

**Spreading a Holy Fire**  
**May 19, 2013**  
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The first year Ky and I came to live up here in the mountains,  
I remember I was walking down past one of the places there at Pine Junction,  
And it started to snow. I remember the shock I felt at feeling so cold,  
Because it was right around my birthday---the middle of May.  
I turned to Ky, and kind of laughed loud  
about my shock about the snow falling all around us,  
And I remember this lady, who'd been listening,  
called out to me from a side rail, shaking her head.  
She said to me--- "You oughta be thankful! Don't complain!"  
At first I didn't understand. She seemed so frustrated by what I'd said.  
See, I hadn't witnessed a bad fire season yet, during that first summer we lived up here.  
And finally, after the North Fork fire, and the fire down in the Springs,  
along with all of those other horrible fires that blazed last year,  
I remembered the woman's words,  
and understood why she'd said what she said, the way she said it.  
Living up here gives you a whole new perspective on the constant risk of wildfires.  
It gives you a whole new appreciation for late falling snow.  
And this year, I found myself saying the same thing  
to other people who were complaining about how much snow fell late this Spring.  
--Of course, I was careful to say it in a much nicer way...  
But all the same... I came to realize how easily these things happened.

How quickly they spread.

How much of the surrounding world these fires consumed so fast...

...changing lives forever as these fires ripped through the area, and grew.

And so I also felt my fingers pause as I typed out

the title of the Contemporary Word for this Pentecost Sunday.

“---Spreading the Fire?? ...Really?”

I was worried the words would maybe jinx us, up here, in the mountains.

Or at least raise our heart rate a little!

But those worries quickly washed away.

My fingers moved on, and typed out the words,

and hit send on the e-mail to Katriena without a second thought...

... And that's because today—the day of Pentecost---

Sure, we're talking about fire.

We're talking about a spreading fire.

But this fire, it's the good kind of fire.

A holy fire.

One that lives in us, and breathes through us,

and spreads between us with the same heat and vastness of impact,

but with the exact opposite effect as all of those bad ones

we watched burn so much of our beautiful view, last year.

And we'll get into that more, as the sermon goes...

But first, I wanted to touch on what this day actually is for us.

So many Christians, don't know about Pentecost.

This year alone, I've had more than a handful of people,

--just in casual conversation---

Ask what the day stands for.

...So I thought it would be good for us to remember why we celebrate.

To talk a little bit about what happened for us way back in the day of the apostles,

And what happens to each of us now, in these moments,

each day each of us are here,

blessed to experience this life, and this God we feel all around us.

This holiday might take the backburner to others, like Easter, and Christmas...

So it's more vague in our minds...

...but Pentecost is a *hugely* important day for us, as Christians---

---and I'm actually kind of surprised it's not a bigger time of celebration,

with its own decorations and traditions---

because what we celebrate on Pentecost, is the day the church was formed.

It's the day the church first came to life.

It's a day that changed the world and the way people hear of God,

and experience God, forever.

Going back to that moment, it's good to remember  
that there was no "Christian church" in the days Jesus was alive,  
(As strange as the thought might be.)  
There was the *Jewish* faith. The Temple. Jewish sacrifice, practice, and tradition.  
But there wasn't yet a separate Christian movement, that could be defined on its own.  
At this point Ky read about from the New Testament—the book of Acts---  
Jesus had lived his ministry. He went around teaching,  
with the disciples walking close behind.  
And all of this time, the disciples had mainly been only listeners. Followers.  
They'd done little to nothing on their own,  
in the works and words Jesus was giving to the world.  
Then---tragedy---Jesus, their teacher, was killed by the angry mob.  
And the disciples were left alone. They didn't know what to do.  
Then, by the startling miracle of the resurrection,  
Jesus shocks them to disbelief, by walking back up to them again after he died.  
And talking to them, and assuring them they'd be okay.  
He tells them to move on.  
That they'll be protected. That the Holy Spirit will come and fill them up,  
To where there would be no choice but to let it spill back out of themselves,  
For others to feel and see.  
And that God would guide them in every step they took from then on.  
Just before the moment I'll read into again---in Acts---  
After Jesus tells them this, they watch him go away again.

They stare helplessly as he ascends into the clouds, according to the text...

...And I love that part, because it leaves the disciples just standing there,

Alone, their chins tilted up into the clouds.

And it's those moments just after, that we celebrate today.

---Those moments after Jesus disappears from view,

And the disciples finally let their faces drop from the sky, to look back at each other....

...With nothing but trust in what Jesus had said to them,

to give them the courage to hold strong, and walk on.

And not too long after, the disciples find themselves

experiencing exactly what Jesus had said to them, in an unexpected moment,

Which is exactly where our scripture for today drops us off...

From Acts, chapter 2:

(Acts 2) When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. 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. 3 Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. 4 All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability. 5 Now there were devout Jews from every nation 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?... 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." 14 But 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. 15 Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. 16 No, 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. 18 Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy.

Verse 21:

...21 Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.' 22 "You that are Israelites, listen to what I have to say: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with deeds of power, wonders, and signs that God did through him among you, as you yourselves know-- 23 this man, handed over to you according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of those outside the law. 24 But God raised him up, having freed him from death, because it was impossible for him to be held in its power. 25 For David says concerning him, 'I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand so that I will not be shaken; 26 therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced; moreover my flesh will live in hope. 27 For you will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One experience corruption. 28 You have made known to me the ways of life; you will make me full of gladness with your presence.'

In this moment, the disciples were filled up with God.

They let God in, with trust in what Jesus had said,

And God spoke through them in miraculous ways. Ways anybody could understand.

The rush of God's Spirit filled their souls, and it all came flooding back out again,

For others to experience and feel, for themselves.

And this was the day, of the start of the church.

This was the day, where we sit now, and talk with each other now, came to be.

Pentecost is a day of hearing God from unexpected voices, in unexpected moments,

In a way that changes lives forever.

It's a day we celebrate the spreading of a holy fire.

Now, this thought---it's important to hold onto.

The writer of Acts uses the image of fire, as the disciples speak to the crowd.

And to me, it's the best way to describe what we do, as Christians,  
As we live in the world, and talk with people, ourselves.  
See, up here in the mountains, we know all too well,  
The way fire works to spread.  
When we think of the bad kind of fire,  
We know that there's a single moment of ignition.  
A spark, that sets into something with the potential to hold its heat, and create a flame.  
From that point on, the heat, the fire touches into another piece of the surrounding world,  
That also has the potential to hold that heat, and move the flame further...  
... from one piece of life, to another, to another, to another...  
...until all things surrounding are consumed in a blaze.  
Those words as scary to think about, when considering that bad kind of fire.  
That destructive kind of fire.  
But it's absolutely beautiful, when we think about the spreading of the love of God.  
It's absolutely beautiful, when we think about  
the holy fire of our passion for God that fuels our very thoughts and words,  
And spreads them from our hearts, to our mouths,  
then onto the next heart, and the next heart, and the next heart,  
Until the world around us is full of the experience and warmth of God in their souls.  
  
What we do as the church, and what we do as just people walking around,  
who have experienced God, and know God as a very real—maybe the most real---  
Presence in their lives, is we stand as a place of ignition.

And from us, the passion in our souls spreads from one life into another,  
As we allow our passion for God consume us.  
As we let our love for God, and our experience of God, burn inside of us.

And this passion for God comes to us in so many unexpected moments,  
And leaks out with different, unexpected words,  
and unexpected voices in unexpected places.

It can happen across a table at a restaurant.

It can happen talking over the phone with a friend, or a loved one.

It can happen in a random exchange with a stranger, outside a movie theater.

It can happen any time, any place, that we feel moved and filled by God...

...who is in all places and all things.

Have you ever felt that passion—that burning---inside?

That moment of being overwhelmed with God?

To the point that it all just spills back out of you...

I can remember some times, myself, when all of the sudden,

I'm talking with somebody

Who's for whatever reason, suddenly open to talking about life and spirituality.

---Another person... another piece of life... standing near, in the open,

To catch the heat of the flame inside of you,

and burn with passion and thought and love, themselves.

Embarrassingly enough, for whatever reason,

I always get winded while I'm trying to talk about God in those moments.

That's how I know that fire's burning deep.

And words fill up my mouth without any kind of pre-thought, or intention.

(Which is weird for me, because I'm kind of a socially paranoid person...

...always wanting to be sure of my words, and where they're going)

But in those moments... without any goal, or hope

to come around in sharing what's coming from my heart,

I just hear myself just suddenly speaking...

...and by nothing other than what must be a miracle of the love of God,

in all of those moments, I can't recall a single instance

where the fire of that passion was doused, or refused.

---Even with the most devout of atheists and agnostics.

In those moments, I've felt God spread through that space...

...even if just for a moment, into the life around us.

And this is the good kind of fire---a holy fire.

It spreads with the same effectiveness, the same heat as the bad stuff---

But instead of destroying life, it enhances life. Makes more life.

Just the same as the other stuff, it takes only one little spark

of the life inside of us willing to burn,

to spread and send the heat of God's glory between any soul standing near.

And it's that holy fire, and holy spreading of our sense of God and joy in God,

That became the church. And still is the church. And *will be* the church,  
As long as there are more embers, and more souls  
willing to ignite into passion and share that heat in their souls.

...This is what we celebrate today.

So, this morning, on Pentecost Sunday, let's open our souls to God,  
and stand up willing to let something catch and burn inside of ourselves.

Like the disciples, let's anticipate with joy, those moments  
when we have no choice but to let the Spirit of God that fills us,  
spread back out from inside, to touch into the heart of another,  
And spread the love of God deep and far into the life around us.

..Watching in awe at the view,  
as the presence of God in our souls spreads as a holy, brilliant fire,  
From one life, to another, to another, across God's created world.

Amen.

