

Time to Light the Fire

Luke 3:15-17, 21-22

From the beginning of time, humankind has been fascinated with fire. We found that fire can produce both heat and light, both of which can aid us in our daily lives in a variety of ways. From the time we discovered fire to today's use of heat and fire, we've learned to use heat and light in ways that benefit humanity and in destructive ways as well. We both adore and fear fire. We adore what it can do for us under our control. We fear the ways it can escape our control or be used for negativity that lies outside of our control.

Control is a big thing for us. But we have learned in science that the benefits of fire far outweigh the risks—at least we like to think so. We know enough about combustion to know its effects and potential, and we feel in control enough of our “fire” that we don't need to see it to know it's there. We may have an oil or gas burner in our home, but we don't focus on the fire, if it's safely maintained in our furnace. We go about our daily lives, dependent on its power but unworried about its threat. It's easy to have faith when you're controlling the outcomes, isn't it?

In fact, in many ways, we have more faith in science than we do in God, because when it comes to Holy Spirit fire – something that lies far out of our control—we the Church back away, sure we're about to get burned. Why are we so afraid of the source that fuels our faith, empowers our mission, lights up our lives, and sets our hearts on fire? Why in our super-technological, fiery age of innovations, do we as the Church avoid relying on the Holy Spirit for its life source, energy, motivation, and guidance?

Some might say we as humans have a fear of what is non-practical or non-logical. Some might say we fear what lies outside of our control. After all, it's hard to “surrender” your spirit to a God you do not know and cannot see. Some fear God in general, if they've been raised with a fear of judgment, punishment, unresolved emotional wounds, or a false definition of who God is. If you don't see God as a guide, comfort, and source of empowerment, why would you trust the Holy Spirit?

But more than any of these, I believe what we fear most, what human beings always fear most, is change. Fire, no matter what its source or how it's employed, always initiates change.

Change makes us uncomfortable. And the Holy Spirit is all about change –changing not only our environment, our culture, our church, our traditions, but changing....us!

Fire burns away resistance. Light reveals truth. You can't hide amid fire. You can't get “cold feet” in the heat of the Spirit.

We know enough about fire to know what it can do. And we in the Church know enough about the fire of the Holy Spirit to know that once it touches down, everything, including you, will change.

Human beings fear change more than anything else. We've learned to fear fire. For many churches today, our fear of fire has progressed far beyond a mere caution or hesitance. We've come down with a pure anxiety disorder when it comes to Holy Spirit fire, haven't we? So much so, that we fear anywhere in which that Holy Spirit fire “might” occur!

Like a patient fearing a life-saving operation, many of us today just don't want to take the risk. We don't want to rock the boat. We feel good and comfortable just the way we are. We want things to change. We want our church to grow. We want our church to flourish. We want to be a major center of our communities. We want to be a powerful force of good for the people around us.

But we don't want to go through what it takes to experience that vast kind of change, the kind of change that doesn't just change our church, but it changes us. Because let's face it. We are the church! We learned that when we were 2 or 3 years old! As the Hymn says, “I am the church, you are the church, we are the church together...” You know what I'm talking about.

If the church is on fire –it means that so, are we. And we won't be able to control it. We won't be able to hinder it. Once God touches down, things will change. We'll be a "house on fire."

We know this about the Holy Spirit. We know it from scripture. We know it from Jesus, from the Hebrew scriptures, from the Gospels, and from what we see happen in Acts in the birthing of the Church!

We know it in those who have had their emotional wounds healed and their souls put to rest.

We know it through the eyes of those who are passing on.

We know it from the light it brings to others.

We know how it can change the lives of those addicted or mourning or grieving or alone.

We know it in worship when for that one moment, you let down your guard, and you feel the touch of God upon your shoulder, upon your heart. And you can feel that power coursing through your body and the change within your Spirit.

You know the power of the Holy Spirit and what it can do.

The question is, will you allow that Holy Spirit to live and breathe in you?

Today's scripture is a story of witness. It's a witness to the power of the Holy Spirit ascending that day by the Jordan River, a power that would be available to all who would turn to God and accept that Holy Spirit fire.

And the best part? When that Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus, fluttering with flames like a dove's wings, bathing him in glorious light, a voice said this: "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

After that moment, Jesus would go on to start a movement that couldn't be stopped and couldn't be tamed. A fiery kind of movement that would change the world and countless peoples' lives.

Something similar would happen at Pentecost when fiery "flames" of light would touch down upon all who prayed in that room, igniting them to a ministry that would found the entire Christian Church throughout the world.

Scary? Maybe. Out of control? Definitely.

The secret to empowering the Church is not how much you can do but how much you will allow God to do through you!

So, I ask you Church, is there fire in the house?

If not, it's time to light the fire.