

Have you ever just sat around a campfire

or some other kind of outdoor fire and just watched it?
Some of us have done that at our fall retreat at Beersheba.
I can remember all the fires I started
and watched in Boy Scouts growing up.
If you didn't make the fire, you didn't eat the hobo pack.
Memories making smores at Hershey PA.
For me, watching a fire is almost
mesmerizing or peaceful if it is controlled.
The fire literally breathes back and forth.
Growing and shrinking. Glowing.
It feels like it is alive.

As human beings, we would never
be able to live if it weren't for fire.

Favorite movie...Castaway

We need fire for warmth, for light, and for power.
When the power goes out in an ice storm or summer storm, what do we do?
Candles, oil lamp. Fireplace.

It's that good and necessary image of fire

That we associate with the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost.
Today is the day when we remember and celebrate
the birthday of the Christian church, even with a kind of candles.
And it is the day we see Christians catching on fire.
No, not literally, but instead, the presence of God through the Holy Spirit as fire.

Pentecost calls us into a celebration,
shows us signs and symbols of a God who pushes through,
who rushes in when it seems all is lost.

We have been reminded with the doves and the pom poms

All the finery around images of fire

Those are powerful reminders of the movement of the Spirit.
The traditional color red, plus orange and yellow
reminds us of the flame and the passion of
the one who calls and transforms us.
Fire is also a great reminder of the power of the presence
and there is something else fire is.
Fire can also be unpredictable. Powerful and all-consuming.
It is dangerous, and honestly, so can be an encounter with the Spirit.
Pentecost is traditionally full of sound

and movement and song and joy.

That is the kind of Pentecost we find in Acts 2

Pentecost was originally an agricultural festival celebrating the first harvest of the growing season. it morphed into an observance of the giving of the law to Moses on Mount Sinai. Important times of celebration, but nothing pointed to the power that was unleashed on this day. I'm sure it caught the disciples by surprise, too. They were used to a low-key holiday, Think Labor Day. but instead found themselves in an encounter with God like no other. And now it was about to be Independence Day.

1 When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place.

Nobody was left out like the Easter night intimate Pentecost of just the 11. There were probably 120 disciples from all over. Try to put yourself in that room with them. Recall the despair and the fear of all that they had seen and what might happen; remember the emptiness that gripped them as they tried to avoid thinking about the rest of their lives without his presence among them. They had a taste of life, of living fully, of being alive like they never knew was possible, and now it was gone. They avoided eye contact with the others in that room, afraid of swirling down the drain again into the void that threatened to consume them every time they breathed. And then the God-struck voice... well, struck...

2 And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting.

Luke is careful to say that the noise they heard was LIKE a violent wind. And Luke emphasizes that it is the noise filling the house, not actual wind. A sound shook them out of their stupor. The Spirit of God's Love and Power fills the entire house! It sounded like a freight train if they had known what a freight train was. And yet this sound, this roar, sounded different somehow. It was not like an oppressive, angry threat, but rather like hope.

Hope? A wind-like hope?

Wind is often a sound or force that accompanies God's presence or God's action especially in the Hebrew Bible.

In the backyard of my house growing up, we had an old clothesline
Maybe you did too?

That Holy Spirit wind blew through their despair
like the wind drying our sheets on that old clothesline.

Those disciples were those freshly washed sheets,
fluttering in this wind, lifted into a new day, drying their tears.

They remembered that feeling, that joyous certainty.

They remembered flying on the wind of faith and
for a moment, believing in eternity like it
could bear them up with grace.

That was what the disciples felt in those moments.

But that was not all...Then

3 Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them.

Full of fire.

Remember the fire.

Fire as God appears to Moses in the burning bush.

Or to Moses on top of Mount Sinai when giving the Law.

Remember the fire in your bones that you had to
let out that you can't contain and you can't control.

When you became a believer in the power of God.

**Luke writes that it was divided tongues, as of fire,
that settled on each of them.**

Be cautious of that word "divided" though.

This is not a separation or individualism.

No, this is unity; the same tongues reach out wanting to gather in,
to bind together, to make as one.

They were each in this together.

They were all as if they were one.

That is why I like us to wear not only red but also orange and yellow.

Those are all colors that make up fire and flames.

This is a fire that unites, a blaze that leaps from one to another and to all.

This is a fire that builds up, not one that destroys.

All of this was glorious and unexpected.

4 All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

Sometimes we get confused about what speaking in other languages is here.

This is not talking about speaking in tongues as one of the gifts of the Spirit.

The other languages mentioned here are actually other spoken languages around the whole known world.

5 Now there were devout Jews from every people under heaven living in Jerusalem. 6 And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. 7 Amazed and astonished, they asked, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? 8 And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language?

You can see on this map all of the countries mentioned and where they were.

9 Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, 10 Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, 11 Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power.”

12 All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?” 13 But others sneered and said, “They are filled with new wine.”

The Day of Pentecost came like the sound of a violent wind.

It was fire; it was power; it was chaos and noise, but it was also meaning, and it was hope.

And then to be filled with the power to be, the power to grow, the power to love as Christ loved.

The gift of languages imparted by the Spirit on Pentecost served as a reversal of what happened at the Tower of Babel when humanity tried to build a tower to God and be God.

And God said I don’t think so and God mixed up their languages.

But on this day, the Spirit unifies humanity in a new way.

That’s what Pentecost is all about.

It’s not simply a birthday commemoration,

Not just a marker along the road, a milestone passed.

It is a moment of power, an offering of transformation.

The Holy Spirit wants to transform us

Who knows who you might be once you’ve been windswept by the Holy Spirit?

But sometimes it is hard to rise to the occasion of such a Pentecost.

We get the idea, and we wear our red, orange, and yellow.

But the breath within us isn't a mighty wind;

it is more like a groan.

Maybe of pain or sadness or grief,

maybe of uncertainty or fear.

Not a mighty wind, but a sigh almost under our breath.

But here is the thing...

The Spirit breathes on you and me today, too.

Just like we talked about in the first Pentecost last week

In John, right after Easter, when the disciples were behind a locked door, waited in fear, and Jesus came and stood among them.

When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit.

We asked last week for the Holy Spirit to breathe on me.

Melt me, mold me, fill me, use me.

Speak to me and through me.

In the heat of the moment.

In the struggle of living and loving and finding our way in a complicated world.

Breathe on me. Give me peace.

Not a peace that resolves every issue.

Not a peace that fixes everything that is broken, that answers every question, that removes every doubt.

Breathe on me that I might find peace enough to continue on the journey on which I find myself.

Peace enough to mend the broken parts or that allows me to limp with grace and confidence.

Peace that lifts up and binds together.

Perfect love - peace - casts out fear.

Going to court...

We don't create this peace.

We receive it. Like a breath.

That comes from elsewhere.

From beyond us and outside us.

And then it lives in us.

It is a gift, a joy, an unexpected encounter,
a cool breeze that fills our sails and sends us
across the horizon into new worlds of love and joy.
That is the inpouring of the Holy Spirit.

**Whether you choose to observe
the loud Big P or the quiet Pentecost,**

there is a uniting presence celebrated on this day.
Barriers and divisions are overcome.
Differences become signs and wonders of God
and not reasons to be afraid.
Strangers are not enemies to be opposed
but sisters and brothers to be embraced and included.
This is a day when we remember that
Spirit, wind, and breath are all part of the same experience
and that life itself is a gift from God and a sign of
God's goodness and presence in our lives.
Through Acts this is what the Holy Spirit did.

**We share in common the need to breathe;
we are impacted by the same wind;**

we share in the same Spirit.
Let us find ways this Pentecost Sunday to breathe in
our unity and celebrate our oneness with God and one another.
This is the day God breathed on us.

Last week in 1045 service, we sang one of the great Pentecost hymns
Breathe on me, breath of God, fill me with life anew,
that I may love what thou dost love, and do what thou wouldst do. ...
Breathe on me, breath of God, till I am wholly thine,
till all this earthly part of me glows with the fire divine.
Breathe on me. Breathe of God.

In what areas of your life are you trying to operate
under your own strength instead of the Spirit's power?

Come Holy Spirit Come
Fall afresh on me
Melt me, mold me, fill me, use me
Spirit of the Living God
And fall afresh on me and all of us.