

Preacher: Pastor Twyla

Scripture: Acts 2:1-21

¹ When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. ² And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. ³ Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. ⁴ All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

⁵ Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. ⁶ And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. ⁷ Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?" ⁸ And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? ⁹ Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰ Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, ¹¹ Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power." ¹² All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" ¹³ But others sneered and said, "They are filled with new wine."

¹⁴ But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, "Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. ¹⁵ Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. ¹⁶ No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:

¹⁷ 'In the last days it will be, God declares,
that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh,
and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
and your young men shall see visions,
and your old men shall dream dreams.

¹⁸ Even upon my slaves, both men and women,
in those days I will pour out my Spirit;
and they shall prophesy.

¹⁹ And I will show portents in the heaven above
and signs on the earth below,
blood, and fire, and smoky mist.

²⁰ The sun shall be turned to darkness
and the moon to blood,

before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day.

²¹ Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'

Until a few years ago, before the family got too large for all of us to be there at one time, the Rowe family would have family weekends at our family cabin in Union County, PA. Much of the weekend was spend eating, playing games, hiking, listening to sports events on the radio, reading, talking and laughing as we sat around the large campfire. The fire pit is large enough for everyone...15 to 20...to sit around comfortably.

Usually, whoever got to the cabin first started the fire. They built a nice big "Rowe Fire"; that's what we called it. We had plenty of firewood available to us since we were in the mountains. We fed the fire from first thing in the morning until bedtime. All the guys like taking a turn at stirring the coals and throwing more wood on the fire. The last person sitting by the fire at the end of the day poured water on the fire if there still are flames.

Because the fire was so hot, the fire does not go out totally by morning...even when water was poured on it the night before. There always were hot red coals somewhere in the pit that could be used to start the fire for the new day. This went on until the last family left for home.

This morning we read the Pentecost story. The story tells us about the promised day that Jesus spoke of when the Advocate...the Helper...the Counselor...the Holy Spirit arrived. It happened on a day when all those believing in the resurrected Christ were together for the Feast of Pentecost, which was one of Israel's three agricultural festivals, when all of a sudden "*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.*" That was Eugene Petersen's translation from the Message. The Holy Spirit made quite a dramatic entrance. Can you imagine what that must have been like?

The believers, prompted by the Spirit, suddenly spoke in many different languages. Now, at this point, we could get lost in a discussion about speaking in tongues; but, then I think we would be missing a more important point here which is the Spirit giving the people...both men and women...the power to be witnesses of Jesus, in word or deed, in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

After the Holy Spirit invaded the space, the flames of the Spirit's power could be seen and heard by more than those gathered in that room. A crowd of thousands began to gather outside. In the crowd were Jews from many different nations including Greeks, Arabs, Romans, Africans, and Asians, just to name a few.

Each of the people in the crowd could understand the conversation coming from the upper room in his own language. The Message translation says that when these thousands "heard one after another, their own mother tongues being spoken, they were thunderstruck." They said, "They're speaking our languages, describing God's mighty works!"

The flames of the Spirit could not be extinguished; not even when some in the crowd began to make jokes about them probably being drunk on cheap wine. The believers felt no embarrassment about what was happening. They were changed by the Spirit...empowered by the Spirit...brought together with purpose by the Spirit. They became the body of Christ...the church, spreading like a wildfire for Jesus.

Let's turn our thoughts towards the church today in our world. Do you think the fire of the Holy Spirit is still spreading like wildfire; or is the fire going out in our world today? Listening or reading the news could certainly make one wonder. We find a lot more bad news than good news in the media. People do some pretty unbelievable and horrible things.

People murdering security people when asked as they enter a building to put on a mask. What's that all about? A man dies while being arrested because a policeman has his knee on his neck cutting off his airway. The man cried out that he could not breathe several times. And then there's all those violent street riots taking place in retaliation. Policemen have a very difficult job...one I would not want to do. I have a lot of respect for them. Events like this have to make their job even harder. There is no denying that evil is alive and spreading in today's world.

Evil pours water on the flames of the Spirit...trying to put it out; and, creating smoke that gets into the eyes of men and women, blinding them from finding God. The Evil smoke causes men and women to cough and choke, leaving them desperate to take a hold of anything that will relieve them of their anxiety and discomfort, their troubles and pain. There are many earthly

things for scared and hopeless people to grab hold of in today's society; but they are only temporary remedies for their bad feelings and problems.

The Good News is, try as it may, however, evil will never be able to extinguish the flames of the Holy Spirit...never. God won't let that happen. The flames may appear to have disappeared in some places, but there will always remain hot coals even in the darkest of places...even after long periods of time, and those hot coals...like a campfire...when fed, will burst into flames again.

In 2014, nearly 300 girls were kidnapped from their school in Chibok, Nigeria by the terrorist group, Boko Haram. Many Brethren churches accepted the call to take the name of one of the girls and pray for her. At Fahrney-Keedy, which is a Church of the Brethren retirement community, also accepted the call to pray for a girl named Kauna Luka. I don't think that any of us would argue that this was and continues to be the work of the Evil One. It is one of those nightmares in the world that leaves the rest of humanity feeling powerless and helpless.

But even in the midst of this, the Holy Spirit was at work. I remember reading an article posted on Facebook by the General Secretary of the Church of the Brethren at the time, Stan Noffsinger. The article said:

"A group of second graders at Wakarusa Elementary school challenged their school to gather money for the Chibok girls and their families. All told, these courageous young people gathered about 400 pounds in change amounting to about \$1,400. This was matched dollar for dollar by a matching grant which makes their effort total \$3,400. Incredible. Young Preston Andrews came up with the idea because he cared so much about the girls. They all want the girls to return home safely."

Oh yes, my friends, the fire of the Holy Spirit is burning in our world. We see it through large accomplishments and through small efforts, like the effort of these second graders. I believe God views all openness to the Spirit and the accomplishments of a call...or assignment from God, therefore resulting in fulfillment of the Spirit's work as HUGE!

You and I...united with Christians all over the world, blessed with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit...are the flames that shine light on the one who called himself "the Light of the world". That's what we are called to do...to allow the Holy Spirit to fuel our fire...to fuel our faith...to live in and through us...so that those lost in the smoke of evil can be rescued.

There is a story about a little girl who, on the way home from church, turned to her mother and said, "Mommy, the preacher's sermon this morning confused me."

The mother said, "Oh! Why is that?"

The girl replied, "Well, he said that God is bigger than we are. Is that true?"

"Yes, that's true," the mother replied.

"He also said that God lives within us. Is that true, too?"

Again, the mother replied, "Yes."

"Well," said the girl. "If God is bigger than us and he lives in us, wouldn't he show through?"

God IS bigger than any of us...bigger than anything that might try to extinguish the fire of our faith...and keep us from letting our light shine for Jesus. Don't allow discouragement over all that seems to be wrong in our world today cause you to surrender your faith to hopelessness and meaninglessness. Don't think that even the smallest of things you may be able to do is not worthwhile.

Instead, allow the Spirit to be your guide to overcome these feelings. Allow the Spirit to be your source of day to day courage and power to face the challenges of this life. Allow the fire

of the Spirit glow so bright that you can find the good in this world to celebrate and to encourage you.

The fire of the Holy Spirit in us will spread and get larger and larger until Jesus returns. The coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost lit the fire of the church. God's Spirit is still and must always be the main source of light for Christians. Individually and as the church, we should do what is necessary to keep ourselves good places for the Spirit's flames to burn hotly and the Spirit's light to shine brightly.

There's a story, told by a brother minister, of the lighthouse keeper on Robbins' Reef off the rocky shore of New England. Jacob Walker, after years of faithful service of minding the light, caught a cold one stormy night and rapidly grew worse and died. His wife buried his body on the hillside above the shore, on the mainland, in plain view of the lighthouse upon the reef. Then she applied for and received the appointment as the keeper of the light. For twenty years she carried on alone, and then a New York City reporter went out to get her story. In the course of the interview she told him this: "Every evening I stand in the door of the lighthouse and look across the water to the hillside where my husband sleeps. . . . I always seem to hear his voice saying, as he often said when he was alive, 'Mind the light! Mind the light! Mind the light!'" Across the troubled waters and the crashing breakers of our time there comes another voice to us, a voice from that "green hill far away, without a city wall," a voice out of the blackness of earth's darkest day to us in the darkness and evil of our day. And the message of the Son of God is the same, "Mind the light! Mind the light! Mind the light!" And, God helping us, as faithful Christians, we will!

Mind the light brothers and sisters. Let the flames burn high...right where you are...every moment of the day. Amen.