

"FIRE IN THE CHURCH"

Acts 2:1-21

Welcome to Pentecost in the Year 20[10]. It is a time to open up to the mind-blowing, heart-warming, life-changing power of God. The power of God can invade the body, inflate the mind, swell the soul, lift the Spirit and make us more than we ever imagined. It'll make you young when you are old, and it'll make you live even when you die. The power and presence of the Spirit will disturb, delight, and lift. When God sends forth the Spirit, "the whole face of the earth is renewed." When God sends forth the Spirit chaos is changed into creation the Red Sea opens up to a highway of freedom. When God sends forth the Spirit: A young woman says "Yes". Jesus is born and life is never the same. When God sends forth the Spirit amazing things happen: *[Congregation joins in saying]* **barriers are broken, communities are formed, opposites are reconciled, unity is established, disease is cured, addiction is broken, cities are renewed, races are reconciled, hope is established, people are blessed, and church happens.**

Today the Spirit of God is present and we're gonna' have church. So be ready, get ready...God is up to something... discouraged folks cheer up, dishonest folks 'fess up, closed folk, open up, gossipers shut up, conflicted folks make up, sleeping folks wake up, lukewarm folks, fire up, dry bones shake up, and pew potatoes stand up! But most of all, Christ the Savior of all the world is lifted up... (Rick Kirchoff, Germantown United Methodist Church, Opening remarks to the 2000 Memphis Annual Conference)

Today is the day when Christians all over the globe either have, are, or will be celebrating the birthday of the Christian Church. It is a day that the believers in Christ who had gathered together in Jerusalem over 2,000 years ago were all fired up for God. The new church that was birthed that day of Pentecost was on fire, not literally but figuratively.

Which reminds me of a story I once read- There was once a village who had a man who was an avid atheist. Now he was not a bad man, he just didn't believe.

He definitely was not interested in church... and there was only 1 church in the area. It was a cold, dead church; more like a social club, with no decisions being made. Well one day the church building caught on fire, and the whole town ran toward it to help extinguish the flames... including the atheist! Someone yelled out. "Hey, this is something new for you, the first time we've ever seen you running to church!" He replied, "This is the first time I've ever seen the church on fire!"

I wonder, if a group of Christians visited all the churches in Akron and they were asked to evaluate whether or not the church was a.) Cold and dead or b.) On fire and alive, I wonder what they would find? How many would be ready for the grave or already there and how many would be excited and exciting and full of life? And I wonder, how would they rate our church? Sometimes you need an outside eye, an objective opinion to tell you what you can't or are unwilling to see. Now I know we Presbyterians have been labeled the "Frozen Chosen" but I wonder how they would

evaluate us. I mean, have you ever visited a cold church where you are fortunate if someone comes up and says, "good morning" to you. I have been to other churches when our family has been on vacation and there have been times I have wished someone, anyone would at most say "Hello" and, at the least tell me to "Drop Dead," at least I would know that they knew I was present in their house of worship.

Maybe you have read in the book of Revelation, chapter 2 where Jesus issues a warning that He will remove their lamp stand or, as another translation puts it, their candlestick if they didn't repent. As a matter of fact there is a stern warning to the church at Laodicea in Revelation 3:15-16 where we read, "I know your works; you are neither cold nor hot. I wish that you were either cold or hot. So because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I am about to spit you out of my mouth."

At that first Pentecost, what were the dynamics that day? They were **wind, fire and praise**.

Here we have the disciples in that upper room. Were they waiting? Were they expectantly waiting and praying for something miraculous to happen? I mean, after all Jesus had instructed His disciples to wait for they would eventually receive power after the Holy Spirit would come upon them and it would change them forever. And so they gathered and they waited. And suddenly a wind began to move and stir in that room and it grew stronger and stronger to the point that it was rushing with a rumble like that of thunder.

Interesting **the Hebrew word for spirit and wind is *ruach***, and when hearing the Hebrew word pronounced it even depicts its meaning. The wind, for generations upon generations in Israel, was a symbol of the Spirit. In the Old Testament book of Ezekiel we read of the Lord speaking to Ezekiel in the valley of the dry bones, in Ezekiel 37:9 where the Lord tells Ezekiel, "Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live."

In this passage from Ezekiel the dry bones are symbolic of the deflated, defeated, dejected people of Israel who are in exile in Babylon. And these people of Israel needed the Spirit for life to come into them once again.

So here in the Upper Room the wind is blowing upon the disciples, it is rushing upon them and it is an irresistible wind that they welcome. And this wind does, as any gust of wind might do, it was scattering all the cobwebs of fear and blowing away the layer upon layer of uncertain dust. And the presence of this outward wind would soon be internalized and would touch these disciples and bring new life, bring new thoughts, bring new emotions, bring a new purpose. And these followers were being stirred up and transformed all because the Holy Spirit had come upon them.

But we read that **divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them and a tongue rested on each of them.** I cannot even imagine what those disciples must have been experiencing as the wind and the fire became evident that day.

For when we think of wind and fire they are not tame or docile, but rather wild, untamable forces and both must have been both terrifying and thrilling that first Pentecost.

When we become a believer in Christ the Holy Spirit comes and dwells within us. The Holy Spirit brings peace and comfort; the Holy Spirit brings companionship and can exhort us in the ways of the Lord. But the Holy Spirit can also burn away the chaff of anything that can separate us from God or any other person and the Holy Spirit will be our companion and friend when life seems difficult and challenging. The Holy Spirit, out of His love for us, will burn away that which will weaken us and cause us to not be the person that God created us to be. But hear this- **the Holy Spirit will do even more than be that fire that will burn away the chaff; the Holy Spirit will galvanize and purify us.** And so what we have left is pure metal. Friends, with the power of the Holy Spirit, we do not, let me repeat, do not have to stay the way we are.

Recently I was on the phone with someone who has turned their life around but is experiencing trials and tribulations. They have given their life over to the Lord but are so tired of getting knocked down and getting back up. I prayed with this person and gave them passages to read- I Peter 5:6-7, 10-11; Matthew 11:28-30; Psalm 46 and Psalm 84. When we get down physically there can be that snowball effect and we can then struggle mentally and spiritually. My friend was being tested and Satan was working overtime because, Hey, why would Satan be concerned about a person who is already His or have nothing to do with God, Satan wants to bring down the person who is trying with their faith, the person who has said, YES, to Jesus and is trying to be His disciple. I told my friend to lean more on the Lord and that He would carry him through this time of difficulty. And He has.

And as I was writing this sermon I thought about that person and prayed that God would not only send the fire of the Holy Spirit to minister to my friend and galvanize and purify this person who was struggling, but send the wind of the Spirit to give him new thoughts, a new purpose, a new will.

The Holy Spirit came with a wind that was rushing with a rumble like thunder, that first Pentecost. The fire of the Holy Spirit came and sat upon them and it looked like divided tongues, and the result was Praise. Praise to the God of creation who sent His only Son, Jesus Christ, who, promised that He would send the Holy Spirit at some time to be with His followers always.

The wonderful news about the Holy Spirit is that He brings forth passion, genuineness, spontaneity. **And as the wind of the Spirit brought forth new experiences like speaking in other tongues that First Pentecost, the fire of the Spirit set those first disciples of Jesus aflame with an emotional fervor that was passionate for God.**

And the visible tongues of fire above the heads of those people that we just read about was an outward, visible sign of what had transformed them from within- they were now filled with the Holy Spirit, and their lives would never be the same.

In his commentary on Acts, Lloyd Ogilvie writes, "The miracle of Pentecost was that the followers of Jesus became capable of warm, inclusive love. Each in his or her own uniqueness became free of the limits of the categories of personality. I believe the extrovert was deepened and the introvert released. They were free to love each other, and, as we shall see, they were given an unquenchable love for people in the world."

And friends, if we have received Christ as Lord and Savior we have the Holy Spirit within us. And the Holy Spirit wants us to be a people of God aflame with the passion of sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ with a hurting world.

The Holy Spirit wants churches that are alive and on fire for God so that the fire in the church moves outward into the world, that is desperately in need of Jesus.

As that chapter from Revelation 2 indicates, there is no such thing as lukewarm church. Either we are hot or cold. If we are hot, we are a church that is alive and on fire for the Lord and if we are cold, well, dig the hole 6 feet deep, put us in, shovel the dirt on us and put a few flowers on top because we are dead.

May the fire of the Holy Spirit be in us, be in our church so that we can model those followers who experienced the first Pentecost. For when they were in that Upper Room waiting, I can only imagine that they were a small group of frightened, confused and, for the most part, uneducated people, who, with the coming of the Holy Spirit, were transformed into a force, a mighty force to be reckoned with around the known world.

Fire in the church.... May it be so, Lord, may it be so. And may it
begin with me and with you. Amen.

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Introduction: When God sends forth the Spirit amazing things happen: **barriers are broken, communities are formed, opposites are reconciled, unity is established, disease is cured, addiction is broken, cities are renewed, races are reconciled, hope is established, people are blessed, and church happens.**

The story of the village, the atheist and the fire...

**At that first Pentecost, what were the dynamics that day? _____,
_____ and _____**

The Hebrew word for _____ and _____ is *ruach* Ezekiel 37:9

Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them and a tongue rested on each of them

**The Holy Spirit will do even more than be that fire that will
burn away the chaff; the Holy Spirit will _____ and
_____ us**

**As the wind of the Spirit brought forth new experiences like
Speaking in other tongues, the fire of the Spirit set those
Disciples of Jesus aflame with an emotional fervor that was
_____ for God. They were transformed from within.**

Conclusion: May the fire of the Holy Spirit be in us, be in our church so that we can model those followers who experienced the first Pentecost.