

WELCOME 20 May 2018 – Pentecost '18 B

Good morning! Welcome to worship today! It is great to have you all here this morning. Please stay with us for morning tea...you know that's going to be awesome.

"On Fire"----the phenomenon of combustion manifested in light, flame, and heat

- a. being consumed by fire; aflame, eager, burning
- b. fervent or passionate emotion or enthusiasm
- c. to excite or stimulate

It may be the dictionary definition but it is also a description of what happened that 1st Pentecost, when God set the follower of Jesus on fire & they became the movement that carried to the whole world the news of his resurrection triumph over death/sin/evil - of God reclaiming a sinful world for himself & revealing God's reign of grace over all things in Jesus...and people streamed into the community of faith...

Does that sound like you? Are you on fire? Is the Church on fire today? Or has the fire been tamed? Controlled? Reduced to embers? Today...this Pentecost, God wants to fan that flame & fill his Church again with his earth-shaking & earth-shaping fire. For when the fire of the Holy Spirit is unleashed on your combustible heart, it will consume you - igniting your life & releasing through you power and passion impossible to contain. Come, Holy Spirit and set your 'Church on Fire'.

We'll explore & experience that today.

LWKids takes on its new shape today as a large part of our worship will be aimed at helping our youngest saints be grasped by the power & presence of God in their lives...Quite exciting!

We continue together...(to the litany on the screen)

PRAYER OF THE DAY

"You never go away from us, yet we have difficulty in returning to You. Come, Lord Jesus, stir us up and call us back. Kindle and seize us. Be our fire and our sweetness. Let us love. Let us run." — Augustine of Hippo

Whirlwind Spirit of God, Roar through our failings & fears, Shake the foundations of our ill-placed securities; Sweep away the cobwebs of our apathy, Blow down the walls that separate us, one from another. Then into all our empty spaces, breathe courage to challenge injustice, call us to the urgency of mission, bring passion to our living, make us bold to speak your word to grow & mobilize your church so the world may see you risen and reigning Lord of all! Through Jesus Christ we pray...Amen!

PENTECOST '18 B – CHURCH ON FIRE

- FAITH CHAT:** 1. What gets you fired up?
2. In the Bible, “fire” represents God’s presence and power.
How are you seeing the fire of God’s presence in your life?

I think what I need to do this week is start with a confession...and maybe even an apology. I mean it. I was looking back at some stuff from the last few years & I noticed that I have often referred to Pentecost as the “Birthday of the Church” While that’s technically correct...when you think “birthday” what do you think? Cake...candles, balloons, presents, singing, food, happy, clappy, smiley, laughy stuff. But when you read Acts 2:1-4: *On the day of Pentecost all the believers were meeting together in one place. Suddenly, there was a sound from heaven like the roaring of a mighty windstorm, & it filled the house...Then, what looked like flames or tongues of fire appeared & settled on each of them. Everyone present was filled with the Holy Spirit & began speaking in other languages, as the Holy Spirit gave them ability. And what follows is confusion & consternation & mockery...bewilderment, dismay & scorn*

Does that sound like Cake & candles, balloons, presents, singing, food, happy, clappy, smiley, laughy stuff? Or perhaps does it seem more like Kilauea? Where what they seem to need is less “pass-the-parcel” & more an evacuation drill. Mighty windstorm. Sounds like thunder from heaven. The house is filled/shaken. Languages not their own just bursting forth. Every man & his dog racing up the street to see just what in Sam Hill is going on...And if I’ve ever led you to believe that the coming of the Holy Spirit that proceeds from the Father & the Son is anything less than a spiritual volcanic eruption...I apologize. If I’ve ever somehow left you thinking that the Spirit that raised Christ from the dead was simply going to pat you on the back & give you a nice hug & some hot cocoa...I’m sorry. If I have ever dialled back the earth-shaking life-changing world-transforming power of the Holy Spirit...and made it seem tame & constrained & polite & manageable...please forgive me.

Look...you know & I know that if Ladbrokes had run a line on the disciples anytime between Good Friday & the day *before* Pentecost...no one would have bet on the followers of Jesus. Even after Easter...even with Jesus appearing, Paul tells us, to more than 500 people...they are still bottled up in their safe secure enclave. They are not out broadcasting far & wide the news that death is done for – sin forgiven – peace with God assured...evil defeated...joy hope love are for now. But from this point forward...everything about the followers of Jesus is different...the spiritual volcano has erupted & there’s no putting the fire back under control.

From the early days of the life of God’s people we read: *The Lord your God is a devouring fire; he is a jealous God. Deut 4:24* Moses warns that God can’t abide unfaith and idolatry & rebellion will be burned up...Lives offered in worship to anything other than Yahweh would feel furnace heat. Hearts turned to their own selfish ends would find a flamethrower pointed their way. People who would not live responsive to the God who had set them free & brought them to himself would be toast. And that’s their story...They did not listen...had not obeyed. They had rebelled & worshiped other gods, relied on other nations for their security & lived injustice sold themselves to their own whims & desires...and as such found themselves burned up...scorched – nuked – obliterated as a people.

But that fire was designed not just to wipe out the ravages of human sin & rebellion against God & leave it at that...God declared that he wasn’t finished with his creation - it’s not over for his people - he isn’t walking away from their ruined & scorched lives...but the fire that burned will one day enflame them into abundant life with God which was God’s desire & design all along...LIFE.

God’s plan all along was not/is not to take us from the world but to join us in it. To give & nourish & make flourish in abundance his LIFE in us. To make his rule over all things present & real in among with & through his most beloved creations...us. God’s design all along was for his presence & his power to be so deeply imbedded in us that we faithfully bear his image, live his presence & carry out his purpose here & hereafter now & forever. His design all along was to set us aflame with himself/his love & life so we could be light for the world. Our lives a torch lighting the way home for the lost – straying – adrift – beat down – worn out – burned up burned out.

Peter quotes OT prophet Joel...*“In the last days,’ God says, ‘I will pour out my Spirit upon all people. Your sons & daughters will prophesy. Your young men will see visions, & your old men will dream dreams. In those days I will pour out my Spirit even on my servants — men & women alike — & they will prophesy.”* That fire would re-ignite in us God’s word & make us alive for God’s purposes...And we know...3 times on the night of his betrayal Jesus promised his Spirit as a gift that would assure his friends they were not orphans/abandoned *“I will ask the Father, & he will give you another Advocate, who will never leave you. He is the Holy Spirit, who leads into all truth...you know him, because he lives with you now & later will be in you. No, I will not abandon you as orphans—I will come to you.”*

Pentecost keeps that promise...The risen Jesus Christ who by his death destroyed death - who by his shed blood & broken body forgives sin - who by absorbing the world's evil defeats evil - who guts the tomb of its power & threat giving life to all as a gift...w/ Pentecost keeps his promise of his presence & power unleashed in us. Pentecost keeps that promise of fire that brings life to the dead & swirls life out of our ashes

Last week I mentioned Swiss pastor/theologian Karl Barth...he said this: "Jesus does not give recipes that show the way to God as other teachers of religion do. He is himself the way." In the same way...Jesus does not send his followers us to a holy place—to a temple or on a pilgrimage to a special city—Jesus sends the Holy Spirit to make us a holy people & wherever we are wherever we set our feet is a holy place. Jesus sends the Spirit to make us God's holy people sent to our world...as the breath/fire of God to make all things new & his reign evident here as it is in heaven.

The Church, filled with the life of Jesus & ignited by the Spirit was always intended to be incendiary in nature, stirring things up putting us on the front lines of life with good news to share, mercy to give, love to spread, power to impart, joy to multiply and an urgency that won't let us rest until we have done so!

Maybe you read the NT differently than I do...but nowhere do I find the mandate to preserve crumbling cathedrals or dying institutions...I never hear Jesus say defend denominational tradition & nuance. I don't find the call to the latest gadget/gimmick. What I do hear is "go make disciple of all nations." What I hear over & over is "love one another as I love you," "as the Father sent me so I send you." What Jesus is unequivocal about is that "you are the neighbour the person in need requires right now." What I see the Spirit doing is freeing the voices of the disciples to "speak about the wonderful things God has done." What I see in these fired-up followers is a readiness & a boldness to look the unbelieving world right in the face & say God himself has come to us in Jesus...and by his life/death/rez rescues & remakes all things & gives life without end & love without measure & joy without restraint freely as a gift.

That kind of living is inherently disruptive, difficult, at times even dangerous. So Jesus sends the Spirit, to enflame, encourage, equip, strengthen, provoke provide & protect so that we can go to those we know & do it day after day after day after day. Find the place most desperately in need & let the Spirit start a fire with us right there

The difficulty we often have with Pentecost is that too often we look for the extraordinary, a show stopper, that once in a lifetime tongues of fire experience. But on Pentecost, the Spirit reached into the hearts of Jesus-followers who were just like us...ordinary human beings, & empowered them to speak with wisdom, to understand life's deep struggle & excruciating pain, to exercise the gift of strong faith, to take authority over sin/evil, to win people's hearts with their words/deeds, to discern truth from deceit, to display the spirit's variety of gifts in a way that built up the fellowship, to prophesy such that lives were shaped & changed & opened to God-inspired opportunities...& above all else they revelled in the best gift of all: the supreme gift of love...

They were people whose capacities seemed limited, whose charisma & influence appeared minuscule. Yet they were set alight by the Holy Spirit & those early followers of Jesus encouraged each other & challenged each other & held one another accountable to that same Spirit of Jesus until they saw in their lives/churches the fruit of the Spirit & they knew there was no limit to how often or how much they could bear that fruit. They went passionately & urgently to the world with the simple message that God has come in love not wrath to restore not destroy to reveal his rule of grace in Jesus...who died & was raised again so that all might have unending abundant life now & always.

Maybe the real miracle of Pentecost is that God's Spirit is even now filling & setting alight common ordinary people in common ordinary ways, transforming our lives... I am sure I have said this before but I know it is true especially on Pentecost... we are more powerful than we imagine - more dangerous than we think & more capable than we allow ourselves to believe & the Spirit is poised to take us to the people & the places where there is deep longing & yawning emptiness to burn so brightly in us that we become instruments of God's eternal transforming power in the life of someone we care about. Think about it...if the people you work with every day...if the people you live with...if the kids in your class at school...if the people who live next door...if your best friends aren't seeing the love of Jesus & the fire of the Spirit in you - visible in your life...where else are they gonna find him? From where else is that light going to shine? that fire going to burn for them?

God set the followers of Jesus on fire & they became the movement that carried to the whole world the news of his resurrection triumph over death/sin/evil - of God reclaiming a sinful world for himself & revealing God's reign of grace over all things in Jesus...that's what he intends for you...for me... So...what are you? Cake or volcano? Let's pray: Lord Jesus come today and set us on fire with your life and your love. Pour out your Spirit in us so that every day this week we too might invite others into your abundant joy, your limitless strength and your boundless hope. Let your light and your fire be bright in us so that others can rejoice in you. We pray in Jesus' Name...Amen..