

Pentecost – Year B  
May 20, 2018

Grace and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

Happy Pentecost! I am sure each of you greeted one another with those words as you came in this morning. Or maybe some of you are even gathering with family for the annual Pentecost meal this noon. Pentecost, so often, is but an afterthought on most of our minds. I suspect many of you came this morning not even realizing it was Pentecost. I don't say that to make anyone feel guilty; however, I believe it is just a reality Pentecost is not all that much on our radar screens as Lutherans. We don't talk all that much about the Holy Spirit; even though, we pray in the rite of Holy Baptism for God to pour out God's Holy Spirit on those washed in the waters of baptism and give them new life. And in just a few minutes we will seek God's blessing upon Cole as we pray that God may stir up the Holy Spirit in him giving him wisdom and understanding, counsel and might, knowledge, and the spirit of joy. It seems only fitting to celebrate with Cole as he says "yes" to the promises God made to him in Holy Baptism on Pentecost.

Images are a staple of faith. Every religion has them and as Christians, we certainly have our share. None of them, of course, more important than the cross of Jesus Christ. But on this Pentecost day we hear and see images of fire. You will see Cole's name written on a flame and pinned to the confirmed in Christ banner downstairs. The color red even hints to the fire of the Holy Spirit descending and resting upon the heads of those first Christians as we heard in our reading from

Acts. When many of us think of the Holy Spirit we may initially think of a dove. In fact, it's the dove printed on the front of the cover in which Cole's excellent statement of faith is found. The dove seems like a much calmer, soothing, and peaceful representation of Christ's Spirit.

Yet, the more I thought about it the last several days I can see why the gift of the Holy Spirit marking the true presence of Christ descended that day upon the foreheads of those gathered in a flame. Fire is such a common image and certainly has symbolic meaning going all the way back to the days of the great prophets of Old Testament times. Recall, God is found in the burning bush before Moses or God's presence goes before the people of Israel in the form a flame lighting the way.

I enjoy watching survivalist shows. Matt and I would watch one in particular called Dual Survivor, in which 2 well-trained individuals would be cast out in the middle of nowhere with very limited resources and must find their way back to civilization. It never failed that there were two things they depended on more than anything. One was finding water and the second was finding a means to make fire. In fact, they would go to great lengths to start a fire; even, to the point of blistering their palms as they spun a stick against a rock in an effort to create enough friction and heat to create the smallest of sparks on some dried-out twigs or leaves or grasses or whatever they might find. And in time, this tiny spark with some gentle puffs of breath would soon give rise to an abundant fire. These were truly life-giving. It kept them warm in life-threatening cold temperatures. It enabled them to boil water purifying it to drink or cook wild game they may have been fortunate enough

to catch nourishing their hungry bodies. It gave them light amid darkness. It was the single most best defense they had from keeping predators at bay in the middle of the night. Fire was essential for their survival.

Many of us ask just what the Spirit is or how to describe it. Fire seems to be the perfect image. The Spirit is like that ember of fire that crackles, pops, and suddenly leaps out of the flames and lands nearby or even upon our body quickly causing us to leap into action. The Spirit is like that warm glow amid the darkness lighting our way and protecting us on our journey. The Spirit is like the warmth a fire produces wrapping us like a blanket in God's love, presence, and promises. The Spirit is like a campfire that gathers people in and unites them together. The Spirit is like that fire that boils within us, purifying us from those things that keep us from entering a full and right relationship with God and with our neighbor. Purifying us in none other than the free, unmerited, sacrificial gift of love and grace of God revealed through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Spirit is like that smallest of sparks soon able to be set ablaze God's redemptive work in the world.

Bishop Michael Curry, of the Episcopal Church in America, referred the importance of fire throughout history yesterday in his message to Prince Harry and Megan Markle. He referred to verses 6 and 7 from the Hebrew Bible book Song of Songs, which states: "Place me like a seal over your heart, like a seal on your arm; for love is as strong as death, its jealousy unyielding as the grave. It burns like blazing fire, like a mighty flame. <sup>7</sup> Many waters cannot quench love; rivers cannot sweep it away."

Later he referenced French Jesuit scientist, scholar, mystic, and Roman Catholic Priest Pierre Teilhard de Chardin who wrote about how fire was one of the great discoveries in human history being the spark for life as we know it. Without fire, there would not have been a bronze age, an iron age, or an industrial revolution.

God's Spirit is that fire, which burns within our hearts because we are created in the image of God. We are claimed in our baptism into the body of Christ and filled with the love of Jesus Christ. The blazing fire Song of Songs speaks to is none other than the love of God. The source of all love. Bishop Curry challenged those gather to imagine once again the discovery of love. The redemptive power of God's love quoting from Martin Luther King Jr., "We must discover the power of love, the redemptive power of love, and when we do that we will make of this old world a new world, but love, love is the only way."

We are a people of the Holy Spirit and it is that Spirit of God which can rid out the hatred we harbor in our hearts. It is that Spirit of God that has the power to unite. It is that flame of love that through the smallest of sparks, which can set into a motion an abundant fire of love redeeming engulfing the world and rescuing it from the groans, pains, struggles, heartache, and decay and transforming it into a new world. God's kingdom here and now.

On this day, by the power of the Holy Spirit that burns in us, we, too, are called to discover yet again the power of love and imagine a church, a community, and a world aglow with the flame of love. Love that will rid out hatred and racism. Love that will conquer division. Love that will create laws, systems, and

relationships that will truly reveal our call to love one another and restore life, dignity, and well-being to all people the way God created and intended life to be.

Love that move us to glorify and testify to the good news that saves us and saves the world. Jesus Christ has died. Jesus Christ is risen. Jesus Christ will come again. Amen.