

“FAN THE FLAMES”

Pastor Mike Corwin

PENTECOST SUNDAY

TEXT: ACTS 2:1-4

SCRIPTURE: ACTS 1:1-8

I – PENTECOST SCRIPTURE – ACTS 2:1-4:

After Jesus was resurrected on Easter morning he did not take his rightful place with God in heaven right away. Instead he continued to meet with the disciples and prepare them for the task ahead. For 40 days he walked the earth a risen Savior, meeting and eating with the disciples on various occasions. His main message was this – don’t go off half-cocked! Don’t start doing the ministry I prepared you for until you’ve been properly prepared and equipped.

You heard the reading this morning from the first chapter of Acts where Jesus said the most important thing is this – don’t leave the city of Jerusalem until God sends the Holy Spirit. It is the Spirit that will give you the final preparation and equip you for doing the work ahead. It’s the Holy Spirit that will empower you to be the witnesses to the world I’ve called you to be. If you read the next few verses in Acts 1 you’ll see that these were the very last words Jesus spoke to them. Immediately after giving them these instructions he was taken up to heaven.

The disciples paid attention. They stayed in the city as Jesus told them too. Ten days after Jesus left earth they were all together in the city when the Holy Spirit came to them as promised. The Message translation of the Bible tells us what happened like this:

Acts 2:1 - 4 (TMNT)

When the Feast of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Without warning there was a sound like a strong wind, gale force—no one could tell where it came from. It filled the whole building. Then, like a wildfire, the Holy Spirit spread through their ranks, and they started speaking in a number of different languages as the Spirit prompted them.

The disciples are gathered together waiting as they were told to do when it sounds like a hurricane enters the room. The sound of rushing violent wind fills their ears. Then they see fire descending on them. Other Bibles say that “flames” or “tongues of fire” landed on each of the disciples. I don’t know about you but the loud wind would have been enough to scare me, the addition of fire would have driven me over the edge! I come away from this story wondering why would God use “Fire”

to represent his Holy Spirit.

We have a fear of fire don't we? The very thought of a fire in our homes brings us to the brink of terror. I've made a return trip to the church on more than one occasion to double check and make sure I blew out my candle before leaving so the church won't burn down. We have fireproof safes in our offices and homes to protect our important papers and keepsakes from the ravishes of fire. If we're smart we have smoke detectors in our homes to alert us to a fire which is starting somewhere in the house. We have special signs in the windows of our kid's bedrooms so the firemen know where to look if they're called. We pay battalions of men and women to put on gear and drive red trucks to our homes if a fire should start. We put a full sprinkler system in our basement here to make sure our youth are safe in the new Sunday school space. We witness the destructive power of forest fires in the news every year as they ravage places like California and other dry areas.

Yet God uses this element of fire to represent the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. The visible sign of the Holy Spirit's arrival is fire. It has such significance that our denominations logo is the cross and the flame, which the confirmands learned is the symbol of the Holy Spirit's involvement in the church.

The question for us to ponder today is this: "Why did God choose to use fire to represent his Holy Spirit to the disciples then and now?" As I look at this Scripture and at life, I can give you at least three good reasons...

II – POWER:

The first reason is that fire represents POWER. The fact that it's a powerful force of nature is obvious, but I want to look at how its power gives us power, how fire has empowered and changed the lives of human beings:

- Humankind first lit their way through the dark with fire
- Humankind kept from freezing to death when they discovered the heat put off by fire
- It was fire that kept our ancestors from being hors d'oeuvres for the wild beasts
- Without fire you'd all be eating your steaks extremely rare

Fire is considered one of the most important discoveries of the civilized world. Fire brought us heat and light. Our first modes of mechanical transport were steam engines powered by fire. Can you even imagine a world without fire? I can't, or at least I don't want to. Fire brought humankind the empowerment to live a better life.

It's only natural that God would continue its use as a symbol of empowerment on the day of Pentecost. That's what happened that day isn't it? The disciples were empowered by the Holy Spirit to go out and do the work Jesus had set before them. Jesus knew without the Spirit there would be no fire, just a little smoke, which would soon blow away in the wind. They wouldn't be able to stand up against the persecution, which was coming, they wouldn't be able to preach effectively and tell everyone the Good News of Jesus Christ. Jesus knew that the Holy Spirit would light a fire under

them, would get them fired up to do the job he had set before them. It would give them the power they needed to start the church that day. It was the Holy Spirit that gave them the power to preach the Gospel in the languages of the people who had gathered in the city that day and to do it effectively so the people heard and understood it.

III – GROWTH:

The second reason is that fire means growth. It's easy to see fire as a destructive force, but if you look at it in another light you can see it also as an opportunity for growth. It's devastating to see the neighbor's home burn to the ground, but with insurance, isn't it usually built back up as a better structure? It's fire that removes the imperfections from gold and makes it pure. The Bible points out that it refines us in our faith. It's fire that is used to melt all the various elements together and make steel that is used in our tools, our homes, and our vehicles just to name a few examples.

Even the ravages of forest fires promote growth. If you study the ecosystem of Yellowstone National Park you would discover that fire is the agent of growth in the forest. 77% of the forest is comprised of a tree called the "Lodge Pole Pine." The pine cone, the seed, of this tree will only open up and start a new tree after it's been exposed to high heat. To make matters worse it falls and lies on the ground among all the other debris like pine needles and branches because the park is too dry for decomposition. It's only when a fire blazes through the park that the debris is destroyed and the pinecones are opened and new trees begin to grow to keep the forest alive and healthy.

Throughout the Bible we read about the Holy Spirit bringing new growth to people. It tells us that when we give Jesus a place in our hearts we receive the Holy Spirit and we grow, we become "new creations" as Paul said. On the day of Pentecost the disciples grew into the mature ministers Jesus called them to be to start the church when the Holy Spirit arrived. They grew so much that as you read the rest of the story in Chapter 2 you find that Peter, the disciple who had denied Jesus, the disciple who was always putting his foot in his mouth, preached the first sermon of the new Christian church. He preached in the power of the Holy Spirit so that not only did he grow, the church did too. 3,000 people joined that day.

IV – FIRE SPREADS:

The third and final reason I think God used fire to represent his Holy Spirit is because fire spreads. If fire gets started and isn't controlled, it spreads rapidly and affects other areas. Ask a fireman how many times a piece of burning trash has started a large grass fire. How many careless campfires have started a forest fire?

Remember a lady by the name of Mrs. O'Leary and her famous cow? The story is that Mrs. Patrick O'Leary had tended to the cow before going to bed one night and left the kerosene lantern in the cowshed lit when she went inside the house to go to bed. The cow kicked the lantern over and set the shed on fire. This little shed fire spread quickly and burned for two days on October 8 & 9, 1871. Before it was over the fire spread and consumed 17,000 buildings, 250 lives and left 100,000 people

homeless in a 3-½ square mile area of Chicago.

I think God may very well have used the image of fire that day because what He was starting in that place with those disciples was supposed to spread. He had no intentions of them receiving the Holy Spirit and then keeping it to themselves, he wanted them to share the Spirit with others. He had no intentions of them staying in that room and starting the church, of limiting the membership to those who were already there. He had every intention of them flinging open the doors and windows and spreading the Gospel to all who would listen. He wanted everyone to hear the Good News and learn of the great love he had for his creation in the hopes they would repent, turn from their sins, find the Son he sent to be a sacrifice for their rebellion, and have eternal life. That's still his wish today. Christianity was never once meant to be a closed club, it was meant to be spread all over the world. Remember Jesus' last words from Acts 1 before he left the earth- "You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, all over Judea and Samaria, even to the ends of the earth." In other words – spread the Word...fan the flames! He wanted the disciples to spread the Gospel like wildfire, a fire that would never stop burning.

V – FAN THE FLAMES:

Usually at this point in the message I have a question for you to ponder for the week. I have no question for you this week; I do have a statement of fact...WE ARE CALLED TO BE THE CHURCH ON FIRE...not the church that just smolders!

This church has been given God's Holy Spirit. I know because I have felt him here on many occasions. I have seen some of you receive empowerment from that Spirit, I've seen some of you grow in that Spirit, and I've seen some of you begin to spread that Spirit. I want to tell you this morning that it doesn't matter whether you're a raging inferno, whether you're a small campfire, or whether you're just starting to see sparks from rubbing your two sticks together, once you receive the Holy Spirit you are supposed to be witnesses for Jesus Christ. You are supposed to make sure others feel the heat and get drawn to the cross and the flame just as you have been.

I think it's high time Christians stopped pouring water on the fire of the Holy Spirit and started pouring gasoline on it. It's time we stopped fearing the fire of the Holy Spirit and instead embraced it and shared its warmth with others. As your Pastor I'm telling you this morning that it's time you took the pilot light you've got burning here and fan the flames until it results in a raging inferno which draws people to Jesus. For the confirmands and everyone else in this church I tell you all it's time to BURN BABY BURN!

AMEN