

## ***Pastor's Message - Pentecost***

Acts 2:1-7, 13-18

John 15:26-27

Wouldn't it be amazing to see something like that happen in this Church? Don't you wish you could see them some Sunday in your church? Wouldn't we wake up if we saw flames of fire descending? Wouldn't it be awesome if we heard reports from all over the country, from wherever and whenever people are worshipping with us, of tongues of fire appearing over heads and roaring like a roaring windstorm, but without the damage? Some churches expect these signs of that day every day! Hopefully people will see the Holy Spirit at work in us... tongues or no tongues!

When was the last time something totally unexpected happened during Sunday morning worship services in your church? How long has it been since you completely lost track of time because you were so "caught up" in the spirit of a prayer, a song, a speaker, or even a vision? Is church the last place you expect to find something new, fun and exciting going on? Maybe this is the day, maybe this is the Sunday, when the Holy Spirit will raise the roof, do something totally unexpected, even "off-the-wall," and open some Holy Spirit holes in our lives.

If these things aren't happening, perhaps it's time to reevaluate why we claim to be a Christian church. It has to be more than something that came with our family history – more than something our spouse drug us to. Claiming the name of Jesus has to be more than a social norm we are expected to conform to and more than a social club where we can catch up with our friends, family, and neighbors. Claiming to be Christians must mean a life born out of love and passion for Jesus. Perhaps as we celebrate the gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, we should take the time to consider what powers us as believers.

In Jesus' farewell speech to His disciples, just before the two verses from the gospel of John which we read today, Jesus has told his disciples how it is going to be difficult for them after he is gone. They will be persecuted just as he was. The world will hate them, he says. They will be thrown out of the synagogues. They will suffer, and they might even be killed. He tells them he knows that their hearts are filled with sorrow at the prospect of his leaving.

In time, Jesus' prediction comes to pass. His disciples witness Jesus' arrest, crucifixion, resurrection and eventually His Ascension. They were probably stunned and uncertain how to go on. What next? Where do they go from here?

It reminds me of the story of a woman and her parakeet Chippie. It seems that the woman was cleaning Chippie's birdcage with the long hose of a canister vacuum cleaner when the phone rang. She reached over to get the phone, and as she did, she heard the unmistakable sound of Chippie being sucked up into the vacuum.

Immediately she rushed over to the vacuum, pulled out the vacuum bag, and ripped it open. There she found Chippie, totally stunned but still alive. Since the bird was now covered with soot and dirt, she grabbed him and ran into the bathroom, held him under

the faucet and washed him under the cold water to get all the soot and dirt off. When she finished she saw the hair dryer sitting on the sink. She turned it on and held Chippie up in front of the blast of hot air to dry him off. A few weeks later, she was talking to a neighbor about the incident and the neighbor asked how the bird was doing. "Well," she said, "Chippie doesn't sing much anymore. He just sort of sits on his perch and stares."

Jesus has told the disciples that He needed to leave, and it was to their advantage that He do so that they could make room for the Holy Spirit to come to them. The Advocate, the Holy Spirit, will then be with them always. The Spirit of Truth that abided in him will come to them and will abide now in them. It will continue to comfort them and teach them and empower them, even after he is no longer physically with them. His leaving is not even going to be the end point of his teaching, he says, because the Spirit of Truth will always be there to guide them. This spirit is the Spirit of God, and God will never leave them.

We know now, as we read today, that the Holy Spirit falls upon the believers meeting together, all 120 gathered in a room in Jerusalem, and they proclaim the good news of the resurrection of Jesus Christ in the languages of all the people gathered in Jerusalem for the feast of Pentecost. Based on Luke's account in the book of Acts, we can be sure of one thing that happened that first Pentecost day: the Spirit bestowed his gift of bravery on the apostles and changed a group of men and women who were huddled together in that upper room into fearless evangelizers of the gospel who converted thousands of people on that one day alone.

On that day, they began to speak boldly about "God's deeds of power." On that day, they experienced winds gathering and blowing through like a tornado. Flames of fire like tongues appeared over the heads of this group of men and women gathered in the upper room. Men and women alike being were gifted with the ability to suddenly speak fluently in another language. And in the midst of all of this, God's deeds of power were being demonstrated.

The Spirit of Truth came to the disciples at Pentecost. While we may not experience winds blowing through our Church, or tongues of flame over our heads, or our neighbor sitting next to us speaking in a foreign language, the Spirit of Truth has likewise come to all of those who have been followers of Christ throughout the generations. The Spirit of Truth is spoken in every congregation in every generation and every place in the world, no matter how large or how small, rural, suburban, or city, with a long history or recently planted.

"God says,  
 'I will pour out my Spirit upon all people.  
 Your sons and daughters will prophesy.  
 Your young men will see visions,  
 and your old men will dream dreams.  
<sup>18</sup> In those days I will pour out my Spirit  
 even on my servants—men and women alike—  
 and they will prophesy. "(Acts 2:17b-18)

Not just one day, one day of Pentecost every year, God breathes on us daily. God gives of his life and spirit daily. And like Peter and the multitude there on that dramatic day in Jerusalem, we find that when the Spirit of truth comes to us we discover, to our surprise, a new life and boldness, and we stand up, a vast multitude who are called the church.

The fact that these tongues of fire rested on each of Jesus' followers on Pentecost is a way of showing *that when the Spirit fills us, we, too, radiate the light of God*. Thus, Spirit-filled Christians are light-bearers. And over the centuries, Christians have "glowed" with that light as they have spread the gospel, shared the good news, gone about doing good, committed sacrificial acts of love for neighbor and even for enemies, and have sought to understand and do the will of God.

One June evening, just past dusk, a little boy was playing outside his home when he noticed some fireflies. He was fascinated by their brightness, and so he ran inside the house and excitedly asked his dad, "Daddy, what makes the fireflies glow?"

His dad, not sure how to answer, said to his son, "I really don't know, son. Why don't you ask your teacher at school?"

The boy was not discouraged by his father's non-answer but simply ran outside to admire the fascinating creatures some more. He tried to catch one. Several times he swatted at them with his hands but missed; but then his hands clapped together on both sides of one's flight and it squished between his palms. Making a face as he felt the mashed insect's body between his hands, he slowly opened them to see the wasted creature. To his surprise the dead firefly was still glowing in the palms of his hands.

Excitedly, he ran back into the house, yelling, "Daddy, Daddy, I found out what it is that makes the fireflies glow!"

His dad, pleased that his son had figured out the answer to his own question, asked, "And what is it, son?"

"It's the stuff inside!" he replied proudly, showing him the palm of his hand.

"The same thing is true of followers of Jesus Christ. What is it that gives us that glow? The answer is simple. It's the stuff inside."

Have you ever wondered just what the disciples were saying? Well, maybe it wasn't what they *said*. Maybe it wasn't the words they *spoke* (even if everyone could understand in his or her own language) that communicated the power of God's deeds to the crowd that was there to witness this incredible moment. Maybe it was *who they were* that most profoundly communicated God's deeds of power in a life-changing, transformational way to the crowd gathered in Jerusalem that day. Maybe it was just the fact that the Spirit blew God's truth into their lives and the flame lit up their hearts and they were energized and no longer afraid.

God is with us in Spirit, giving us languages to speak across the barriers of nation and culture.

God is with us in Spirit, giving us resources to feed the hungry and house the homeless.

God is with us in Spirit, giving us strength and wisdom to work hard and work smart, overcoming the many obstacles we will face, as we act out divine dramas in our own homes, workplaces, and neighborhoods.

Because God has given us the Spirit and let us go, we are free to do great things - for ourselves and for others. We have to be believing in our God-given mission: to tell of the live-giving and life-saving power of Jesus. Trusting in God, there is nothing we lack to do what He has for us to do.

Pentecost is not limited to one day in one particular place. Pentecost happens for someone every day. Sometimes it happens in the most unlikely places and to the strangest people and at the most inopportune times, but it happens just the same. Pentecost happens at just the right place and just the right time – just when we need it most.

Pentecost happens because we too often allow our bonfire faith to dwindle down to a mess of dying embers and ashes.

Pentecost happens because people who meet Jesus Christ cannot help but to tell other people about him.

Pentecost happens when we lack "holy boldness," and we hide our lamps under bushel baskets. We are called to be witnesses of Jesus moving in our lives and in our world: we're not called to be indifferent bystanders.

Prior to Pentecost, we were like a mobilized army that hadn't been issued rations. We had marching orders, but no means of sustenance for the long campaign.

Since Pentecost we have all the resources we need to carry out our commission: to seek and to save that which was lost. Jesus has supplied us with the means to transform lives, and he has equipped his followers to obey his command: to go and make of all disciples. All these things are possible because Jesus' life is now part of our lives through the power of the Holy Spirit.

John 3:8 says, "The wind blows wherever it wants. Just as you can hear the wind but can't tell where it comes from or where it is going. . ." But on this day, on this day to celebrate Pentecost, we celebrate not a Spirit of randomness, but a Spirit who leads us, guides us, and holds us in God's ways. God's Holy Spirit gives us a language to speak God's love and welcome and forgiveness and salvation. God's Holy Spirit gives us the words to speak and the courage to proclaim that wherever we have been or whatever we have done, it is put away and God has acted and continues to act in our lives and in the world.

There is hope – there is promise that what is, is not what will be. We are given the power to make change, to bring about transformation, and to live our lives in such a way that people see, not stunned and silent parakeets, but people singing confidently and shining out what's inside: the power of the Holy Spirit and the love of God.