

## Acts 2:1-21

### Come, O Holy Spirit, Come

Fire has no shape or substance. You can't taste it or smell it or hear it. You can't touch it except at great risk. You can't weigh it or measure it or examine it with instruments. You can never grasp it in its fullness because it never stands still. Yet there is no mistaking its extraordinary power.

The fire that sweeps through miles of forest like a terrible wind and the flickering candle that lights the old woman's way to bed. The burning logs on the subzero night that save the pipes from freezing and give summer dreams to the tabby dozing on the hearth. Even from millions of miles away, the conflagration of the sun that can turn green earth into desert and strike blind any who fail to lower their gaze before it. The power of fire to devastate and consume utterly. The power of fire to purify by leaving nothing in its wake but a scattering of ash that the wind blows away like mist.

A pillar of fire was what led the children of Israel through the wilderness, and it was from a burning bush that God first spoke to Moses. There were tongues of fire leaping up from the disciples on the day of Pentecost. In John's apocalypse it is a lake of fire that the damned are cast into, and Faithful and True himself, he says, has eyes of fire as he sits astride his white horse.

In the pages of Scripture, fire is holiness, and perhaps never more hauntingly than in the little charcoal fire that Jesus of Nazareth, newly risen from the dead, kindles for cooking his friends' breakfast on the beach at daybreak.<sup>1</sup>

These words were written by Frederick Buechner in his book called *Beyond Words*. At a time when Alberta has been and is still in places, under threat of fire, one can feel and see the power of fire. We have seen it previously in BC and in wildfires in the southern states.

In the scripture reading from Acts we hear that the Holy Spirit came from heaven "like the rush of a violent wind and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability." (v2-4)

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<sup>1</sup> Buechner, Frederick. *BEYOND WORDS (2004) DAILY READING IN THE ABC'S OF FAITH*. [Frederick Buechner Sermon Illustration: Fire | Day 1](#). Accessed May 26, 2023.

Today is Pentecost Sunday. We often forget, if we even knew it, that this holy day is ancient. Jeremy Williams writes on a website called [Working Preacher](#) that, “Pentecost is a harvest festival where families bring the first fruits of their harvest in anticipation of God blessing the remainder of the harvest (Exodus 23:16; Deuteronomy 26:5-11). This made Pentecost already symbolically rich for imagining the beginning of a bountiful ingathering, but in Acts’ case what was reaped was not produce, but people.”<sup>2</sup>

Some churches celebrate Pentecost as the birthday of the church. It is when the Holy Spirit, which is the Spirit of Jesus, was given to the people...to the church, as a gift of Jesus. Yet to stop here takes away the continuing power of the Spirit to be active in a vibrant and energizing way in the world here and now. The Holy Spirit did not enter people on that day over two thousand years ago and then say, “Okay, ride that wave.” No. The Holy Spirit is as active as ever.

With the decline in worship attendance and the number of people who say they are of no faith community or done with the Christian faith, it would be easy to think that God’s Spirit is not as powerful as in the days of the early church. But that just is not the case. I do wonder if we have become desensitized to the work of the Spirit in the church, in us, and in the world. It is so easy to go along with the world’s evaluation of the church, but we are called to something more and different.

On the day of Pentecost God’s people were gathered as they had done for centuries and something incredible happened...God’s Spirit descended on the people. In that moment people from all different places who were there to celebrate the feast, many speaking languages other than Hebrew or Greek, heard people speaking about God’s deeds of power in their own language. (vs 10-11)

It was so overwhelming, so confusing, and chaos causing, that those who could suddenly speak in other languages were accused of being drunk. Peter, standing with the eleven disciples, those who were left after Jesus’ death and resurrection, brings things to order and quotes the prophet Joel of the Old Testament. Those words of the Old Testament were for them the only scriptures of the people of that time and Peter interprets through Joel what is happening.

What is also wonderfully mind boggling given the times, was that the Holy Spirit descended on everyone, was given to everyone regardless of gender or generation, social or economic standing. Men, women, children, elderly, slaves and free, it did not matter. The Spirit was given to all. It was amazing. Yet, even now we like to think that the Spirit is only for some.

We like to limit the Holy Spirit to moving and being in the world in ways that fit our mold. Still, imagine it. The Holy Spirit coming into our church, into churches, and blowing through us, inspiring us, but not only us. Suddenly those who sit on our steps have the

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<sup>2</sup>[Jeremy L. Williams](#)

[Commentary on Acts 2:1-21 - Working Preacher from Luther Seminary](#) Accessed May 26, 2023.

gifts of the Spirit, those who are down trodden, homeless, drug addicted are given new life because of the Holy Spirit. Each of us given the opportunity interpret in ways that are meaning to others the gifts of God, the story of Jesus, the transforming experience of the Holy Spirit at work.

There is a hymn from Nigeria that we sing, the song, translated into English is...

Come, O Holy Spirit come.

Come, Almighty Spirit come.

Come, come, come.<sup>3</sup>

What would it create in us to sing those words in a meaningful way. To sing them remembering the power of the Holy Spirit to change everything. Expecting that something incredible is possible.

In a podcast I listened to, Professor Matt Skinner says, "Pentecost is a time where God breaks into the world through the Spirit and sets the church on a new course or new discovery of what God is making possible through Jesus."<sup>4</sup>

All of the churches I am working with currently and particularly this congregation of St. Andrew's Thunder Bay, all are working to interpret and experience how God is calling us to be in the world right now. Yet when we do this work, it is easy to forget that God is already doing God's thing through the Holy Spirit. We, as the church and individuals are invited into that work, but it will only happen when we pray, when we trust that God is still God, and that Jesus is still present through the power of the Holy Spirit.

If we try to do this work of being the people of God in the world today without looking to the Holy Spirit, praying for the Holy Spirit to enter into us and our churches, we will miss out on the very thing God knows we can do.

Peter talks about prophesying. To prophesy is not to be able to predict the future, rather it is about how we might glimpse how God is in the world today. It is to look at ourselves in our own time, to look at the world today and interpret together how God is in the world now and how God is showing up, at work, and still building community, healing, feeding, loving all people and then how we might and can be a part of that.

Rather than being afraid of our future as a church and as community, may we trust God to be faithful, present, and inviting us to make connections of love, hope, promise, forgiveness, while becoming communities of welcome and places where all can become whole and restored. Where the fire of holiness is burning.

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<sup>3</sup> Words: Church of Lord (Aladura), Nigeria; English, I-to Loh. Music: Church of the Lord (Aladura), Nigeria, I-to Loh, as taught by Samuel Solanke. Words and Music Copyright World Council of Churches and the Asian Institute for Liturgy and Music, 1986.

<sup>4</sup> [Sermon Brainwave 905: Day of Pentecost - May 28, 2023 - YouTube](#)

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