

Shaped By the Fire

Acts 2:1-21

Did you hear about the woman who called the fire department one day. She was very agitated, "Come as quick as you can," she cried, "my house is on fire." Then she hung up.

A few minutes later she called back, and "Hurry, hurry as fast as you can, it's spread from the kitchen to the dining room." And then she hung up, again.

A few minutes later, she called one more time, this time, with the volunteer fire crew was ready to roll the dispatcher said, "OK, lady, just calm down and tell us how to get there."

It was obvious by her response that she was a little confused because she said, "Oh, uh, well, don't you have your little red truck anymore?"

We can't get much of anywhere without direction can we. Today is Pentecost Sunday, the day we celebrate the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the Disciples and the day we mark as the birthday of the Church. This is the day in which God sent the Holy Spirit to empower the people of God to do the work of God in the world. This means that none of us ever have to attempt to live the faith or to walk the walk or to do the work of God without direction, ever again.

The wind and the fire of God's Holy Spirit swept into the lives of the disciples and believers in the early church and changed their lives and our lives forever. The wind blew through with an awakening. The fire shaped their lives and gave them direction.

I once took a tour of a Crystal Factory where they made crystal table ware. It was fascinating, it became spiritual experience for me.

that experience is one which I think describes the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. It began with a simple phrase by the tour guide. She was showing us the inspection room. All of the sudden we heard a loud crash. Some of us jumped. And then she explained, "When you get to the Showroom and Store, you will find that we don't sell culls or seconds. There are no seconds. Anything that is imperfect and not of the highest quality, we destroy. Then we melt the glass down and start over."

I wasn't there to write a sermon or even look for anything spiritual, but that phrase, "There are no seconds," clicked in a part of my brain and from that moment on, all I could see were the spiritual aspects of what the artisans were doing.

You see, what struck me is, that there are no culls in the Kingdom of God. You and I have been created in the very image of God. There aren't any seconds; there aren't any culls in God's Kingdom.

We are held up to the Light of Christ and declared fit for the Kingdom, not because we are perfect. But because in the hands of Jesus and the through the Fire of the Holy Spirit we can be perfected. Jesus is the artisan. The fire of the Holy Spirit is His tool to shape us. All we have to do is put ourselves into the hands of the Master Artisan and let ourselves be perfected. There are no culls, there are no seconds. Trust the Master Craftsman to shape your life.

The next place we visited was the Glass Blowers. The furnaces used to heat the glass, to it's pliable and molten state, burn at 1400 degrees Celsius or 2550 degrees Fahrenheit. It's in that heat that the glass begins to take its shape. The glass bower reaches into the furnace with a hollow iron rod, choose just the right amount of molten glass for his particular project and starts the shaping process.

He pulls the molten glass out of the furnace and begins the process of shaping it. He blows the glass into the beginning shape and then uses wooden molds and tools to finish the process.

God does the same thing with us. At our creation, God breathes life into us. And then at our baptism, God breathes the presence of the Holy Spirit into our lives and the shaping process begins to take place.

Once the piece is shaped and molded, then it's brought to the Glass Cutter. These are the artisans. A Master Glass Cutter goes through a stringent training that involves a minimum of 5 years as an Apprentice and 3 years as a Journeyman. Glass Cutting is a very precise and specialized skill which requires steady hands, dexterity and concentration. And while the piece is marked, the pattern is done by memory, whether it is one of the flat cuts or one of the wedge cuts.

The actual cutting is done with a cutting wheel. And because that cutting generates so much heat that the crystal would shatter, the wheel is constantly cooled with water. The water acts as both a lubricant and as part of the cutting process.

Each piece, though created to look like each other are in fact, unique. No two Glass Cutters hold the piece or cut the piece in exactly the same way. Nor do they do each piece exactly the same. They are unique, just like you and I are a unique creation of God's. When each piece is finished and inspected it is bathed in a series of chemical bathes, cleaned and polished. The same thing could be said for the waters of our baptism.

Through our baptism we are bathed, cleaned and polished. The physical water may dry up, but the spiritual waters of our baptism still run and flow through our hearts and souls as Christ shapes and molds us into God's own unique design.

That brings us to one last phase of the Crystal Factory. Sometimes special pieces are created or chosen to have further enhancement added through etching. The etchers are true artists of the craft. They turn beautiful pieces of crystal into almost priceless works of art. When the crystal piece is created a place is left for the artist to etch anything from a woodland scene to a family crest.

For me, this symbolizes God's call in our lives. I believe that we are all called by God. You may not have discovered your calling yet. Mine is preaching. I don't think we are truly happy if we are not doing what God has called us to do. And I believe that the Master Artist and Creator has etched that calling on our hearts and spirits.

So, you see, what started out as a tour, became for me, a powerful spiritual experience. I'll never look at a piece of crystal the same way again. And because of this day, Pentecost Sunday and what has taken place in the history of the Church.

We will all continue to change and be perfected under the hand of the Master Craftsman who is shaping and molding our lives through the Fire of the Holy Spirit.

I want to close with something Dr. Laurie Wirthlin who was on the tour, wrote in an email.

"After going through the factory, I realized that I had been praying for the wrong thing - I had been praying that I would be translucent, and that Christ's light would shine through me What I realized after going through the factory was that I needed to be praying to be transparent that no part of me hindered the light of Christ Love from shining through me.

I am praying that you and I will become like a transparent piece of beautiful crystal - Taking the fire of Christ Love & Light that has been put into our hearts into the world, and letting it shine through us with Grace and Peace in Christ Service."

Let the Fire of God's Holy Spirit warm your heart and set it on fire like the early disciples. Then let the Fire of God's Holy Spirit shape you, form you and mold you into the person God would have you be. Let Christ perfect you and make you transparent, so Christ light will shine through you and bring God glory.