



MINISTER
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Pentecost Sunday
May 27, 2007

Acts 2:1-21

Fire in the Attic

Intro: Our reading this morning is the story of Pentecost. This is a moment when the Holy Spirit came to Jesus' followers and it was like a mighty wind, with tongues of fire and tongues of speech.

I was at the mall this past week...doing research for the sermon. I looked all over town actually, and you know, I could not find a single indication that this was the week before Pentecost! Now this may not come as much of a surprise to you, but the church has only three major holidays, Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost. Pentecost is the only one that has not been claimed as a "buying season" in the marketplace! (We never hear, "only 10 shopping days left till Pentecost!") I should say, that I did see a couple of fire sales, but they had more to do with BBQ's than Pentecost.

Maybe that's a good thing. Christmas and Easter have become so thoroughly secularized, that we often have to struggle to keep the sacred in focus. But there hasn't been much competition for Pentecost. Most likely because the church hasn't quite

known what to do with it, and so the stores haven't figured out how to capitalize on it! But of the three major church holidays, Pentecost is the oldest, having been celebrated as a Christian holiday from the very first year of the Christian era. Fifty days after the resurrection. Christmas and Easter are later additions to the church calendar.

In this one story, that occupies only one page in the Bible, the Church is changed, transformed and never the same again. Maybe that's why this scripture can be a troubling one for us. Everything is new and different. And it's confusing. It's messy. It's out of control.

It starts out easily enough, we read that a group of people are praying. A nice quiet worship service. Even Presbyterians would

be comfortable in that little room filled with people praying together. It was dignified, respectful. People doing what Jesus told them to do.

But then the wind blows. No little breezes this Pentecost morning. Big gusts of mighty wind. And Fire. Tongues of fire sitting on everyone's shoulder. And people blathering about, speaking in different languages all at the same time? What would it have been like that morning....??? (SKIT)

What would you think? So much noise. So much confusion. No wonder people thought they were all drunk. No wonder the mainline Church has tucked this passage of Scripture up into our ecclesiastical attic. We read it because it is Scripture. We color the paraments red just one day a year. We celebrate just a little bit and call this day the birthday of the Church. But we keep it under control. Not too much confusion. If we're honest about it, this Scripture lesson about the coming of God's Holy Spirit onto all God's people is an embarrassment to us.

It's so noisy and confusing. People are being weird. In church. In church, of all places. The church where we want to keep things quiet. The church where we want to keep things the same. Especially when nothing is ever the same in our society and our environment anymore. This Holy Spirit might just embarrass a church to death. But think about it.

When something new happens it's always like that. New things happen when things seem messy and out of control to us human

beings. That's what's happening in our Scripture lesson today. God is making something new happen. God's holy winds of change are blowing over the people of God. To those standing by and seeing what God was doing, it was noisy and confusing. But there is an exciting thing about the passage, it is perhaps a little more subtle than all the flames. It is that God's word, was now heard in many languages. And not so much that it was heard, but it was understood. People got it, they understood what God's love for us through Jesus was all about. And they were excited.

In our day we can stand, scream, and shout at sporting events, think about football games. Look at Packers' fans. You can wear an oversized piece of cheese on your head, paint yourself green and gold, act your getting a suntan in subzero temperatures and not get noticed in a crowd. Minnesota may be a little more reserved, but how far does a twins fan have to go before someone turns to their neighbor and says, "wow, they're nuts."

People can become enthusiasts for golf or boating, and that's fine, it is encouraged to get "in the spirit", but let a person get excited about their faith, let someone become possessed with gratitude for what God has done in their lives or express dependence upon God in the midst of crisis or illness and everyone just politely looks at the ground.

For us, expecting and wanting everything to be the same, Pentecost seems pretty chaotic. But read on in Acts and see what God is doing. The holy wind blows. The flames of

holy passion ignite the people of God. Ordinary people, people like you and me. They begin to do amazing things.

The definition of Spirituality that I like the best, it is the only one that I could really understand or memorize, is that Spirituality is “the fire within”. It is that gift from God that moves us to action, that warms our souls, that calls us to others. At that first Pentecost, the flames could be seen on the outside of those gathered, but something was ignited inside, that has remained lit, and glows for us all. Sometimes just a glow and other times a wild brush fire. It is that fire within and it is a connection to God.

One preaching professor in a seminary told a story about a time when there was a fire in the chapel of the seminary, a hundred year old building loaded with history. And a timid secretary came to the door of the classroom where he was lecturing, tapped politely on the door and said, “Excuse me, I hate to bother you, but the sanctuary is on fire.” Which is very similar to the way we have approached our proclamation of the gospel.

Christians no longer have lions and tigers turned loose on us, but we are being silenced by an embarrassed response to faith that just says, “Oh, that’s nice,” and looks away. The church needs to stand up once in a while and shout **“FIRE!”** Amen.