

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Amen.

Let me set the scene.

It is a beautiful summer day almost fifteen years ago on Elkhart Lake, Wisconsin,  
and it is time for the doubles finals of Camp Brosius Regatta.

The wind is blowing steady out of the southwest at around 10 or 15 miles an hour.

The seven little Sunfish are weaving about in preparation for the start.

With two people in each boat it is a little cramped.

Camp Brosius is a family camp,

and so crews are a mix of parents, children, and older siblings.

A blast from an air-horn on shore informs us

that the race will start in precisely two minutes.

The activity in the boats gets a little more frantic

as the skippers gauge the wind,

circling and jockeying for position so as to cross the start line right on time.

One of the skippers, a high-school aged boy, loses control of the rudder

and his little craft circling wildly out of control.

As the sail flaps loudly, and the boom swings wildly,

his teammate, a girl of about the same age,

gets dumped, squealing, overboard.

Another blast of the horn; one minute to go.

The errant Sunfish continues in a tight circle

as the hapless skipper tries to recover his rudder

and his sodden crew-mate drags herself back aboard.

My middle school aged son Nate and I have been practicing during the week

and so far we have been working well together,

but both of us know the same thing could happen to us in an instant.

With twenty seconds to go I turn our boat toward the start line

trimming sail and rudder.

Nate shifts his weight back a bit, and outboard

as the sail takes the wind and we pick up speed.

As the horn sounds we cross the line, a rare, near perfect start.



When I counsel couples in preparation for their marriage,

one of the metaphors I like to use for life is sailing.

I like using sailing

because sailing is the artful balancing of forces you have control over,

and forces you don't have control over

In an effort to make headway in the world.

No matter how complicated a sailboat might get,

it really has four active parts;

the hull, the keel, the rudder and the sail.

The hull allows you to float on the water, as well as glide through it.

The keel helps you travel in a straight line.

The rudder allows you to turn, then set and hold a particular course.

The sail allows you to harness the energy of the wind

and convert it into motion.

Add wind and water,

the two things you don't get to control,

and you have everything you need for a rich metaphor for life.



The race course for the day was a triangle

with the first leg close-hauled nearly into the wind.

As we headed onto the course

Nate leaned out on the windward side of the boat

to keep our mast as close to straight up as we could.

By doing this we hoped to present the most sail to the power of the wind

and present the least hull to the drag of the water.

It appeared to be working

as slowly we began to move away from the other boats in the pack.

Some other skippers noticed our technique and made adjustments of their own.

While Nate watched the boats behind us,

I scanned the water ahead for little patches of ripples that indicated puffers,  
gusts of wind that might give us a little kick of speed.

I spotted a large patch of ripples form on the water ahead and move quickly toward us.

This was just what I was looking for.

“Here comes a puffer Nate. Get ready,” I said.

✠

James, in his letter, speaks of the power of the tongue,

saying, “the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great exploits.”

He equates the tongue with the rudder of a ship;

though “it takes strong winds to drive them,

yet they are guided by a very small rudder  
wherever the will of the pilot directs.”

James is warning us of the importance of,

as my Mom used to say,

minding your mouth.

In our Gospel, Jesus asks his disciples what the people are saying about him.

He listens contentedly to their answers

and then looks them right in the eye and says,

“Who do *you* say that I am?”

And Peter blurts out, “You are the Messiah!”

✠

When the puffer arrived it wasn't quite what I expected.

No, it wasn't at all what I expected.

It wasn't a puffer, it was a blaster!

The wind jumped to around 25 mile per hour  
and it laid our little boat almost on its side.

Nate was almost thrown out of the boat and onto the sail  
that was laying almost flat against the water.

How he hung on I don't know, but he did,  
rolling onto his stomach and leaning over the gunwale  
as he hung out over the bottom of the hull that was now almost vertical.

I fought with the rudder to try and bring the bow more into the wind  
to ease the pressure on the sail  
at the same time that I was hauling on the main sheet  
to try and keep the sail up out of the water.

I knew that if the sail dragged in the water we would go over,  
but as we balanced there on the edge of disaster  
we were going like a bat out of hell, if you'll pardon the expression.

It seemed to take forever,  
but eventually we had readjusted to the new wind speed  
at a respectable forty degree heel.

And man, we were flying!



When Jesus began to tell his disciples what it really meant that he was the messiah,  
they were taken aback.

What did it mean he had to die.

Didn't being the messiah mean he was powerful...

That he would make things right?

Peter took Jesus aside to try and set him straight...

and then it got worse.

Get behind me Satan?

If you want to save your life, you will lose it?

What could all this mean?

He couldn't be serious, could he?



“Dad, look!”

Nate's voice sounded different, kind of awed.

I looked back at the rest of the fleet and caught my breath.

Only one other boat was upright,

and it's sail was flapping loosely as a crewman was struggling back aboard.

Two of the sailboats had completely turned turtle,

their daggerboards the only thing sticking above the water.

The other three Sunfish were wallowing on their sides

as their crews struggled to get them back upright again.

I couldn't believe it.

They had to have seen the gust hit us.

They should have been prepared.

As we rounded the buoy and started our run down the next leg,

only one other Sunfish had gotten back under way.

I still couldn't believe it.

How could they have missed it.

It was right there in front of them.



Jesus went on telling his disciples over and over again

what it would mean to him that he was the messiah,

and what it would mean to them,

but to tell you the truth

I don't think they ever really got it...

until he appeared to them on Easter morning.

It is so easy for us to be smug about how the *disciples* didn't get it

and how we *do* get it,

but that isn't really fair.

We know the *end* of the story already.

Of course *we* can see the clues early on.

When it gets right down to it, those poor disciples didn't have a chance.

Still, you have to admire the disciples for what they did when they finally did believe.

They went out and changed the world.



As Nate and I crossed the finish line,

there were only two boats on the same leg with us

and they fought tooth and nail for second place the whole way.

Eventually everyone made it in,

and we had a wonderful time swapping yarns

about how we all battled the wind gust that day.

We all agreed that it was the best regatta ever seen at Camp Brosius.



If you are not paying attention,

the wind of the Spirit can knock you flat.

Even when you *are* paying attention it can sometimes be almost too much to handle.

James reminds us that from the same mouth can come blessing and curse.

He is speaking of *our* mouths.

It makes me wonder how often we are a blessing or a curse to those around us.

He also reminds us that from a small fire

can grow a blaze that will burn down an entire forest,

and our tongue is that fire.

I thought about using the wildfires out west as a sermon illustration this week,

but in the end I couldn't do it.

It scared me too much.

It does make me wonder though,

if the fires we have kindled with our tongues

are fires of blessing or fires of curse like those wildfires.

Twenty-three years ago last Wednesday we were a stunned nation,  
trying to make sense of a terrorist attack against us.

With words of bluster and bravado

we lit the fires of a war that was extinguished only a few years ago.

As all wars do,

the war on terror has changed us in ways we never intended.

And as all wars do,

that one left behind much healing that will need to occur.

As with all wars, history will resolve whether the fires we lit

were ultimately a blessing or a curse to the people we sought to help.

Again the war clouds are billowing

and we find ourselves supporting allies in war.

The line between assisting and enabling grows thin

and the risk getting sucked into a larger war grows.

And the divide between being a faithful Christian

and a loyal citizen grows as well.

We must do the best we can in these troubling times

until a season of peace returns.

Until that time comes, let our words of prayer

be those of the psalmist from so long ago.

“Who can tell how often he offends?

cleanse me from my secret faults.

Above all, keep your servant from presumptuous sins;

let them not get dominion over me;

then shall I be whole and sound,

and innocent of a great offense.

Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts

be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer.”

Amen.