

Natalie Ford
 June 12, 2011
 Pentecost

Got Spirit?
Acts 2:1-21

I read a wonderful little prayer for beginning a sermon this week:

"O God, take my lips and speak through them.
 Take our minds and think through them.
 Take our ***hearts and set them on fire.***"

Our lives as Christians are so often ***watered-down*** versions of what they could be. All too often we live as ***lukewarm, mediocre*** followers of Jesus

Who show up at church on Sunday, and when Monday rolls around we tend to fall back into our old routines....

Relying on ourselves, instead of God
 Living for self, instead of living for Christ,
 Living without direction,
 instead of following our God-given purpose.

And the ***result?***

Worry, anxiety, fear, momentary happiness here and there,
 But overall a lack of lasting joy.

Jesus knew this about us....when He promised to send us the Holy Spirit.
 He knew that after his death his followers would be tempted to live
 As though they hadn't learned everything He taught them.

So instead he promised them His Spirit—***the Holy Spirit.***

The Bible tells us in the Gospel of John,
 Exactly what the Spirit is---our
 Advocate, Counselor, Comforter, and Guide.
 And when Jesus ascended to heaven, he sent the Spirit
 to live within us.

Jesus' cousin, ***John the Baptist*** foretold the coming of this Spirit.

He said that Jesus would come and baptize his followers with fire!

The message God has for us today is all about ***being on fire.***

Having an inner, holy fire---ignited by the Holy Spirit.

Life can all too easily become just a series of either lackluster, or highly stressed days, one after another,

The weekend might be a highlight,
but then it's back to the same old same old,
week after week after week.....

Unless....unless we allow God's Spirit to work in us,
To do more than just get us some good feelings on Sunday,
But to actually *change what we think and do and feel*
Monday through Saturday!

We *don't talk* about the Holy Spirit as often as we should—
Even though the Spirit is God, the mysterious part of the Trinity
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

We claim belief in this Spirit every time we say the *Apostle's Creed*.
We know from the Bible that the Spirit was brought to us by Jesus,

And in Luke's continuing story, in the *book of Acts*,
We know that the Spirit came, and something amazing happened—
Something that carries meaning to us centuries later.
It begins as a traditional *Jewish festival---*
Commemorating the Harvest of crops,
and the giving of the 10 commandments.

But instead of coming to celebrate the Harvest and the Law,
the believers *became* the Harvest—with new gifts and new purpose!
And Jesus' promise of the Holy Spirit was fulfilled!

You know the story----the Holy Spirit descends upon all of
Jesus' followers in Jerusalem
Like *holy wind and tongues of fire* dancing on their heads.

And miraculously, they could all speak---
Not about just anything ...but about God, God's power.
And doing it in all the foreign languages represented in Jerusalem.

Suddenly Parthians started hearing about God in their own language, and so did
people from Mesopotamia, Libya, Egypt, Cappadocia. They each peeked into the
crowd looking for more of their own countrymen and instead they saw *simple*
Galileans speaking in all different languages!

It was truly a sight to behold...I mean imagine if God gave you the ability to speak the good news in German, or Greek, or Italian—
 right now, right here, and people from Germany and Greece and Italy were actually here to witness it!

These people who had lost their Lord and Savior on the cross,
 Now found themselves filled with *new gifts and new purpose* for life,
 They were becoming the ones who would share the good news,
 They were being used by God in amazing ways!

And as a result, the *church was born*.
 3000 people were baptized and became believers in Jesus Christ.
 And the word about Jesus spread and spread.
 All through *simple people like you and I*.

Let me say that again...all this happened to people like you and I
 No previous foreign language experience,
 No special qualifications, except knowing Jesus.

And the miracle at Pentecost is just the *beginning* of the story—
 All of the Book of Acts tells about the power of the Holy Spirit in those early believers.

In Acts we see the Spirit *guiding them, leading them, helping* them,
 just as Jesus promised.

The miracle of Pentecost is like the Holy Spirit saying,
 “Ladies and Gentlemen, *start your engines*”
 because everyone’s heart was ignited with the Spirit.

Pentecost is like the ‘*big bang*’ that created the church,
 And put into motion everything we know about the body of Christ.

When the Spirit descended upon all those followers, and new converts in Jerusalem, not only did they speak and hear the good news....
 They created a whole new way of living together.

Listen to this description of the early church.
So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added. 42 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. 43 Awe came upon

*everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. 44 All who believed were together and had all things in **common**; 45 they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. 46 Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, 47 **praising** God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord **added to their number** those who were being saved.*

Later when the believers gathered in Antioch
they were called Christians.

The Holy Spirit did ***two things***---it gave gifts to the individuals,
And it brought them into a new way of living together.
The Holy Spirit brought ***new purpose*** to life—
Both individually and as a church.

Wow. So where is this Spirit today?
Can we have it in our ***hearts***?
Can we have it in our ***church***?

The answer is a resounding **YES!**
The same Spirit that empowered the people at Pentecost,
Is the Spirit that empowers us today.

It's the same Spirit that gives you the gifts that set your ***heart on fire!***
What fills you up with passion?
What interests, or desires, or talents?
These are gifts of the Holy Spirit!

This same Spirit enables you to ***share the good news as well!***
When talking to a friend who needs to hear about God,
This is the Spirit of truth,
And when you open your mouth trusting in the Spirit,
Just the right words come out

This same Spirit brings ***us and our gifts together*** into the body of Christ,
The Church.
It's the Spirit that gives us meaning and purpose,
That ***teaches us, guides us, comforts and counsels*** us.
And it's the Spirit that gives us the **POWER** to do things
we could barely dream or imagine!

It's the Holy Spirit helping us share the good news with 30 children at **VBS**,

It's the Holy Spirit bringing us together to hear Eileen and raise money to our sister church in **Malawi**.

It's the Holy Spirit that helped us gather supplies for **tornado** victims, and send health kits after the a tsunami.

1 Corinthians says it so well, it is one and the same Spirit that gives all gifts each to be used for the common good.

And isn't it true that *real joy* is found in something *beyond ourselves*?

In a greater good? A greater purpose?

By the power of the Holy Spirit
we are people with a greater purpose!

The Holy Spirit is the one pointing us to the greater good,
To the greater purpose!

Months ago our Elders read "Spiritual Leadership for Church Officers" by Rev. Joan Gray of the PCUSA,

And in that book she has perhaps one of the *best metaphors* for Christian living that I've ever heard.

She says that we can be *rowboats, or sailboats* in life.

And the same applies to our church as a whole.

We can either *expend all our energy* trying to create our own purpose and do our own thing....

like rowboats, rowing mightily against the current....

Or we can *let go and let God's Spirit* fill our sails,

following where God is in the world,

joining what God is already doing,

and allowing ourselves to get swept up in God's plans and purposes.

Rowboat or sailboat? Which ones sounds more promising?

If we are people who believe in, and follow, and enjoy the gifts of the Spirit,

then we must also be people who allow ourselves to be guided

by the Spirit. We've got to let go and let God lead us,

counsel us, show us the way.

In the Bible, we learn that the Holy Spirit is our voice of *guidance*

Telling us right from wrong, good from bad

And the Spirit is our *comfort and encouragement*

When no one else is around, no one to comfort us,
 The Holy Spirit is that voice and presence that sustains you
 The Spirit is the one to pray for you,
 when you don't have the words!

And it's the *Holy Spirit* that enables us to do anything
 here at First Presbyterian Church of Owasso!

Pentecost is the day when we *remember and celebrate* the coming of the Holy
 Spirit...and friends, the Spirit hasn't left us.

It still resides in your hearts,
 and in the body of Christ wherever believers are gathered.

The question is, will we *listen, follow, and allow* the Spirit
 to lead us to things beyond our imagination.

Or will we be rowboats, straining against the oars
 to hold our lives together and find some purpose in this world?

This is why your board of Elders, the Session, spends time in prayer together,
 Trying to hear from God, to be led by the Spirit,
 Instead of leading from how much money we have in the bank,
 Or what we think we can do as a smaller church.

The Elders are committed to being sailboats, filled with wind and fire,
 Now *what about you?*
 Do you want to strain against the oars,
 Or let God fill your sails?

It's really a decision of the heart,
 We *decide* to let go and let God.
 We go to God in *prayer* and say,
 fill me, use me, let me be your servant.

And then we see the *power of God* at work in our lives,
 And in the lives of everyone and everything around us.

It was *holy wind and fire* that Pentecost day,
 The start of something truly remarkable...
 The **Good News** for us today is that the wind still blows,
 And the fire still burns
 All we need to do is let it fill our sails. Amen.