

I brought my daughter's sailboat in today because I always think sailing makes an excellent example for how we live in the Spirit. You may remember that I've preached about this before, just not with a sailboat!

There are lots of ways to propel a boat. You can row it, like a canoe or kayak or rowboat. When you are rowing you are the source of energy. The boat goes only as far as your energy will carry you. When you are too tired, the boat stops. Unless, of course, you are in a canoe and you are clever enough to fake rowing so that the other person actually does all the work! Still, you provide the energy. It is your work that does it. If you've ever rowed into the wind or on a wind-swept lake you realize just how little power you actually have and how limited you are.

From a theological perspective let's call rowing a boat "works righteousness." You are doing the work yourself.

On the opposite end of the spectrum is a power boat. Whether it be a big ship or a little jet-ski an engine provides the power to move the boat. Unlike rowing you can continue on as long as there is fuel in the tank. You can decide where you want to go, when you want to go, and as fast as you want to go; as long as you don't break any speed limits. You are in control. And if your engine has any power at all things like wind and small waves are insignificant to you. You just muscle through them.

From a theological angle, let's call operating a power boat "cheap grace." You're getting where you want to go, but other than a little effort in steering and docking you aren't really doing any work at all. You aren't the source of energy.

And then we come to the third way to propel a boat - a sail. When you are sailing you are neither providing the energy to move the boat nor are you in control of an engine - a power source. Instead, you are harnessing a power which already exists and which you do not control.

Sailing is an act of cooperation. You can fight the energy of the wind, and you'll go nowhere -or capsize. Or you can cooperate with it.

Now when you're sailing you're not captive to where the wind blows you. No, you have quite a bit of control over where you go - and with good tacking maneuvers you can easily travel toward the wind. The wind doesn't control you. It is simply an energy source you are harnessing.

Sailing isn't passive, especially if you're sailing into the wind. It takes work to constantly reset sails and turn the rudder. You find yourself working hard - and yet your hard work isn't what is moving the boat. Your hard work is the constant harnessing of the energy source.

But don't ever underestimate how fast and powerful a sailboat can be. Captain Ron, the leader of the sailing program at Lake Chautauqua Lutheran Center, has no trouble going very fast on the camp's racing catamarans. You can pass people waterskiing and see people's jaws drop when you overtake their motorboat.

For the sake of theology let's call sailing a "response to grace." The energy is there. You're just catching it and using it to your benefit.

Of course there are limits to sailing. It is an act of cooperation with the wind. If there's no wind you don't go anywhere. If there is too much wind, you'd better second guess a decision to go sailing. I've never overturned a sailboat when it is too windy, but I've come close many times. Last year at confirmation camp it was too windy to go sailing one afternoon. The sailing crew wouldn't go out with campers, but two of the crew wanted more experience sailing in high winds. I happened to be the extra weight they needed to keep the boat in the water. It was the ride of my life. It was incredibly rough, and they nearly flipped over frontwards several times. I should have enjoyed it more, but it's quite humbling to think yourself a cool pastor and then realize all they really want you for is your weight!

Sailing is cooperation with the wind. You do not control it. You harness it.

Life as a Christian is an act of cooperation with the Holy Spirit. In our Bible reading from Acts we have the well-known story of the coming of the Holy Spirit on that Pentecost Day. The disciples were gathered together in one place in Jerusalem. They were gathered there because just 10 days prior Jesus had ascended into heaven. As he ascended he told his disciples, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you." And so they waited. They did not control the coming or going of the Holy Spirit, but it came and energized them. It wasn't a smooth or straightforward ride after that. There were many halts and hesitations, mistakes and backtracking but they cooperated with the power of the Spirit and gave birth to the church. It was an act of harnessing the power of the Spirit. We of course want to do the same.

For the disciples this way of life was completely new. They had never done anything like this before. And there was no church, no set of standards or traditions to go by. It was completely new territory. And I think we find ourselves in a similar situation today.

Let's go back to the sailboat for an example. That boat can't sail as long as it stays in here. The most air movement that will happen is what the air conditioning blows around. It has to get out of here and into the untamed winds of the world if it wants to actually go anywhere. While I certainly like to worship God in a comfortable room on a Sunday morning, let's not think that is the norm for faith. What we have really done here is something like riding on a motorboat. We have created a nice place for ourselves. There is nothing wrong with that, but it cannot be allowed to stifle the wind of the Spirit.

Like most churches we struggle to connect with young adults, and for good reason. I wrote about that in our May newsletter. While they don't necessarily think ill of the church they come in here and can legitimately say, "This is nice, but where is the wind? The sail hangs limp and the boat goes nowhere. I'm going to set my sails where there is wind."

Many young adults are very compassionate, very service oriented and want to make a positive difference in the world. If the church can't give them that then they'll go elsewhere. We too know that the church is not an end unto itself. It is a

means to an end. It is like a sail for God to use in the service of the ship of the kingdom.

Engaging youth and young adults is not about getting them in here so they can see how nice church can be, but validating their own abilities to catch the wind. It is to value the fact that they too have sails and they are quite effective at catching the wind.

The best way to engage people of all ages is not to attract them with programs and ministries. It is to actually ask them, "What inspires you? What issues make your heart beat? What do you find yourself coming to over and over again because you just can't let it go?" Those are the places where they are connecting to the Spirit. Those are the places where we engage.

The Spirit blows in and through our community of faith and throughout the world each and every day. And in the same way no sail or windmill is big enough to harness all the power of the wind, we can never exhaust the amount of energy God's Spirit provides. There is always more than plenty. Let's not hoard it, but rejoice in its abundance. Amen.

