

DIAKONIA WORLD ASSEMBLY OPENING SERVICE, LOYOLA UNIVERSITY,  
CHICAGO, IL—6-29-2017---Ephesians 4:4-6

In the name of Jesus. Amen.

Well, look what the wind blew in!

My mother used to say this with surprise or even shock when a long-lost friend or relative walked through the door unexpectedly.

Look what the wind blew in!

Maybe you have a similar expression in your language or culture.

Look around. See what the wind blew in this morning in Mundelein Hall at Loyola University, Chicago.

Just look at what the wind blew in.

There is really no surprise or shock this morning. The executive committee and many other people locally and throughout this region DOTAC have been planning this for several years.

And you have been planning, too—saving money to cover the costs, applying (sometimes more than once) for visas, registering, making travel plans, communicating with others about details.

Maybe some of you feel a little shaken by the wind. It may feel a little like you are in a whirlwind. You have had to arrange for others to cover your responsibilities back home. Perhaps you encountered some unexpected difficulties in getting here. Maybe you have traveled through many time zones or even across the international date line to get here, and you still feel a little disoriented. Maybe you are struggling to listen and speak in a language that is not really your own—or you may even be struggling to understand your own language spoken with an unfamiliar accent. And some of you didn't sleep so well in a strange bed in a strange place with sounds you don't recognize throughout the night. You may feel a little shaken by the wind.

Make no mistake. We are meant to be here. We have been blown in, shaken by the wind, the breath, the spirit of the risen Christ. . . to be a community. . . to be one together for these next days.

Ephesians reminds us that our unity, our oneness, begins in the loving heart of God even before the foundations of the world. The breath of that loving God gives life to the whole creation, as we sang in our Psalm.

That same Spirit is at work through the ages, loving, healing, reconciling, comforting, recreating and making community. That same Spirit breathes in Jesus Christ. In the chapters preceding our reading from Ephesians, we are told again that through Christ's cross God breaks down every barrier, every wall, every hostility that divides people from people.

From the time of the Ephesians down to this morning, that same Spirit blows. That same Spirit gathers us into a community, one body. That community is a gift. Look what the wind blew in.

The community the Spirit brings is a gift. Our job, first of all, is to recognize it, receive it and rest in it. We can take a deep breath, take in the Spirit's gift, and just be. . . together.

The gift of community is a bit like a package wrapped in many colors and tied with lovely ribbons. It is not just for us to admire; it is also for us to unwrap, open, unpack and use. As we do this, we may well feel the wind shaking us again. While community, unity is God's loving gift to us, it does take some work and commitment on our part to fully live it.

The people who first read Ephesians experienced that. Theirs was a world that was divided into Jews and Gentiles. Theirs was a world divided by privilege and class. They had to learn to let the love of God flow into them so that they could live beyond all the walls and hostilities, so that they could be more and more like the "one body" Christ called them to be.

The people who began DIAKONIA World Federation 70 years ago also experienced how hard it was to live the unity that God gave. Theirs was a world that was badly wounded by the ravages of World War II. Theirs was a world where people knew who their enemies were--enemies during the war, yes, but also enemies for generations and generations. It would have been easier to leave the walls and hostilities in place, and to form separate organizations, but somehow the Spirit kept shaking them. They talked. They prayed. They wrote letters. They met. They prayed. They talked. They prayer. They were shaken by the Wind. The Spirit moved them. They reached across the walls. They laid aside the hostilities. The living breathing community of DIAKONIA became a reality. In these days, you may well hear about some of the ways DIAKONIA has changed people's lives. And maybe you will experience how we still reap the benefits today.

We, too, I think, know something of both the gift and the challenges of living into community. Oh, it may be somewhat easy here, at least at first. We see the wrappings and the ribbons. We are happy. We celebrate and sing. But even in these days we may irritate each other. We may unknowingly speak a wounding word. Our cultural or language differences may get in the way. Our differing politics and perspectives may seem line barriers. Even here, these days, we may need to be shaken by the wind in order to have patience, to act with gentleness and humility, and to bear with one another in love.

By God's grace, here these days, I think we will experience the joy of community as we worship and play together, as we tell our stories and listen to one another, as we eat and sing together and as we discuss how best to serve in the church and world today. In our differences and diversity, we will discover the gift of "one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all." And we might add one call to *diakonia*.

And perhaps when we leave next week, having been shaken by the wind, we will take what we have experienced here back to the places where we live and work and worship. Perhaps we will be a little better able to recognize the gift of community there and to receive it and rest in it also there—and then to recommit ourselves to unwrapping that gift, using it, and sharing it.

We know well that this gift of community isn't just for us. It is God's gift for the sake of the world, the world that God so much loves. We know all too well the brokenness, the polarization, the fragmentation, the injustice in our world. We know how much the world needs our witness and our work. The world needs to know that unity, community is possible.

In a little while we will be sprinkled with water to remember our baptism—the one baptism that we share. This water looks and feels a lot like the water that we pour into our basins to carry out with our towels to wash the feet of a weary world. It's the one *diakonia* we share.

Look what the wind blew in.

May the Spirit keep blowing.

In Jesus' name. Amen.

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