

**Gladys Gifford, ALP  
29th Sunday, Ordinary  
Jeremiah 4  
I| Timothy 3:14-4:5**

**October 21,2007  
Bacon Memorial, Niagara Falls  
Psalm 119:97-104  
Luke 18:1-8**

## **Bending with the Wind**

**As our confession of sin, we spoke a litany of the wind a moment ago,  
from Jeremiah, chapter 4.**

**Jeremiah saw wind in two ways**

**—the unrelenting wind of a dust storm that blocks out the sun,  
  
or the steady wind that blows the chaff from the grain.**

**the wind of a dust storm, such as described by John Steinbeck in The  
Grapes of Wrath:**

**The wind grew stronger, whisked under stones, carried up straws  
and old leaves,  
and even little clods, marking its course as it sailed across the  
fields....**

**During the night the wind raced faster....  
The dawn came, but no day. In the gray sky a red sun appeared,  
a dim red circle that gave a little light, like dusk; and as that day  
advanced,  
the dusk slipped back toward darkness,  
and the wind cried and whimpered over the fallen corn.  
Men and women huddled in their houses, and they tied  
handkerchiefs over their noses,  
when they went out, and wore goggles to protect their eyes.**

**the helpful wind for harvesting grain at this time of year—in the old days  
done 012 a threshing floor,**

**where the grain was tossed up and the wind carries the chaff away.**

**How shall we deal with the wind of the Spirit-**

**shall we feel that wind in a terrible dust storm of judgment?**

**shall we feel that wind as a blessed help to do our work?**

**Can we bend with the wind?**

**Jeremiah called to his people when he could see that they were facing national ruin—**

**the loss of their beloved city, Jerusalem,  
eventual defeat in battle against the empires of the day.**

**Let us allow Jeremiah's words to speak to us today,  
as we face the loss of earth's bounty.**

**Through our unrestrained consumption of the goodness of creation,  
a creeping and relentless fever sickens the planet's climate—  
a fever unnaturally named "global warming"**

**which will bring rising sea levels and wild swings in weather  
leading to drought and famine and disease and war.**

**Jeremiah's prophecy challenged the people of his day,  
calling them to turn from their idolatry and  
to renew their covenant with their god, YHWH,  
in an effort to prevent the tragedy of their national defeat.**

**Jeremiah's words fell on deaf ears, in his own time.**

**Calamity came, and the people fled to Egypt,**

**carrying Jeremiah with them in spite of his warnings not to go there.**

**Will we let ourselves hear his words to us, in our time?**

**Oh, Jeremiah! How difficult and uncompromising you are!**

**You say, in vs. 22, "they are skilled in doing evil, but do not know how to do good."**

**But Jeremiah, we don\*t know that we are doing evil.**

**how can we know?**

**we just go along with the program,**

**doing what needs doing in order to get ahead, if possible.**

**We want our children to succeed, to do better than we have done.**

**We don't intend to do any harm!**

**so we drive our cars alone to hurry through our day, rather than slow down to use public transit**

**we buy food at the supermarket that has been trucked thousands of miles, "marinated in crude oil,"**

**rather than buy food grown locally, content with what is available in season.**

**we consume electric energy with high-tech gadgets,**

**rather than conserve electric energy by living simply.**

**we shop weekly for mounds of cheap goods with our scarce dollars,**

**rather than wait to shop for a few quality items when we have saved up our money.**

**we believe that our individual worth consists of the stuff we accumulate,**

**rather than the gifts each individual brings to nurture the community.**

**So, Jeremiah, is there any hope?**

**Yes!? he says, in chapter 6, verse 16.**

**Jeremiah calls out: "Thus says the Lord:**

**Stand at the crossroads,  
and look, and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way lies:  
and walk in it, and find rest for your souls.”**

**Here lies our hope—the good way, the ancient path.**

**This is the choice at the crossroads,  
this intersection in our lives.**

**Will we take this moment to seek out the ancient paths, to find God's way  
forward?**

**Will we seek the good way, the way of rest for our souls?**

**Will we choose life, for all of creation?**

**or will we turn away, saying, "that's too hard; I can't go there.?"**

**<sup>A</sup> phrase coined by Bill McKibben**

**But, my friends, we have no choice.**

**The wind is blowing, already.**

**We must respond.**

**Jeremiah calls us! Ask for the good way, no matter how difficult.**

**Seek the steady wind of the Spirit, to blow the chaff from our lives.**

**Oh, that the work of bending with the wind were a little easier.**

**Oh, that the word from God to us was as clear as was the message of  
Jonah.**

**Just think,**

**all Jonah had to do was holler:**

**"40 days, and Nineveh will be overthrown! 40 days, and Nineveh will  
be overthrown"**

**And immediately, the mayor of the city heard him!**

**Jonah didn't have to wait in the hall or camp out on the public  
square or threaten a lawsuit-**

**the mayor heard him!  
and the mayor repented, then led his people in a city-wide fast of  
repentance!**

**How strange is this!**

**Well, remember—the book of Jonah is a parody, an extended joke, even.  
The reality, then and now, is quite different.**

**Most political leaders do not hear the word from the prophets of their day,  
even though that word is powerful and right-on.**

**And even when the word of prophecy is spoken in their very faces,  
many of them turn right around and blast the messenger with  
cynicism and disrespect**

**Our situation today is that of the unjust judge, in the parable told by  
Jesus.**

**The powers that be know to do good, but do not**

**The powers that be have no fear of God.**

**The powers that be are only afraid of one thing: to lose their power.**

**But this unjust judge was worn down by the persistent nagging of a  
widow.**

**She was the wind of the Spirit,  
bending that man to do right by her.**

**Can we be agents of the Spirit?**

**Will we be faithful, with the widow, to call out, over and over and over  
again,**

**calling for justice in our world?**

**Will we let the wind blow away the distractions of our lives,  
so that we are as free as she was—**

**free to take personal action against injustice?**

Lord knows, we have so many complaints:  
    global warming, Iraq, grinding poverty, racism—  
The hot wind of judgment bears down upon us.  
Let's get serious about our calling.

Most of us do the ministry of social justice as if Jonah were real\*  
We shout out a warning and feel we have done our job—  
    we can go sit in the shade and suck our thumbs.

Let's get real.

Let's move from Jonah to Jeremiah, from a parody to me real thing,  
    from instant gratification to accompaniment,  
    from sampling to personal involvement  
And then,, let's move from Jeremiah to Jesus,

For it is through our lord and saviour, Jesus the Incarnate One,  
    mat we have the endurance to bend in me wind of discipleship>  
Jesus rose victorious over the powers that be,  
    to bring about the new creation—the Kingdom of peace.

Jesus, the faithful one, brings us to faith  
    so that as the winds of judgment gather up and blow,  
    blocking the sun and changing the climate,  
    drying up rivers and melting the Arctic,  
We may have the grace to hear Jeremiah  
    and seek the ancient paths,  
To stand at the crossroads for a moment,  
    and then take the paths of shalom-

Let us repent, and turn to our Lord,

**crying to him day and night in our widow weeds,  
so that justice will come.**

**The wind is upon us.**

**Do you feel it?**

**Let us not fear the wind, but bend with it**

**Let us walk together in the Spirit-wind  
on the ancient paths of shalom.**

**Amen.**