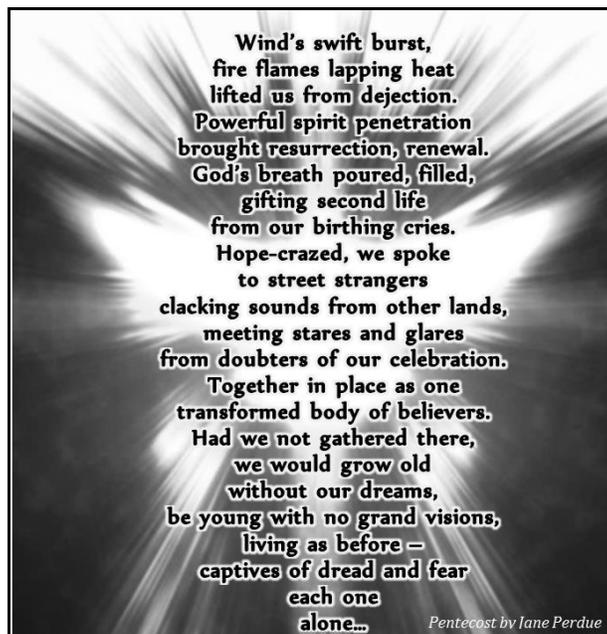


HOLY FIRE BIRTHDAY PARTY!



Scripture:

Acts 2:1–18

¹When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. ²And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. ³Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. ⁴All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

⁵Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. ⁶And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. ⁷Amazed and astonished, they asked, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?” ⁸And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? ⁹Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, ¹¹Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power.” ¹²All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?” ¹³But others sneered and said, “They are filled with new wine.”

¹⁴But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, “Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. ¹⁵Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o’clock in the morning. ¹⁶No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:

¹⁷“In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. ¹⁸Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy.

This is the Word of the Lord! Thanks be to God!



HOLY FIRE BIRTHDAY PARTY!

Pentecost is often referred to as the church's birthday. Whether a church is sixty-three years old like this one or two-hundred-eighty-three years old like the church I served in New Jersey or whether the church is brand new as in the one being celebrated in the book of Acts, Pentecost is the event when the gift of the Holy Spirit is given for all and the church is born.

What a gift and what an amazing Holy Fire birth of the church party!! Can you just imagine how this special event progressed? First, the birthday party had a wind and fire storm to kick it off. It had an amazing diversity of people in attendance. And then, after all the chaos and tongues of fire and speaking in different languages, Peter gave a special speech explaining that all of it was directly connected to a prophecy given in ancient days by the Prophet Joel. This was quite a party!

Do you have a favorite birthday party you will always remember? Maybe you were the guest of honor or you threw a party for someone?

I bet your party wasn't even close to the craziness of this Pentecost Holy Fire surprise birth of the church party.

THE CHURCH BIRTHDAY PARTY

Reverend Theresa Cho wrote a blog about the church birthday party that was the first Pentecost. She said, "The invitation list is insane. Everyone is there: Galileans, Parthians, Medes, Elamites, Mesopotamians, Egyptians, even the Romans and Arabs. And People are having such a good time that you would think they are drunk, but no! They have just received the most amazing party favors of prophecy, visions, and dreams."

DREAMS, VISIONS AND HOPE

Then Cho describes what her first birthday was like in the Korean tradition. The first birthday of a child in Korea, Cho says, is called a *Dol*, which is a ceremony where the child is blessed with a prosperous future. A child's *dol* is an important milestone because before modern technology, the death rate for children was high. Many never had a first birthday at all.

Much of what happens at a child's *dol* is centered on dreams, visions, and hopes for that child.

God's dream for the birth of the church was to give us all a good future where we can each prosper within a diverse caring community of love, faith, and hope guided by the power of the Holy Spirit.

TONGUES OF FIRE

It is so interesting how the Holy Spirit comes to the new church community in Jerusalem in the form of tongues of fire that rested on each one of them. Tongues of fire; not streams of fire, or fireballs, but tongues of fire. Maybe that is because the true spirit of a person is revealed by what comes from their tongue. Isn't that true? When a person is gossiping, or spreading lies, the tongue can cause destruction like a fire.

This reminds me of James chapter three where he is clearly angry about the potential for destruction caused by the human tongue.

He said, "How great a forest is set ablaze by a small fire! And the tongue is a fire. The tongue is placed among our members as a world of iniquity; it stains the whole body, sets on fire the cycle of nature, and is itself set on fire by hell. For every species of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by the human species, but no one can tame the tongue—a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless the Lord and Father, and with it we curse those who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this ought not to be so."

So the way the Holy Spirit comes to the disciples on Pentecost as a tongue of fire is a clear reminder to all of us. We must harness that power and ask the Holy Spirit to always guide our tongues to be constructive and up-building rather than a destructive fire.

ANCIENT PROPHECY

So at this point after the tongues of fire have rested and the many languages have been spoken and interpreted, Peter calms the Holy Fire birthday party chaos by remembering that the Prophet Joel once predicted that Sons and daughters will prophesy and the young will see visions and the elders will dream dreams. Servants, men, and women will have the Spirit poured onto them. Wonders will occur, and all will be saved.

The connection to ancient prophesy gave the events of that day a framework to reflect upon. Peter reminded them that God was in the midst of all this, and was present with them now as he was in the days of the Prophet Joel who reassured the Israelites they were not alone.

And we can be calm in the chaos of this present day by remembering that the Spirit that was present at Pentecost is the same Spirit that is present with us now. We are connected to that same call to live out a faithful life in which dreams and visions may soar. Our call is to continue to lay the ground and provide the space, so our dreams can blossom in others.

THE FLAME OF LOVE

Reverend Cho went on to say that “What is clear in Acts 2 is that a church birthday party is taking place—that dreams and visions are not meant to be dreamt alone but in a diverse community united in the Spirit.”

This task of dreaming and visioning involves all of us and all of who we are as we strive to live out our faith in Christ. Love is the flame that is meant to flow from us out to others so they too can feel the spirit of God in their lives.

The power given to us the church is meant to empower us to fearlessly spread God’s powerful love to all and by doing so we will grow Christ’s church for the future.

SPREADING THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

Imagine that this is the birth of the church, and your job is to spread the mission of the church to all the regions where you go. Maybe yours is a short region just around your home, but it doesn’t matter how large the area is where you spread the Holy Fire. You can spread the flame of God’s love and by doing so enlarge our church’s influence. You are a disciple of Jesus Christ. You are empowered by the Holy Spirit to share the Good News that God is love which is unconditional forgiving love, stronger than any other power in the universe. Your mission is to help people embrace that love and know that God seeks to have a closer relationship with them. Whenever you share God’s message of love you are celebrating Pentecost once again.

NUDGED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT

Do you have any examples of how the Holy Spirit nudged you to speak to someone or do something you didn’t want to do? I love hearing these kinds of stories.

I’ll never forget the day I felt the Holy Spirit nudge me and insist that I talk to my father about God. I was reading the Bible study for the Presbyterian Women’s study I attended at National Presbyterian Church in the Washington, DC area. My parents had been visiting us in Maryland for a few weeks in their transition from selling the farm and moving to Texas.

While I was reading the study I felt the internal Spirit say, “Go talk to your Dad about me.” In my mind I said, “No, he might get mad.” And the Spirit kept saying: “Go talk to your Dad!”

It was a nagging Spirit and I could tell I was not going to be at peace until I went to speak with my Dad.

I had a lot of trepidation about talking with him about God because he had a lot of anger left over from being the child of a Christian Scientist mother. His mother never took him to a doctor when he was sick and injured as a child. As a result my Dad would not attend church because

he had suffered from his Mom's religious beliefs.

So when I was being prompted to go speak with him, I hesitated because I thought my Dad might get mad. However, I was reminded that sometimes he had mentioned that he believed in God when he watched the amazing miracle of the crops growing on the farm.

When I lost the tug of war in my mind, I left the kitchen and went down to the TV room where Dad was watching Johnny Carson. I asked if I could talk to him for a minute, and if it would be okay if I turned off the TV just for a little while. I think he was as surprised as I was that I wanted to talk so he said, "Okay."

I told him that I was reading my Bible study and felt God wanted me to go talk to him. I said I wasn't exactly sure how to say it but that the message seemed to be that God loves him and wants to have a closer relationship with him. So I said, "God loves you and wants to have a closer relationship with you. How you work that out, I don't know. I just know I am supposed to tell you that God loves you and wants to have a closer relationship with you."

Then I waited, with baited breath, as they say, for his reaction.

He thought about it for a minute silently. After what seemed like a long time he just turned to me and said, "Thank you."

So I got up and went back to the kitchen. (In my mind I was going, "Whew!!")

My parents moved to Texas a week later and my Dad died from emphysema five months after their move. Before he passed, he had started attending the new church with Mom and he had memorized Psalm 23.

That talk we had helped me cope with his passing maybe even more than it helped him. I don't know. But I'm still so thankful I listened to the tongue of fire nagging me to go talk to my father about God's love. Amen

Benediction:

Go out into the world with God's love, dream dreams, pursue visions and speak of God's goodness in your own words.

And may God who breathed life into creation be your delight.

May Christ Jesus give hope to your dreaming, and may the Holy Spirit, your advocate and guide, set your hearts ablaze with a passion for peace.

And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you now and forever more. Amen



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