

“When the Elders Get Wasted”

Acts 1:14-2:26

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About a year ago, our brand new Administration Committee here at the church began to work on compensation packages for the staff. They decided they would like to compensate the staff of our church in a manner comparable to other churches. So they came up with a proposal that was approved by Session about three weeks ago, and then approved by you last week at the congregational meeting.

It amounted to quite an increase for all of our staff. Some of them said to me, and I want to say this: *Thank you, very much. It's very gracious and kind of you, especially when it wasn't even asked for, but you did it. And so, thank you for that. And yet, I need to tell you that I still get rather self-conscious about it. I get rather self-conscious about it because my increase, unlike the others, needs to be voted on publicly. And that means I'm analyzed and evaluated publicly. And I'm kind of used to that because I have to do this preaching-thing every week; that's just part of the deal. But whether comments are good or bad, whether they're positive or negative, I still get nervous. Because my self is out there being evaluated. Self-conscious.*

And when I'm self-conscious, I'm not very God-conscious. Or other people-conscious. And then, so very conscious that I'm not being very God-conscious or other-people-conscious, that really makes me self-conscious, which in turn makes it very hard to preach--which is really being God-conscious--and to do it in a loving way, which is really being other-conscious.

And then I get *self-conscious* about that.

I know the same thing happens to you wherever you relate to other people in society. It's so very hard to love well when you're *self-conscious*, for you're so busy evaluating and narrating yourself.

My daughter Becky is our third. And sometimes I think she get kind of lost in the crowd. And so I've been noticing lately she's been narrating herself. She'll talk, and she'll say a knock-knock joke--then she'll say this: *“Like, like orange you glad you didn't say banana? Like uh, like are ya, like are ya hearin' me, like uh, like, like...”* Like that.

And that's what we do when we're *self-conscious*. We narrate ourselves. At least, if not externally, we do it internally. Our inner monologue preoccupies us, consumes us.

“What do they think of me? Oh, I'm an idiot. No, they're a jerk! No, I'm a jerk!”
Oh gosh—*self-conscious*. And if the preacher says to stop thinking of yourself, you think: *Oh gosh, is he right? How is myself doing at not thinking of myself?*
Self-conscious!

Paralyzed!

You know what I mean, don't you? In fact, you make me *self-conscious*. Look at you, you're making me *self-conscious* right now! And I just made you *self-conscious*, didn't I? *Self-conscious*. Wherever you relate to people!

And Satan whispers: *It's just better not to relate. Be alone.*

Staff *self-conscious*!

Session *self-conscious*! A whole church can get awfully *self-conscious*!

But we have an wonderful staff; we really do. And we have an incredible group of Elders who serve in a rather thankless job called our Church Session. And this year has been a real challenge. We've got budget changes, personnel evaluations, building program, and 3.2 million dollars. Jesus says, "*Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.*" That means an awful lot of hearts are just laid there on the table. *Self-conscious*.

A lot of business, a lot of politics, and for me, the *self-consciousness* makes it so much harder to do the work. Because inside I'm constantly evaluating; I'm constantly narrating myself—*Oh gosh, did I just sound selfish? Well, how am I doing, how can I sound unselfish?*

Like I'm really not thinking about myself being *self-conscious*. And then finally I get to the point where I think: *Gosh, am I really debating the issue or debating myself? Come to think of it, what is the issue?*

Self-conscious! My life is less like a dance because I can't hear the music anymore. And it's more like a chore. Business, politics—that's tough stuff! And, you know that it's at this point an awful lot of people bail out of church. They say things like this: *Our faith isn't about business and politics.* And we make jokes like this: *Jesus never formed a committee!*

And yet, he did! And what is business but using our resources for a purpose? And what is politics other than people working together for a common goal? And so, whenever someone kind of arrogantly says, "*Well, you know, church isn't about business and politics,*" ask them, "*What is it about? Do you mean to say that church isn't about people working together and using their resources together?*"

Last week I kind of glossed over a section out of the Book of Acts because, frankly, I didn't quite know what to do with it. It's immediately after Jesus says, "*You'll be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth.*" And then He ascends into the heavens. They go into Jerusalem and wait upon the Holy Spirit. It's immediately after the kind of stuff people like to point to and say, "*That's what church is about you know, ascending into Heaven, visions, and going and waiting on the Holy Spirit, and all that kind of stuff.*"

And immediately after that, while they're waiting in Jerusalem, do you know they do? They have a business meeting!

Acts 1:15: Peter stands up in the middle of the assembly of 120 people. Now this is the very same Peter that five weeks earlier has denied Jesus and run in shame. Do you think he's feeling a little insecure? Probably! Because Jesus told him he had to do this, and now he's doing it. He stands up in the middle of 120 and says, "*We need to replace Judas.*" Now, Luke fills us in that Judas is the guy who betrayed Jesus. One of their very own betrayed him and then he killed himself. Luke adds that his bowels gushed out. What a great line!

And all of Jerusalem is talking about it! Now, don't you think those 11 guys are feeling a little insecure about that--one of their very own denies their leader? Peter stands up and says, "*We need to replace Judas.*" Then he quotes two Psalms.

Now, if you've been to Seminary, you'll recognize this is pretty bad proof-texting Peter does. It's kind of embarrassing. And then in verse 23: "*So they proposed two men: Joseph called Barsabbas, (also known as Justus) and Matthias. Then they prayed, 'Lord, you know everyone's heart. Show us which of these two you've chosen to take over this apostolic ministry, which Judas left to go where he belongs.'* Then they drew lots, and the lot fell to Matthias; so he was added to the eleven apostles."

And don't you think Matthias and Joseph Barsabas felt a little insecure with that whole thing? When you read this, you might think: *These first Elders didn't know what the heck they were doing.*

Now commentators like to argue over this. They don't agree on whether this business meeting was a good thing or a bad thing. Some point out they never cast lots like that after Pentecost, and that's true. Some, though, would say they never had business and politics like that after Pentecost, and that's not true. You'll find in Chapter 15 they have what's called the Jerusalem Council--full of "*sharp debate and dispute.*" The end of that very same chapter Paul and Barnabas get in a fight. Paul and the "*Son of Encouragement*" get in a fight, and they go their own separate ways with their own different guys.

Then in Galatians, you find out Paul rebukes Peter in front of the whole Galatian church. And the Bible is like that. It's not like the Koran, for instance, that I was reading last summer. It doesn't sugar-coat stuff. And Luke doesn't tell us whether this business meeting was good or bad. And I imagine those very first Elders were kind of confused about that too. Bewildered, tired, getting on each other's nerves, *self-conscious*--trying to do the business and the politics that church requires.

It reminds me of my very first real job out of college. I was the supply truck driver for Denver Mechanical Contractors. I very soon realized my job was about more than delivering plumbing supplies. I was the "*stress conduit*" between the front office and the plumbers in the field. (And between the plumbers in one field and the plumbers in the next field competing over ¾ inch copper elbows and floor drains.) I realized I was also

“the stress decoy” for the stress that builds up trying to do the business and politics that construction plumbing requires.

I especially remember guys like Ike. He would just rip on me. I was this stupid college kid who didn't even know what a $\frac{3}{4}$ inch copper elbow was! And I'd get so insecure and *self-conscious* around Ike. And I soon realized, Ike was rather insecure and *self-conscious* around me. I didn't tell him that, but I realized that. And I soon realized all these guys were pretty *self-conscious*.

I also realized stress spreads.

And I don't know that they like each other. And I don't think they like me, and I'm not sure I like them. That's what I thought until my cousin said to me one day, “Hey, Pete, why don't you come down and join us after work at the Grizzly Rose?”

And I have to tell you I was a good church kid with Dad, the pastor, and everything, so I hadn't hung out in places like the Grizzly Rose a whole lot. But what I saw that day appeared to me to be something like a miracle. The front office guys were there; the plumbers in the field were there; apprentices, journeymen, me, the supply truck driver. Ike was there! And I had a beer.

But most of the others had more than a beer. And that's when amazing things began to happen--*they began to like each other*. A lot! And they began to like me, and I began to like them.

It was like people started forgetting all their insecurities and their struggles and even what a $\frac{3}{4}$ inch copper elbow was. They forgot their inhibitions. In short, we all forgot ourselves, that we had been so very conscious of all day. And we had a party! It was kind of like:

Making your way in the world today,
Takes everything you've got.
Taking a break from all your worries
Sure would help a lot.
Wouldn't you like to get away...

Sometimes you wanna go
Where everybody knows your name.
(Sing with me)

And they're always glad you came.
You wanna go where people know
Our troubles are all the same.
You wanna go where
Everybody knows your name.

And you do, don't you? Where everybody knows our troubles are all the same. What is your chief trouble? Your self!

After work, my cousin and I used to sit in the truck. He'd say, "*Come on Pete, have another beer! Don't you love me?*" Let me translate: "*Come on Pete, would you forget about yourself and enjoy me? Party with me?*" Now that's not bad, is it? That's Heaven.

Well, it wasn't long after that, a plumber in the field--not from our company--killed somebody. He was driving home after work after having quite a few beers. And about 3 or 4 weeks ago, I buried my brother-in-law. He got depressed and basically *drank his self away and everything with it*. Alcohol deadens the self--its inhibitions and fears--but it also deadens everything else, including your reason, your will, your life. So it captures people in a cycle of shame. You wake up in the morning feeling so ashamed of how much you drank the night before, and you just want to forget yourself. So how do you do that? Well, you have a drink.

And all sin works that way. Are you feeling kind of greedy? *Well, buy something, you'll feel better*. You're upset you ate too much? *Have a piece of cake! That'll make you feel better*. Feeling dirty because you're promiscuous? *Just go forget about it in the arms of your lover*. Feel *self-conscious* in a meeting? *Defend yourself*.

O, wretched man that I am, who will deliver me from this body of sin and death? The power of sin, Paul writes, is the law. It's my understanding that in the United States we have more laws prohibiting excessive drinking and alcohol abuse than any country in the western world. Yet the United States has a higher incidence of alcoholism and alcohol-related deaths than any other country in the world! Some 100,000 a year! *So we make more laws, and more people die*.

It's as if sin finds opportunity in the law. And drunkenness really is a deadly sin--make no mistake about that—but still I've got to tell you this: *There are times, when I think about the Grizzly Rose. I think about our church staff, tired and busy. And I think about the Session getting out at 1:00 a.m. with all of our struggles, anxieties and troubles, doing the grunt-work of God. I think about all of that, and I say: Wouldn't it be nice just to take them all down to the Grizzly Rose, and just get totally wasted!*

And now, before you freak out, let me say: *I don't think I've ever been really wasted*. However, many times I've had too much to drink, and I've realized that, and I've had to stop. But I could feel the pull: *Wouldn't it be nice to totally go for it? And forget your self?*

I just wonder if those very first Elders ever felt that way after a real stressful and trying business meeting. In Acts: Chapter 1, toward the end, the nominating committee is drawing to a close. Verse 26: "*So they cast lots, and the lot fell to Matthias; so he was added to the 11 apostles.*" Next verse: "*When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit (the Wind) and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.*"

Now they were staying in Jerusalem, God-fearing Jews from every nation. When they heard this sound, the crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard them speaking in his own language. Utterly amazed, they asked: 'Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language?'

Chapter 2: Verse 12: *"Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, 'What does this mean?' Some, however, made fun of them and said, 'They have had too much wine.'* (they're wasted!)—*"Then Peter stood up with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: 'Fellow Jews and all you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. These men are not drunk, as you suppose. It's only nine in the morning! No, this is what was spoken by the Prophet Joel: 'In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people.'"* And then Peter goes on to preach a sermon without inhibitions--the same Peter.

Three thousand people are added to that church of 120--quite a lot of fruit. And not only that, giving is way up at the end. They sell everything and share all their possessions in common. It's quite a party in the streets of Jerusalem. And some people will say, *"Certainly you're not implying they actually appeared inebriated, are you?"*

Transliterated from the Greek, Peter says this: *"For not as you imagine, these men are drunk."* Ray Stedman says in this verse Peter means: *"Yeah, these men are drunk, but they're not full of what you think. They're full of 'it.' But you don't know what 'it' is. Yes, they have just lost themselves to the glory of 'it,' and 'it' is the Spirit of the Lord."*

People get drunk to forget their troubles, to forget themselves. Why do you have to get drunk? Because self can't make self forget self by the power of the self, which is the will. That's why sin finds opportunity in the law, as Paul puts it. *The only way to forget self is to somehow lose self.* But have you ever tried to lose something? I'm going to put it right here, so I can remember where it's not! Very hard to do. However, alcohol deadens the self.

It makes you dead to self, but alive to nothing.

It causes you to lose self, but find nothing.

There are better ways to lose something.

On my wedding day, dancing with my bride, thinking about my honeymoon night, I lost everything. I was a total ditz! The best way to lose something is to be preoccupied with something so much greater. And do you know you have a Bridegroom who longs to dance with you and make you forget your self? So that in losing yourself you would find yourself, *in Him. In dying to yourself, you would find life.*

Then you can sing and dance His praises, telling people of His grace. You can love the person next to you without fear, not because of the law, but because of his Spirit is like a dance, coming out of you.

And if you think I'm stretching with this whole thing, listen to Paul in Ephesians, Chapter 5: *"Don't get drunk with wine, which leads to debauchery."* (It's a waste!) So don't you dare use this sermon as an excuse for that! He says not to get drunk on wine but to be filled. (*And keep on being filled* is what the Greek means.) *"Be filled with the Holy Spirit. Speaking to one another with songs, hymns, and spiritual songs. Singing and making music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord, Jesus Christ. Submit to one another out of reverence to Christ."*

What a party!

That's Pentecost.

The church inebriated with God.

Tom Long from Princeton Seminary was teaching a Confirmation class at his church, these three little girls. He began to tell them what Pentecost was, and he said, *"Pentecost was when the church was all there, sitting together, and the Spirit-Wind came on like fire, and they began praising God in other tongues. And people looked at them, and they thought they were drunk."* And this little girl's eyes got really big, and she said, *"Gosh, Reverend Long, we must have been absent that Sunday."* I hope we're not absent, because the wind still blows in this day.

In 1740, Jonathan Edwards' wife was so overcome by the Spirit of God at one of their revival meetings, that for 17 days she was described as *"insensible and drunk."* She couldn't get out of bed, and when she did, she fell, and they had to take her back. She writes of that time in this way: *"I was aware of a delightful sense of the immediate presence of the Lord, and I became conscious of his nearness to me and my dearness to him. So conscious of him, she was unconscious of everything else."*

You may think that's absurd, but do you remember when Jesus was described as a drunkard? Do you remember what he says? He says that wisdom is justified by all her children. Most of you are children of the Great Awakening--Jonathan Edwards and movements of the Spirit that were not dissimilar to those at Pentecost. But all of you are children of Pentecost, descendants of what happened that day. And I've seen the wind blow in such a way in our day.

I listened to Eleanor Mumford from Holy Trinity Church in Brompton, England, on tape the other day. She told of one woman who came to a revival meeting she was at and was overcome by the power of God. On the way home, driving in her car, she was pulled over by a policeman. He walked up to the window and said, *"Ma'am, I have reason to believe that you are just totally drunk."* She looked at him, laughed and said, *"I am!"*

And she got out of the car. And he gave her a Breathalyzer test. And while he was giving her the Breathalyzer test, it overcame him as well. They both fell down on the highway, rolling and laughing. He rolled over next to her, and he said, *"Lady, I don't know what you've got--but I need it too!"* She invited him to church. He came the next week and got saved.

And Jesus said wisdom is justified by all her children. And the wisdom of God is foolishness to men. And if you think that sounds kind of dangerous, let me tell you, in a way it is. But in a way, it's not at all. In fact, if you drive under the influence of alcohol, you are driving under the influence of an evil master. But if you drive under the influence of the Holy Spirit, you are driving under the influence of the Master of all Reality, including traffic.

And if you're saying, "*That's just stupid, that's foolish, and I'm sorry, but I just don't believe that story!*" That's okay! I do! You don't have to! However, you do have to believe in Pentecost! And it's in the imperative tense. Be filled! With the Spirit! The Wind *is* blowing--perhaps not here in the same way as there--but it's blowing with the same effect. And we're supposed to ask for more.

A few weeks ago in Session--so much business, so much politics, work and struggle. And I'll tell you: *I was feeling real self-conscious.* And I was thinking: *I bet the rest of these guys are feeling pretty self-conscious too.* So we called a no-agenda meeting. *And at that meeting we began by just calling on the Wind.* As we did that, you could feel it, like a gentle breeze after a time. Like a reminder: *He's here! Jesus! The Lord of all Reality is here! And He loves us, and He's working in us!*

And soon all the others were just a little bit schnoekered. And then my struggles, my self just seemed--so small. And when we met the next week to do business, it was a breeze, easy.

And that day, Peter preached with boldness, not like it was a chore. And the disciples shared everything in common without inhibition. And you may have felt that way right here in worship. In II Corinthians, Paul says where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. So if you are worshipping, and all of a sudden you feel yourself getting pulled, losing yourself, go for it!
You're drinking the good stuff!
And there is no safer place to be.
And He is reminding you of his nearness to you and your dearness to him.

And so sometimes when my daughter Becky starts narrating herself excessively, "*I'm like this, I'm like that, I'm like, did you hear me? Did anybody hear me? I'm like this...*" I just stop and grab her. I say, "*Oh, Becky, I love you so much! You are so cute and so awesome! How on earth did you get to be so wonderful?*" And Becky sits there in my arms and drinks it up. She lets me be the narrator. Then she's free, free to be Becky and not just act like Becky.

You have a Heavenly Father who longs to do the very same thing for you. So drink it up! *The blood of the Covenant, the new wine of the kingdom. His grace, His mercy, His very own Spirit, the Living Water, the Wind of God.*

I'll end with this--Robin Gunn wrote: "*She stood a short distance from her guardian at the park this afternoon. Her distinctive features revealing that, although her body*

blossomed into young adulthood, her mind would always remain a child's. My children got caught up in fighting over a shovel. They didn't notice when the wind changed, but she did.

A wild autumn wind spinning leaves into amber flurries. I called to my boisterous son and jostled my daughter, 'Time to go, Mom still has lots to do today.' My rosy-cheeked boy stood tall watching the wide-eyed fascination, the gyrating dance of that down-syndrome girl as she scooped up leaves and showered herself with a twirling rain of autumn jubilation. With each twist and hop she sang deep, earthy grunts, a canticle of praise meant only for the One whose breath causes the leaves to tremble from the trees.

'Hurry up, let's go, seat belts on.' In the rearview mirror, I study her one more time through misty eyes. And then the tears come. Not tears of pity for her--the tears are for me. For I am far too sophisticated to publicly shout praises to my Creator. Too full of self that is! I am whole and intelligent and normal. And so I weep, because I will never know the severe mercy that frees such a child and bids her, come dance in the autumn leaves."

And that's not really true, because there is a Wind. There is a Wind that comes, and it will turn you into a child. It will set you free and cause you to forget yourself and to dance. The Spirit of God. Let's call on Him.

Lord God, would you come to us with your Holy Wind. We know you already have, but, Lord, we ask that you would come with greater power. And that you would cause us to dance. Lord, if people dance in worship, that's great; if they don't, that's great. But, Lord God, let their lives be a dance. That, Lord Jesus, they would preach and share your Gospel without inhibitions. And that, Lord Jesus, we would share our lives with each other without inhibitions. That, Lord God, we wouldn't simply act like Christians, but, God, we would be Christians. And you would be our narrator. And so, come, Holy Spirit, and flow onto us.

Benediction... So, let me say: *You are what you drink.* Make it your aim to drink the good stuff. Wherever you are, whatever you're doing, come to worship, *call upon the Lord.* Driving your car? *Call upon the Lord.* When you're about to go into a difficult meeting, a hard place, say, "*Lord, would you fill me with your wind? Blow through me.*" Because it's a command.

It's not an option for you.

For Paul says it in the imperative tense, (paraphrase) "*Be filled, and keep on being filled with his Holy Wind, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. Singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord. Submitting one to another. A party! Called the Church of Jesus Christ. In His name, Amen.*"

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