

Acts 2:1-4  
Fire and Wind  
WRCoB 5.23.21

Garrison Keillor, the well-known radio host  
Of Prairie Home Companion  
Was asked by *Newsweek* to name  
His favorite five books.

On the top of his list?

Not the Bible, but close  
It was one of the books of the Bible  
Specifically, the Book of Acts!

Keillor offered this summary of the book; *The flames lit on  
their heads and bravely and dangerously went they onward.*

Garrison's description, of course, comes from today's text.

So full of the Spirit  
It appeared as if fire came to rest  
On the heads of the disciples.

The OT calls God a consuming fire.

It was a pillar of fire that led the people of Israel  
Through the wilderness.

It was the fire of a burning bush  
That God spoke to Moses.

John the Baptist said that he baptized with water  
But someone is coming that will baptize  
With the Spirit and with fire.

Paul says to the church that their life's work  
Will one day be revealed by fire.

And in the Book of Revelation  
It is a lake of burning fire  
That the damned are cast into.

Frederick Buechner says

*[Fire] has no shape or substance. You can't taste it or smell it or hear it. You can't touch it except at great risk. You can't weigh it or measure it or examine it with instruments. You can never grasp it in fullness because it never stands still. Yet there is no mistaking its extraordinary power.*

I mean, think about fire.

Out of control, it sweeps through acres of land  
Burning everything in its sight  
Destroying whole towns in its path.

And yet, before the advent of electricity  
We heated our homes and lit our lanterns with fire.

We can't live without it.

God's Spirit is also described as wind

For the Hebrew word for both Spirit and wind is RUAH.

On that particular day

Luke describes a sound like a violent wind  
Filling the entire house.

Wind can be quite destructive too

As evidenced by the power of a tornado or hurricane.

Fire and wind, are both descriptions of God

And they don't necessarily give us

Feelings of comfort, do they?

But they are both descriptions of what took place

On that very first day.

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Today is Pentecost, a Jewish holiday

Commemorating the first-fruits of the harvest.

As the name suggests

It is fifty days after the Jewish holiday of Passover.

To the Christians, Pentecost is considered

The birthday of the church.

This particular Pentecost, then

Occurred fifty days after the crucifixion of Jesus.

According to the conclusion in the Book of Luke

Jesus ascended to heaven 40 days after Easter  
In the town of Bethany outside of Jerusalem.

Following Jesus' ascension,  
The disciples returned to Jerusalem  
Where they waited ten days.

When the day of Pentecost arrived  
The disciples had gathered together in one place.

It could have been the very room  
Where they shared the last supper with Jesus.

Below their window the celebration was in full swing.

But the disciples' minds were not on partying.

They had gathered together,  
In one room,  
With one mind,  
For one purpose . . .

To wait on the Lord!

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The event that was to follow surpassed  
All other spiritual events they had ever experienced.

They spoke aloud in ways  
That people understood  
From 15 different language groups

The Spirit empowered them like never been before.

This very same Peter who denied knowing Jesus  
Now stood in the balcony before the crowds

And preached a sermon to all who were there

And as he preached

The people who stood below his window  
Were cut to the heart.

And they asked the disciples, **what shall we do?**

And Peter replied, in verse 38; **Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.**

Luke sums up what happened next in verse 41;

**So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.**

Something was happening there in Jerusalem.

People were being swept away by the Holy Spirit.

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This is the birth of the church!

Never before and maybe ever since

Has God moved people to such a degree  
As God did on the day of Pentecost!

For you see, up to this point in Biblical history

The Holy Spirit rested only on individuals  
As the Lord directed.

But now . . .

God released the fullness of his Spirit on all believers!

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There's something I've pondered about all this.

Ok, so when Jesus was alive on earth  
He went around healing, teaching  
And offering hope to the hopeless.

Here is Jesus ALIVE, who after being crucified  
Rose from the dead and revealed himself to  
According to Paul, over 500 people!

Here is Jesus RESURRECTED, who the disciples witnessed  
Ascending into heaven before their very eyes.

And yet . . . and yet

He only had a handful of disciples  
Who believed him and who he was while alive.

But here comes the Holy Spirit  
At this Pentecost prayer meeting in wind and fire  
And anoints those few disciples

And three thousand were cut to the heart  
Were convicted of Jesus as Savior  
Were baptized  
And became disciples all in one day!

Now explain that!

So, does this mean . . .

That the Holy Spirit has more power to convict people  
That Jesus is the Christ  
Than the very person of Jesus?

It's hard to fathom.

But the church is what it is today, 2 billion strong  
Because of the presence of the Holy Spirit!

This I am convinced of!

And yet . . . and this is the point I want to make  
If the Holy Spirit can do that back in Jerusalem

Why couldn't it do something like that at West Richmond?

The late Dr. A. W. Tozer, author and pastor

*If the Holy Spirit was withdrawn from the church today, 95 percent of what we do would go on and no one would know the difference. If the Holy Spirit had been withdrawn from the New Testament church, 95 percent of what they did would stop, and everybody would know the difference.*

Maybe we just don't know how to untap  
The most underutilized, and overlooked resource  
The church of Jesus Christ has!

Admittedly, the Holy Spirit is the least understood  
Of the three aspects of God  
We know as the Trinity.

But simply put, without the Holy Spirit  
We would never EXPERIENCE God's presence  
In any kind of personal way.

For that is the role the Spirit plays.

For God's Holy Spirit is the comforting  
Guiding, challenging, encouraging  
And empowering presence of God  
In our personal and corporate lives!

It is the Holy Spirit who has kept the church alive  
Ever since that first Pentecost experience  
More than 2000 years ago.

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Our last song, *Come Thou Fount*  
Was a song written for Pentecost.

It was written by Robert Robinson in 1758.

He was just a small boy when his father died.

Consequently, in 18<sup>th</sup> Century England  
Without any kind of social welfare  
He was sent to apprentice under a barber  
At the age of 10-years-old.

He got mixed up in a wrong crowd  
And one day suggested to his gang of rowdies  
That they go and make trouble at a revival meeting.

The preacher was the great Methodist preacher



George Whitefield.

Whitefield was the leader of the great revival  
Called the Great Awakening in England and America.

Anyway, the gang went to interrupt his preaching.  
Whitefield preached on the Matthew 3:7 text.

**O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee  
from the wrath to come? (Matthew 3:7).**

But instead of creating a disturbance  
Robinson left the revival  
Himself deeply disturbed.

Over the next three years,  
Robert Robinson was haunted by Whitefield's message.

And then at the age of 20, he wrote  
"I made peace with God."

Two years later in 1758  
He wrote the song, "*Come Thou Fount*,"  
In honor of the birthday of the church.

This is what the Spirit can do!

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Like fire and wind  
The presence of the Holy Spirit  
Can be a messy business.

Like fire it destroys first before it grows.

This is likened to certain plant seeds  
That can only be germinated  
By what is known as scarification.

The seed needs to be cracked from intense heat.

Take for instance the grasslands in Nigeria.

When the dry season has come  
And it hasn't rained for months  
And everything is dead and dry,

The Fulani, the cattle herders  
Start fires in the savannah  
And burn acres and acres of grassland.

If you're caught in it  
You're doomed  
As it ravages over everything.

But they do that for a reason.

It scarifies certain grass seeds  
That after a few days germinate.

They can then graze their cattle  
Over the young succulent grass.

The Holy Spirit can be like that.

It can burn through decades of denial  
Years of brokenness, periods of depression

And with fire, ravage the dead wood of your soul.

But after doing so

What emerges is a soul-cleansed spirit.

And like wind, the presence of the Holy Spirit

Can blow away all the death and decay of a previous life

And leave you with a calm and tranquil heart

That follows a hurricane.

So be prepared.

And if we, the West Richmond church family

Truly desire the presence of God's Spirit

Which I pray we do.

Not only do we ask for the Spirit

To enter our individual hearts and souls

We need to ask the Spirit

To come into the heart of our community

To burn and blow and have its way.

But if we do . . .

And we need to . . .

Be prepared for some fire and wind!!