

Reflection for September 7, 2025 – The Wind in Your Sails Inspired by Psalm 139 and John 3:8

One never knows when a good read will inspire you. And I have had a few of them courtesy of Chris and his extensive library. Most recently he lent me Alexander Kent's "Sloop of War." It is a very engaging page turner published back in 1974, depicting the British at war with America and the French from 1778 through 1781. It has all the thrills of a great adventure story. Cunning strategies of experienced captains, battles at sea, incredible bravery, tragedy, determination, and of course treachery and betrayal.

It is difficult to appreciate the life of a seaman in those times. Their duties were grueling and exhausting. One could perish falling from the rigging just as easily as from cannon ball fire or a round from a musket. Stale water, mealy bread, rancid pork. Pestilence and disease. It wasn't a time for the weak or the faint of heart.

And the constant threats from weather would unnerve most anyone. Gail force winds could drive a ship ashore or onto a nearby reef, rip the sails apart or break the masts like matchsticks. A helpless ship could be swamped in minutes with the loss of all hands. No wind at all was bad news as well. A ship could drift for miles and miles and with no steerage, be ground to a pulp on a rocky shore.

I suppose my ancestors could have been sailors, but I'm not cut from that cloth. That would not be the life for me.

With the thoughts of the recent passing of our son-in-law, it occurred to me how similar our lives are to that of a 16th Century sailor. Life is unpredictable. Anything can happen at any time. We can be cast upon the rocks of tragedy without warning. The bitter reality of losing a loved one is on the top of that list.

Times of feeling lost or abandoned in open sea on a sailboat with no wind is something many people experience. Even if you had oars to attempt to move you forward, you soon fall exhausted and unable to continue. Those with depressive illnesses, the chronically ill, the disheartened and the grieving know that place.

And we have all experienced violent storms in our living. Sometimes we have had to hang on by our fingernails through chaos and crisis. We have been blown about mercilessly and when we have finally emerged, we are battered, bruised and spent.

Loss, illness, discouragement, worry and fear can cast us into hopelessness, and take the wind from our sails. And it can be very difficult, if not sometimes impossible, to catch it again.

Yes, as John says, **"⁸The wind[☞] blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes."** Sometimes it might take us to a safe harbour. Other times to the depths of despair.

Everyone who has lived through a tragic event understands that there is no panacea, no silver bullet, no life-giving antidote that provides a remedy for our ailments. That is wishful thinking at best.

So how do we fill our sails again? How God do we get the ship righted and sailing on a course to hope? Tell us God what to do and we will follow.

Time and again I find it fascinating that scripture can open my eyes and provide me with prophetic visions. The Psalm Marsha read this morning is one of those scriptures. In many ways it could have been written yesterday rather than some time in the 10th Century BCE. Wisdom jumps off the pages.

**¹¹ If I say, “Surely the darkness shall cover me, and night wraps itself around me,”^[a]
¹² even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is as bright as the day, for darkness is as light to you.**

Night is as bright as day to you; darkness is as light to you. Do you mean that even in my times of loss, my hopelessness, my uncertainty and grief you are their God? Are you prophesizing that today, as in the time of King David so long ago, there is the possibility that our torn sails and broken masts might be repaired, and our ships set again on a course towards our renewal? Is it possible that your reassuring breath may fill our lives once more, relieve our pain and bring us to a hopeful place, a safe harbour?

This Psalm was apparently written by King David himself in some of his times of crisis. These are not just a poet's inquiries on a page, they are words of experience, words through human eyes, words from someone who needed to hold onto hope. Words from someone who lived in troubled times. For me King David's offering sings out to me,

⁷ Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there. ⁹ If I take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest limits of the sea, ¹⁰ even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me fast.

Where can I go when I am in doubt, when I am fretful and anxious? **God your hands trustingly reach out to me then. I sense a nurturing presence, a trusting peace.**

Where can I go when I am shaken, unsure, unnerved by some circumstance? **Holy One you offer shelter from the storm, a liminal space where I can rest.**

Where can I go when I am stricken by grief, unsure what to do, unable to cope? **I can go where Holy Love resides. A place where you will dry my tears and in time, put your living breath back into my sails.**

I can go there anytime. When I close my eyes and consider the vastness of your ubiquitous love, I am comforted, for you are always there waiting.

Thanks for listening this morning. Amen