

Pentecost
June 4, 2017

Text: Acts 2:1-21
Theme: "On Fire"

It's Pentecost, the day of the pouring of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is represented by a dove, or on today, more often as a flame, like the flames on my stole. We'll light a candle and have a real flame. Now the candle is on fire.

Being on fire can be a bad thing or a good thing. On fire is a bad thing if it's your house, our car, or your clothes. It means destruction, loss, or pain. In sports it's a good thing. If a player is on fire it means he's hot, that is, everything is clicking for him, all that training is bearing fruit. In baseball that may mean you are seeing the ball and hitting the ball and on defense you are making every play you should and some you should not. In basketball it is as though you can hardly miss. In curling, well, I don't know what it means in curling.

If you are on fire for the task at hand, that means you are enthused, going at it with a purpose and vigor. You will not be easily held back. You have the will and the power to get the job done. Such on fire can be contagious.

Fire means power for good or bad. It's good for cooking, for heating, for making popcorn. It's not so good when it is burning and/or destroying. It can even leave a bad odor.

Today Peter and the apostles are on fire. The good stuff is happening, the corn is popping.

Fire on something is a real attention getter. So it was for Moses at the burning bush that didn't really burn. So it is with the multitude that gathers today in Jerusalem. Initially

it was the sound that drew them, that mighty rushing wind noise that just came out of the blue. And then as they follow the noise they see the fire, fire like tongues of fire resting on the Apostles. Maybe we can imagine it like the shape of the State of Michigan. It was an astounding and confusing sight. It was a quite a stirred gathering. We read they were “bewildered.” (vs 6) The original word has the picture of “being poured together” (sunecu, qh, sunechuthe).

This was followed by an confusing sound. It was the clarity that confused. No matter where people were from, they were hearing in their own language. How could Egyptian words be coming from Galilean lips? The confusion led to some faulty conclusions. Some probably remained clueless. Others ridiculed, “they are filled with new wine.” (vs 12) We can envision such words from those who always had a ready explanation for everything, one that came because they were just those who knew pretty much everything and were eager to share it. Yes, the fire on the apostles and what followed were attentions grabbers.

And what grabs our attention? Are there things that confuse us and bewilder us? Certainly that is so. Difficulties and losses demand our attention. Fires are still attention getters. If you have ever experienced a house fire or a business fire you could relate. Loss of health get our attention and can certainly bewilder. Then there are financial difficulties. Just where does the money go? Not that’s not really an impossible question to answer. They are ways to track that. But such tracking won’t necessarily stop increasing expenses and declining revenue.

Then culture changes, a change that can be hard to process. The moral has become the immoral, the pleasure of the moment wins out over the long view. Individual

amusement, diversion, and entertainment are valued more than community. And there is increasing isolation and polarization even by choice. What do we do with that?

What conclusion do we draw from what we see or experience? We don't always like clarity. If a clear view of our own sin is put before us, we might draw away as though we were afraid of being burned. Instead of being on fire we are more burned out or flamed out—like that candle burned at both ends and in the middle for good measure. We just ready to be out of here. On fire can result in cinders and ashes.

Today we see the fire on the apostles and surely they are on fire. Peter is standing there with the eleven and wow! Remember where he was. He had been bold in talk but then when the heat was on, he denied his Lord three times. But he was not alone in his scared stiffness. Remember, all fled when Jesus was arrested and on the first day of the week, the third day after the crucifixion, they were behind closed door, closed and locked doors for fear of the Jews. They were about as far from on fire as you could be.

But just look at Peter now. And look at him also in Acts 3, 4, and 5. Jesus had said to His apostles before His ascension, “You shall be my witnesses.” (Acts 1:8) We witness the beginning of that witness bearing here on the day of Pentecost. Yes, Peter is on fire and he begins to sort things out for the bewildered. First of all, he drains the full of new wine speculation. He points out that it is only the third hour, 9 in the morning. Then he moves on to the real reason. Maybe they should have all seen it coming. The prophets had said as much. This fiery day had been spoken of.

He takes them to the words of the Prophet Joel (2:28-32). Joel has spoken of the Spirit being poured out, not on a select few, like Joel and other prophets, but on all. It would be on sons and daughters, young men and old men, even on male and female servants. It would be a time of wonders above and signs below. All this would be before

the coming of a scary day, even a great and magnificent day (vs 20). That word translated “magnificent” is Epiphany as an adjective, Epiphanous day? And the words quoted from Joel end with the promise, “Whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” (vs 21)

Now Peter will point them to the Lord they should call on. Peter speaks of Jesus, the Jesus they would know of from His works, wonders, and signs (vs 22) Not so long ago, just 50 days prior, they had handed him over to be crucified. Peter points out God has raised up the One they crucified saying that they [Peter and the eleven there with him] are witnesses. He says this Jesus has been exalted to God’s right hand and it is this Jesus that has poured out the Holy Spirit and they should know for certain that God had made this Jesus, whom they crucified, both Lord and Christ. (vs 36) There is no holding back Peter. He is on fire!

Yes, fire is powerful. It can be destroying or it can serve. There would be a lot of burning at the end. At the end will be the inferno that will usher in the new heavens and the new earth. There will be no escaping for the unrepentant and then they would be on fire in a really bad way, a fire that burns and inflicts, but yet doesn’t consume. The fiery words of the Spirit through Peter burn up excuses, justification for sin. There is quite a heart burn for those who heard, more of stab, cut to the heart. And now from the very mouths of some who surely were crying, “crucify, crucify,” come, “What shall we do?”

The Spirit continues to work that day. The burning that convicts is followed by the flame of faith. Peter tells them what to do. “Repent and be baptized everyone on you in the name of Jesus for the forgiveness of sins and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 2:38) You see with the water comes fire, the fire of arrogance extinguished, the fire of faith ignited all through the fire of the Spirit. On that day 3000 fires are started, fires that result in popcorn (fruit), not ashes.

Such a change, fires of life for those who were dead in transgressions and sins are now made alive. They have died to sin and now live for righteousness. We see this right away as they continue to gather for the Apostles' teaching, for the breaking of bread and prayer. We see it demonstrated as they truly care for one another needs. "Mine, mine, mine" gives way to "ours, yours as needed." For these new believers the fear of the last of the last days is changed to the joyful anticipation of, even a longing for the day of the Lord's return.

The Spirit continues to work. As we go through life as believers we often find those things we would like to rely on can't take the heat and fire. They will let us down. In the end, even our bodies, bodies decaying from sin will let us down, but God never will. What is faulty and failing is burned away. Faith is tempered and strengthened in the fire and it is not always pleasant, but the result is marvelous.

Faith directs us to right conclusion even when what is going on can be confusing. We trust the fire Giver whether what we see is popcorn or ashes. We understand His motive is love, our eternal good, even when we are unclear about the details. That's how it is while we are still in that day of the last days. We understand the need to be constantly strengthened in our walk. We have the need to feed on that which sustains. We are sustained and strengthened to do the right thing as the Spirit works through God's Word and through the Lord's Supper, as we remember that Spirit was poured out on each us whether son or daughter, young man or old man, male servant or female servant, poured out on the day of our baptism.

On fire, Peter and apostles were on fire doing the very thing, giving witnesses to Jesus, that He had told them to do. It was not their strength. It was the strength of the Spirit. Yes, Joel's words include us as we await that final day, that great and magnificent

day. We are confident of our salvation as we call upon the name of the Lord Jesus. We walk after Him and point others to that same Lord. For His sake. Amen