-18**

**Paul Purdue preaching**

**Rooted in Prophetic Tradition**

As a college student, I spent a **summer in Minnesota** working as a summer missionary. I had loved riding my bicycle in high school, so when one of our hosts offered the use of their very nice road bike, I decided to trade my daily run for a nice long ride. Minnesota in the summer is flat, verdant, temperate and beautiful. I glided past fields of wheat, the still green grain seed-pods waltzing in the wind. The flat land on the edge of the prairie made for an almost effortless ride. I flew down the road on this wonderful bicycle enjoying Minnesota’s wide-open spaces. My sojourn on the bike turned spiritual, weather perfect, view lovely, and the bike racing. I rejoiced at the tidy farms dotted with bright red sturdy Scandinavian barns. I hit my preselected turnaround point in amazing time and decided to glide on past it. Finally, with my sports watch beeping, I pulled over, enjoyed a banana and turned around. Less than a minute into make my return journey, my pedaling cadence dropped, as a previously unnoticed wind pushed back against me. **I had made such good time due to a considerable but unnoticed tailwind,** whose 10 mph breeze silently pushed me along. Without my acknowledgement, the wind lifted me over gently rolling hills, multiplying my efforts and easing my ride. Now I faced the 10mph opposition of a considerable headwind. It’s force opposed every turn of my pedals. I labored home taking 2 exhausting hours to cover what I had blown across in half that time.

**We are not alone- there is a subtle, silent, strong tailwind at our back.** The often unnoticed wind lifts us with comfort, or courage, when we release ourselves into it. **We stand in a line of prophets, seekers, sinners, and saints, whose deeds and ease our journey up the steep places of today**. Abraham, Sarah, Moses, Miriam, Deborah, David, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Peter, James, John, Mary, Elizabeth, Anna, Magdalene, Deitrick, Martin, Bill and Dot stand behind us urging us on. **We are not the first to make this journey**. We are not the first to hum *In Bleak Mid-Winter* in a dark season or hum *We Shall Overcome*as we read the headlines.  We are not the first to dream on a righteous newday from inside prison, or carry something like a cross through a howling mob.

**We never sing alone**. **Some mysterious wind first whistled our tune,** some poet wrote it down, another tuned the piano, long before that someone invented a musical alphabet, another made built our instruments, and someone summoned the choir. **Even if we sing a solo,** remember others hum the tune in their hearts, tap their toes, and lean in to receive our song.

**We are not alone. We stand in a line of prophets and poets- of sinners and saints.**  A holy wind pushes us along. Pause - feel that renewing breeze. **Listen for the saints’ song**- **count the stars with Abraham,** hear Moses’ lilting “Tell old Pharaoh- let my people go.” **Notice the wind at our backs**.

When we go outside and hang wreaths, take notice the inscription on the foundation of our beautiful church: **“whose Foundation is Jesus 1927.”** That was the year **Dot Glasgow** was born. Four years later, in the midst of the Great Depression, the new church faced the prospect of the bank calling in our loan. Three Belmont families kept the church out of foreclosure by guaranteeing the church loan with their personal assets. They put their homes on the literal dotted line to ensure that the mission of the 23 year old church could go forward. We stand here today with that kind of wind at our back. **What about that baby named Dot?** Well she grew up to win a mathematics award at Vanderbilt. Her math professor regretted seeing her go to the mission field. She married Bill Anderson and pulled him away from West End. Dot became the campus minister at the Penn State Wesley Foundation at age 23. In 1954, she moved to Mozambique and taught women and men. Some of the men did not appreciate her directness, they got used to it! She said, “We were not sent to Africa to save anyone, but to help share the love of God in a way that never makes someone feel less”. The United Methodist Church officially sent Dot and Bill as missionaries to Kenya in 1976.  There she rejoiced to teach pastor’s wives who, when asked what they wanted the most, replied: “to learn to read so they could open the door to everything.” In 1983, she retired to tutor at Edgehill, teach at Father Ryan, chair the math department, help start TNT which became NOAH, write a story of inclusion at age 84, and be a force for good in our midst. **Take Note of that wind at your back,** helping ease you along your way!l.

**Christian living is impossible apart from a community of faith- apart from a tradition**. God works in community; that means we belong to a tradition. **The Bible is not some oracle** spoke by angels on high and dropped from heaven down to us.  **No, we believe Our Creator wades with us into the muck of this life.** The Bible is a story of God and people: Matthew, Mark, Luke, 1 Peter, James, 3rd John, Ruth, Ester, Judges, and Amos. The holy breeze blows through churches: Corinthians, Ephesians, Romans, and Thessalonians. We do not read the Bible alone- we belong to a tradition.

**Eve preached, *“****With God’s help, I have given birth to humanity.”* Abraham and Sarah discerned the voice of one God above the noise of polytheism. **And before Moses thundered** God’s message of liberation, “Let my people go,” **a quiet spiritual breeze guided his unnamed mother** to push her baby out into the Nile River in a bassinet sealed with bithum tar. Her cradle-ship sailed as an act of well-executed maternal defiance resisting Pharoah’s genocide.

.    **Jeremiah sat in prison**, locked up unjustly. **The nation was a wasteland:** diplomacy failed, the seats of government smouldering ruins, palaces toppled, the economy wasted, and the temple, God’s house, sacked, looted and destroyed. “*While he was still confined in the prison quarters, the Lord’s word came to Jeremiah: “The Lord, who made the earth, who formed and established it proclaims: ‘Call to me and I will answer.’ Really, Jeremiah, with leg irons on your feet?* **With the temple’s consecrated treasures in some Babylonian museum?** Yet, a holy breeze renews Jeremiah and **he prophetizes unlikely, countercultural, improbable hope.**” The Creator says, “*I will bring back the captives… I will rebuild. I will cleanse. God will forgive our guilt and our rebellion. In this wasteland, in the ravaged and uninhabited streets, the sounds of joy and laughter will resound. The voices of the bride and the bridegroom will again be heard dancing outside the temple. And one day God will fulfill God’s gracious promise raising up a righteous branch, who will do what is just and right, and that child shall be called The Lord Is Our Righteousness.*”  We stand in a line of prophets!

**Mary and Joseph raised Jesus on these stories. They taught him to stand in the line of the prophets.**   Every year, they made the difficult pilgrimage to the temple that Jeremiah prophesied would be rebuilt.  **Imagine, a teenage Mary gently singing to Jesus as they walk as refugees to Egypt.** Do they wonder who will greet them at the border? **Did  a nursing Mary sing the lullaby she wrote**? *“My soul exalts the Lord! God has looked with favor on our low status! We are highly favored! Holy is the name of Lord, Holy is the One who shows mercy to everyone, who lifts up the downtrodden, and brings down evil kinds, Holy is the name from one generation to the next. Oh child, remember, the Merciful One who comes to our aid. Oh child, remember God’s promise to our ancestors, from Abraham and Sarah, even to me today and forever. Holy, Holy, my soul rejoices in God our Savior.”*   **Mary and Joseph rooted Jesus in our tradition**. Imagine Mary singing her song to Jesus- the breath from God breathing on God’s perfect child, as they toddle as refugees to an uncertain future! Can you imagine, Jesus carrying that cross, and perhaps calling up the hope lullabyes his mother taught him?

**Do you take notice of that holy wind pushing you along?** You are not alone. We stand in a line of saints, sinners, seekers, poets, and prophets. **But, what will we do with our legacy? What will we give the children born in 2018?** **Will we consume this holy wind, like an air conditioner for our own comfort**? **Or will our words and deed prophecy hope to the 3rd, 4th and 1000th generation?** Let us not ride along on an unnoticed wind. No! Let us lift our sails, untying oppressing bonds, lifting up every voice, singing lullabies to the fearful, fanning the sacred flames of justice, and letting mercy lead us so that others might enjoy that holy wind that strengthens our every step. **We belong to a tradition something bigger than any one of us. Pause and ponder your legacy- feel the wind of God at your back.  And may our lives lifts up each coming generation.**  Amen.