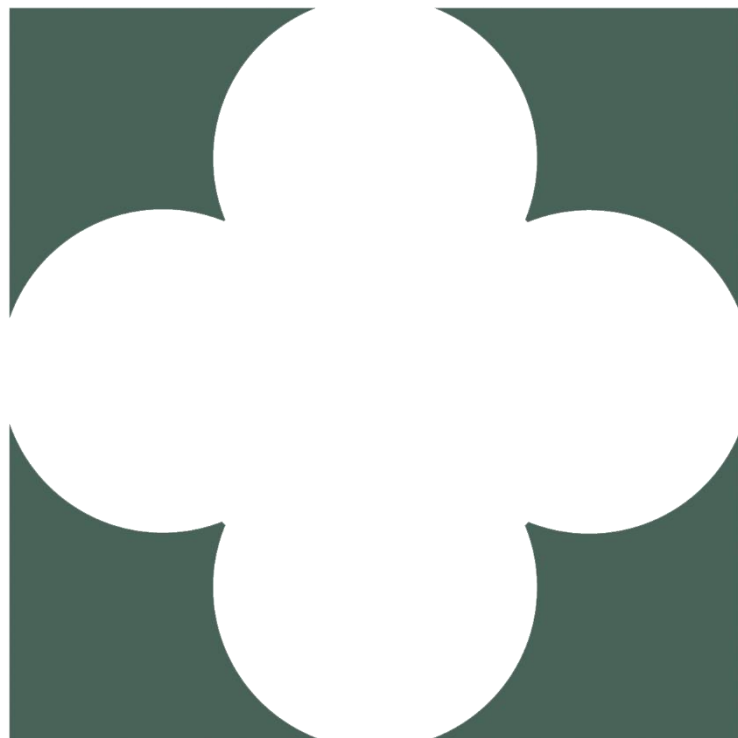


Hearts on Fire

A Sermon for Pentecost 2022

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Acts 2:1-21

Acts 2:1-21 (Inclusive Version)

When the day of Pentecost arrived, they all met in one room. Suddenly they heard what sounded like a violent, rushing wind from heaven; the noise filled the entire house in which they were sitting. Something appeared to them that seemed like tongues of fire; these separated and came to rest on the head of each one. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages as she enabled them.

Now there were devout people living in Jerusalem from every nation under heaven, and at this sound they all assembled. But they were bewildered to hear their native languages being spoken. They were amazed and astonished: "Surely all of these people speaking are Galileans! How does it happen that each of us hears these words in our native tongue? We are Parthians, Medes and Elamites, people from Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya around Cyrene, as well as visitors from Rome—all Jews, or converts to Judaism—Cretans and Arabs, too; we hear them preaching, each in our own language, about the marvels of God!"

All were amazed and disturbed. They asked each other, "What does this mean?" But others said mockingly, "They've drunk too much new wine." Then Peter stood up with the Eleven and addressed the crowd: "Women and men of Judea, and all you who live in Jerusalem! Listen to what I have to say! These people are not drunk as you think—it's only nine o'clock in the morning! No, it's what Joel the prophet spoke of:

*'in the days to come—
It is our God who speaks—
I will pour out my Spirit
On all humankind.
Your daughters and sons will prophesy,
Your young people will see visions,
And your elders will dream dreams.
Even on the most insignificant of my people,
Both women and men,
I will pour out my Spirit in those days,
And they will prophesy.
And I will display wonders
In the heavens above*

*And signs on the earth below:
Blood, fire, and billowing smoke.
The sun will be turned into darkness
And the moon will become blood
Before the coming of the
Great and sublime day of our God.
And all who call upon the name
Of our God will be saved.'*

The written word for the living body of the Christ. Thanks be to God.



*May the Lord Bless you and keep you.
May God's face shine upon you and be gracious unto you.
May God, give you grace not to sell yourselves short,
Grace to risk something big for something good,
Grace to remember that the world is now too dangerous for anything
but truth,
and too small for anything but love.
May God take your minds and think through them.
May God take your lips and speak through them.
May God take your hands and work through them.
May God take your hearts and set them on fire.*

This is my favorite benediction, the words that I say at the end of the worship service as a final blessing. I love the realness of this blessing – taking the ancient blessing from the book of Numbers and combining it with the wisdom of a complex grace and risk that is worth it and the hope that God is known through our thoughts, words, actions and love.

Whenever I offer this blessing to a community, I think of Jesus' disciples. To me, this blessing captures the spirit of Jesus' wishes for the early church. He hoped they would be filled with courage to continue the work he had begun among them—the work of resisting empire, the work of welcoming the

stranger and including the outcast and healing the hurting and loving the lost. And that work is relevant to us, here, today, too.

Today, on this day of Pentecost, we celebrate the birthday of the church. I realized this morning that we haven't shared a Pentecost in the sanctuary since 2019. Christians celebrate Pentecost as the day when the Holy Spirit came to dwell with God's people. Jesus had told his disciples to expect a time when he would depart from them, a time when they would be left without his physical presence. But at the same time, Jesus promised them that they would be accompanied by a "Comforter," an "Advocate," which we also call the Holy Spirit. So perhaps, as the disciples gathered in the upper room, they were anticipating experiencing God's presence with them again ... but little could they imagine what form that presence would take.

They knew about God the creator of the world, father, mother, parent. They knew intimately God the Son, Jesus of Nazareth, Jesus called the Christ, teacher, preacher, healer, friend. On the day of Pentecost, they were met with God the Holy Spirit, Comforter, Advocate, Counselor, wind, breath, fire.

There is much to say about Pentecost – the significance of the language barriers being broken down such that people could understand the Holy Spirit in their own language. The mix of confusion and marveling in wonder at the profound work of God among people from many regions of Mesopotamia. The words of the prophet Joel taking on new meaning in front of the gathered crowd, as Peter reminds the people that God said,

*"In the last days...
'that I will pour out my Spirit on all people,
and your sons and your daughters will prophesy,
and your young men will see visions,
and your old men will dream dreams.
18 Even on my servants, both men and women,
I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy."*

And so, on this day of Pentecost, surrounded by the red and orange of leaping flames and the tongues of flame lighting above every person's head and the filling of each person with the Holy Spirit--my question for you

today, church, is “are your hearts on fire?” and if you say “yes,” then I say, “for what?”

Now, I’m not talking about heartburn in a medical sense, but the spiritual heartburn of righteous indignation, of a gut knowing that something needs to change, of prophetic speech that fills you with a fire-in-the-belly feeling. The apostle Peter felt his heart burn within him, felt the tongue of flame alight above his head – just a mere few weeks previously, he had denied knowing Jesus ... and then now here he was, interpreting the meaning of a divine event in the midst of his community. Peter’s heart was on fire with love for God, on fire with the revelation of prophetic speech coming to fruition among them.

Debie Thomas writes in a commentary on this passage, “And *this* is what the Holy Spirit required of Christ’s frightened disciples on the birthday of the Church. Essentially: Stop huddling in what you call safety. Throw open your windows and doors. Feel the pressure of My hand against your backs, pour yourselves into the streets you’ve come to fear, and speak! Don’t you understand? Silence is no longer possible; *you are on fire.*”

Beloved church, for what do your hearts burn within your chests? For love of neighbor? For justice for the oppressed? For an end to gun violence? Do your hearts burn with the desire to protect our schoolchildren and our elders, our hope and our memory, from being shot down while going about their daily lives? Do your hearts burn with righteous passion that declares transgender children and teenagers beloved and that demands that they have access to gender-affirming healthcare? Do your hearts burn with love for our Black and indigenous and people of color siblings, that we will do all in our power to make sure they are seen as siblings made in God’s image?

On this day of Pentecost, friends, I urge you to not quench that fire that burns in your heart. That fire is a reminder of the Holy Spirit moving in you and among us – the flame that promotes understanding across diversity; that moves you to speak even when your voice shakes; that prompts the children to prophesy and the young people to have visions and the elders to dream dreams. Do not let that flame in your heart go out, but let God work through you, following that flame wherever it may lead you.

May it be so.

Benediction

from the *Black Rock Prayer Book*

The world is now too dangerous
And too beautiful for anything but love.
May your eyes be so blessed you see God in everyone.
Your ears, so you can hear the cry of the poor.
May your hands be so blessed
That everything you touch is a sacrament.
Your lips, so you speak nothing but the truth with love.
May your feet be so blessed you run
To those who need you.
And may your heart be so opened,
So set on fire, that your love,
Your love, changes everything.