

HEARTS ON FIRE

Today, we recall the coming of the Holy Spirit at the Pentecost festival. Pentecost was a holiday that attracted people from all around, includes those of different cultures.

We remember Pentecost for a very different reason.

God's Spirit coming to and moving into the hearts and minds of the believers in Jesus was a significant event.

Those effected said it felt like the rush of a violent wind, and they sensed tongues of fire penetrating all around.

They could feel the presence of the Holy Spirit; however, God's Spirit does much more than evoke an awe-filled emotional response.

Many often regard God's Spirit as merely a feeling, and there are some who seek to possess an intense "spiritual" rush.

Yet, the Holy Spirit is more cognitive in function than it is a sensation. God's Spirit is referred to as a person--a person that enlightens, convicts,inspires, directs, ...equips and enables...Action.

At Pentecost, the followers felt the presence of the Spirit, and THEN ...they were equipped with the ability to speak in foreign languages.

God's Spirit informs and empowers for action,..... and to be sure, the essence and nature of the Holy Spirit is Love.

God is love, and so it makes sense that the activity of God's Spirit is from and for love.

Even so, being filled with the Spirit doesn't just mean being full of warm fuzzy love and loving regard.

God's Spirit enlightens, convicts,inspires, directs, ...equips and enables...Action!LOVE in ACTION.

When the famous Mennonite martyr heard the crack of thin ice and the splash of his pursuer falling into the frigid water, Dirk Willems didn't stop, turn and say, "I'm so sorry for you. I do love you very much and so does God, but I have to keep going or you'll take me back to prison and have me killed. So, you better ask God for forgiveness, while you can. Bye."

The Spirit of God enable, empowered Dirk to defy self preservation and rescue the man in peril.
The Holy Spirit moves us to action.

The Old Testament tells of the coming of God's Spirit in a new and special way, and Jesus taught about the Spirit, too.

So,..... why what's the purpose?

Simple: Jesus is not with us. Jesus is not walking among us, not teaching us and not going around doing justice and helping people.

God sent Jesus to show us / to model the way, and after Jesus, God provides God's Spirit in order to carry on that ministry.

Teresa of Avila (a veal ya), the 16th century saint, described what it is like living without Christ extant .

Here is what she wrote:

Christ has no body but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours.
Yours are the eyes with which he looks with compassion on this world.
Yours are the feet with which he walks on earth to do good.
Yours are the hands with which he blesses all the world.
Yours are the hands, yours are the feet, Yours are the eyes, you are his body.
Christ has no body now but yours, No hands, no feet on earth but yours.
Yours are the eyes with which he looks with compassion on the world.
Christ has no body now on earth but yours.

God's Spirit guides and directs us.

About ten years ago, I bought a Flight simulator program for my computer. It was really cool, and quite realistic,.....as a simulator.

On time, I had the opportunity to try my skills on a real flight simulator. For fun, they adjusted the conditions to dense fog. As I tried to land the Boeing 737, I broke out into a nervous sweat and felt my blood pressure soar.

It was intense.

I did land it, albeit a bit harshly, and I think most of the passengers would have survived.

From that experience, I wondered what it would be like to be in the frightful, dreadful situation of trying to land a real plane.

You know the scenario: something has happened to the pilot and co-pilot and the air traffic controller is giving step by step instructions to the novice about how to land the plane safely.

Well.....that's a bit how God's Spirit works, except God's Spirit can do more than just give directions.

Still,..... the stakes are just as high.....or higher.

It is a matter of living or dying.

Nevertheless, let us not forget the dynamics.

The Holy Spirit is not an unknown voice whispering in our ear helpful tips for good living and how to survive.

We know the Spirit. The Spirit is God.

We are in a relationship with God.

The Spirit comes to those who know God.

At some point, we made a covenant with God. Vows were said, and we invited God's Spirit into our hearts and minds. That was when the journey of our relationship with God began in earnest.

Yet, relationships are not static. Relationships are active, and time, events and circumstance alter relationships.

Conditions can change, and that changes the provisions, the stimuli and the person,.. thus affecting the relationship.

After a while or after a change of circumstances, a relationship must be revisited / reviewed and renewed or it will wither away.

We are not the same person that entered a relationship with God.

We have changed; the world around us has changed, and so new life needs to be breathed into our relationship with God.

Moreover, this applies to any kind of relationship, and we do not want to neglect and starve relationships founded on love--they are too precious to ignore.

Marriages/ covenanted relationships / any love based relationship must be examined and refreshed when things change, such as when children enter in,..... when jobs change,..... when health changes,..... when children become teens,especially then.

Committed relationships must be adjusted/ renewed when children leave home.... or ...after going through a crisis.

Sometimes professional counselling is needed, and always relationship inventory needs to be taken,.....which must include recalling the wonder and beauty of love.

Love opens the door to relationships.

Love motivates loving behaviour / actions.

Love nurtures the soul.

Love expands the mind and spirit to extend beyond self.

And,..... love has been the glue that lets us put up with a lot of ugly, painful and disappointing things over the years.

To be sure, without renewal.....a loving relationship will lose its spark and passion.

We can sense when that happens.....because our lives seem to be fading,.....too.

Fortunately, God's Spirit will call us back to life.

It could feel like regret..... or..... a keen sense of grace bubbling up.
It may be like a violent wind or piercing flames.....that prompts us to action.
It could be a new opportunity or a turn of events that pulls us to God.

Perhaps, there is a nagging torment like an endless knock on the door.
God will call us to renewal / to refresh the relationship.

Similarly, partners in relationships will give signs, too, that it's time to re-energize things.

They could be positive and inviting in nature,.....at first.
Yet, if ignored, they tend to be more piercing and desperate,... like a baby crying in the night.

And,.....our own spirit will give us signs when a love based relationship is in turmoil and fading.

The signs can be a sense of discontentment,..... of aloneness,... of sadness.... of alienation, even hopelessness.

In order to live and to thrive..... we need to be in loving relationships that are vibrant and fresh--that are filled with loving actions.

And, those actions include regular and frequent renewals: call it being refilled with the Spirit or recommitting to a covenant...or healing and restoring old promises.

Ignoring the invitations for renewal or ...putting off taking loving actions to revitalize a relationship will make healing more difficult.

So,.....this morning you will have the opportunity to publically refresh a loving relationship.

It could be as simple as saying and showing to God that the relationship matters,..... and you are choosing to reaffirm the covenant with God. And, doing that is an invitation for God's Spirit to respond in kind.

Also, you will have the opportunity to publically renew a relationship with someone you love, as a sign that you desire to and WILL breathe new life into the relationship.

In a few moments, the Pentecost flame will be lit and Ben will sing a song. That will give you time to think about your choices.

Then, we'll sing two closing songs. As we sing, you can come to the front, ... to the communion table to be anointed with oil.

If you come alone, I'll anoint the oil--just a touch on the forehead.

The anointing is a sign and blessing for taking the action / choosing to refresh / to recommit to growing with God through God's Spirit.

Partners can come together, and each one can anoint the other as a sign that you are again pledging your love and vows to each other.

As Ben sings, you can think about what you want to do and say to your partner. Of course, this is optional, and you may have already repeated your pledge to each other or to God very recently, yet was it in front of others?

You may be wondering, "Why do we have to do it publically?"

Simple: Pentecost was a public affair;
Marriages and other important covenants are public occasions;
Baptism is done publically, and it makes sense that healing and renewal should be public, too. Saying, "I do" in public is powerful.

Moreover, that is what we do as a church.
This is not a private, secret club.

We love.
We love God. We love each other. We love peace and justice.
We love and do loving actions because of the Love of God and by the Power of God's Spirit.
And, that is no secret. That is for all to see and to share.

So, may your hearts be set on fire, by the power and inspiration of God's Spirit.