

“Blowin’ in the Wind”

Sermon – September 14, 2025 Stone Presbyterian Church

“Yes, and how many times must a man look up before he can see the sky?”

“The answer, my friend, is blowin’ in the wind.”

“The answer is blowin’ in the wind.”

Bob Dylan wrote this eponymous song 53 years ago as a cry for justice, peace, and understanding. And he did it as a 21-year-old white man. The song became an anthem of the civil rights movement of which sadly today there are many young, white males decrying that same movement.

It’s a song of lament and longing. In the verse I began with the sky is always present and visible. A person just needs to “look up” to see it, just as they need to look up and see the injustices in the world. But they don’t

But it’s also a song of ambiguity. The answers are out there, tantalizing within our grasp, yet elusive as a leaf on the breeze.

Today’s First Testament passage from Jeremiah 4 offers a different kind of wind. Not elusive, but direct. Not poetic, but prophetic. Not searching for answers—but delivering judgment. “A hot wind comes from me,” says the Lord, “not to winnow or cleanse—a wind too strong for that.”

Dylan’s wind asks questions. Jeremiah’s wind answers them. And the answer is this: when a people forget God, the wind does not soothe—it strips.

In Israel and around it, winds normally blow from the Mediterranean Sea inland, in an eastward direction. This has the positive effect of bringing cool moist air (and rain during the winter months) to the entire country.

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However, the opposite can also happen. When the winds blow from the hot, arid Arabian desert region westwards, the result is very unpleasant.

These strong dry winds of 110° and more distribute a caustic blanket of dust across the entire country. The minute grains of desert dust kill crops and get into every crevice making breathing very difficult.

In this passage God is sending his wind of judgment against the foolish and stupid people. What is telling is the Hebrew word here for wind is *ruwach* [roo'-akh], which can also mean “breath” or “spirit”. It is the same word use in Genesis 1:2: “the earth was a formless void, and darkness covered the face of the deep, while the wind God swept over the face of the waters.”

Further, verse 23 in today’s passage says, “I looked on the earth, and lo, it was waste and void; and to the heavens, and they had no light.”

The phrase we translate here as “waste and void”, though, in Hebrew is, *tohu* [TOO-hoo] *vabohu* [(vah)-BOH-hoo], and is identical to the one in Genesis where we say “formless void” and are the only two places in scripture where that phrase is used.

Thus, today’s passage is describing not just a punishment of Israel, but a literal undoing of creation. It doesn’t—can’t—get much worse than this. But verse 22 gives three reasons why, “For my people are foolish (one), they do not know me; they are stupid children, they have no understanding (two). They are skilled in doing evil, but do not know how to do good (three).”

These three indictments say the community is on the way to destroying itself by its social malaise and infidelity to Torah. The poem

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establishes the responsibility of the nation, exonerates God of blame, and demonstrates that God’s judgment is fully just and justified.

Creation suffers because of people’s actions. The judgment against the people has a profound effect on the natural world and all of its creatures.

The link between the judgment of the people and the desolation of creation is an essential reminder to us that our actions affect more than just ourselves. They affect more than just other people. The whole world is interrelated.

In this judgment, though, there is a sliver of grace in verse 27, “For thus says the LORD: The whole land shall be a desolation; yet I will not make a full end.” So, a small remnant will survive, which indeed it did. Otherwise, we wouldn’t be here today.

Still, it is hard to reconcile a God who seeks to save us and yet here prepares to destroy his people. Surely, many of the people had no choice in what was going on. It was their political leaders doing foolish and stupid things that got them in this mess.

The actual words of the oracle notwithstanding, perhaps it was more God letting the people suffer their own consequences than imposing it on them.

Because regardless of whether we ascribe the destruction of Judah and Jerusalem in the 8th century BCE to God or not, the cause is the same: the people as a whole breaking the covenant with the political and religious leaders called out in particular.

It was the breaking of the relationship, the promise to do good and be good and ignoring the consequences of not doing so.

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When we forget God, the world doesn’t just suffer morally—it suffers physically, relationally, spiritually. The land mourns. The heavens grow dark. The birds flee. Creation itself groans. That is on us—not God.

This week conservative activist Charlie Kirk, a 31-year-old white male, was fatally shot in broad daylight while speaking at Utah Valley University by Tyler Robinson, a 22-year-old white male from Utah.

Kirk’s views on race, civil rights, gun rights, gender roles, and Christian Nationalism, while popular with many, were an antithetical, contrary, to the teachings of Christ.

And yet it also contrary trying to solve disagreements through violence, especially deadly force, as was also done in June when Minnesota state Representative Melissa Hortman and her husband were killed in their home by 57-year-old white male Vance Boelter, also of Minnesota.

Political rhetoric and actions that stoke fear and hate only escalates the situation. As Dr. Martin Luther King preached in his 1957 sermon, “Loving Your Enemies”:

“Returning hate for hate multiplies hate, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars. Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.”

“Yes, and how many ears must one man have

“Before he can hear people cry?

“Yes, and how many deaths will it take 'til he knows

“That too many people have died?

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With all that is going on these days, you are forgiven if you believe the answer is blowing in the wind.

But as followers of Christ, we are the light of the world and we are called to let our light shine before others, so that through our love of all others, they may repent—literally change their mind around, turn their heads around—and start looking, paying attention to the signs of the kingdom of God and of that relationship rather than themselves and personal agendas.

For we know which way the wind blows—it blows from God.

In the name of God the Creator, God the Redeemer, and God the Sustainer.
Amen.