

Message 8-17-25

Shared by Rev. Ken Heintzelman

*Three things are too wonderful for me;*

*Four, I do not understand:*

<sup>19</sup> *the way of an eagle in the sky,*

*the way of a snake on a rock,*

***the way of a ship on the high seas,***

*And the way two people in love are with each other. Proverbs 30:18-19*

The passage reminds us how much wonder there is in the world. The phrase, “*the way of a ship on the high seas,*” caught my imagination. I love the song Cool Change by Little River Band. It resonates with me because I am mesmerized by water. I can stare at the ocean and get lost in the best way.

*Well, I was born in the sign of water*

*And it's there that I feel my best*

*The albatross and the whales, they are my brothers*

I am a Pisces, just barely. I was born in the sign of water. The few times I was seeking my next church to serve, I was open to God’s calling to go anywhere, but I hoped my calling would put me on the ocean. God has a sense of humor, and the best church calling of my life brought me to the desert. Our God indeed has the power to make a feast in the desert. You have proved that.

God has a sense of humor because my church before Shadow Rock was not on the east or west coast, but was on what locals called the “north coast”. I spent almost 17 years on the coast of Lake Erie.

There are a lot of boaters on the Great Lakes. There were motor boats and sailboats. There was a friendly rivalry between the two kinds of boaters. They called each other names. Motor boaters were referred to as stinkpots because of

the fumes their engines would exhaust, and the sail boaters were called blowboaters because they depended on the wind.

Stinkpots are drivers who have a destination, and they get in their boats and go directly from point A to point B. Blowboaters are different. Blowboaters get into their boat, and they must read the wind. They may have to tack and zigzag to get to their destination. To a motorboater, a blowboater looks like they're meandering.

Among us, here at Shadow Rock, are stinkpotters and blowboaters. Cindy Gattorna often uses a model of communication styles that gives insight, and she has called herself a “driver” and me an “analytical”. She wants to get ‘er done, and I want to study it to death before I make a decision. She and I represent a stinkpot and a blowboater.

I think our society has created a stinkpot and motorboat world, and favors motorboat people. The movies make money with action heroes, not thoughtful sloths. For many of us, the winds of culture, time, and history do not matter until it gets our attention. Motorboat people do not discern; they decide. Blowboaters are different. The wind does matter. I am a blowboater. I can get caught up in analyzing something forever. I am always in discernment. I can sail in the waters of discernment and never decide, and therefore miss the destination. We need both stinkpotters and blowboaters. We need both deciders and discerners. With this affirmation of both, I am asking that we lean into the discernment process. I am asking all of us to try to be blowboaters and read the wind in this season of discernment.

What are the winds? Which way are they blowing? Are they blowing toward freedom or tyranny? Are they blowing toward our core values of inclusion, justice, and spirituality? Are we spitting in the wind? Given who we are and what we value, is the wind at our back or in our face?

I want to remind you of the previous lessons from the last two Sundays. Becoming a discerning people helps us to see the nuances and subtleties of change and respond in the most insightful and loving ways possible with each other. Becoming a discerning people opens us up to welcome new voices, new people, new perspectives, and new ways. We do not diminish the value of those who have served faithfully. We simply expand the table. When we discern in a time of great change, it is not a loss—it is a blessing. It is not a threat—it is a promise. The narrow gate does not exclude—it refines. It does not reject—it reveals.

Becoming a discerning people means reading the wind. The essence of reading the wind is knowing you are in a dialogue with life. Reading the wind is perceiving and responding to God's newest thrust in the midst of history.

What a wonderful and dynamic world we live in. We are not in monologues with ourselves. We are in dialogue with all of life. The discernment process is a conversation between ourselves, the Spirit of Life and Love, and the external factors of the world. These factors outside our fellowship include the people who come to Shadow Rock's doorstep and knock at the door. This includes the homeless, refugees, the most vulnerable, the most capable, visitors, and candidates for senior minister.

Discernment may feel elusive and murky. It is not murky. Discernment is the emergence of a clear picture. It is the creation of an artist, not a print from the photo app on our phone. Discernment is the midwifing of a clear direction before making a decision. It is not going to the store and picking a life-size doll off the shelf. Discernment is not only a reasonable practice, but it is a necessary one in a motorboat world that pushes decisions.

Motorboating is beneficial and necessary, but we must be careful because it can create an illusion. I can get into the boat of life, start my engine, and go where I want to go. I am in control; until I am not. For motorboaters, the wind is a non-factor. Motorboaters can be like Italian race car drivers who break off the rearview mirror, "What's a behind me, doesn't matter."

Sailboating is in dialogue with the wind. It is a quieter way of moving through life. It acknowledges it is dependent on the wind.

In sailing as in discernment, listening is more important than speaking. Seeking a deeper understanding is prioritized over Immediate results. Motorboating is singular, direct, linear, and monological. Sailboating is multifarious, circuitous, curvy, and dialogical.

As a child, I loved the funny papers on Sunday morning. They were bright, colorful, and had more pictures than boring words. On the front page of our funny papers section was the Family Circus cartoon. I remember one cartoon that showed the path one of the children took to get home. It went through the neighborhood and circled back on itself and wandered to the neighbors. It was not a direct path home. When the child finally arrived home the mother asked, "Where have you been?" The child responds, "No where." In fact, the child had been everywhere and saw so many wonders as they wandered. The child was blowboating when the parent wanted the child to motorboat.

Discernment is less about what to do and more about who to be, and who we are to be, together. Adjust your sails and catch the wind.

Next week, we will explore the idea of choosing between two goods.