



The Trinity Pulpit



We Did Not Start the Fire (But Did We Put it Out?)

Acts 2:1-13

Dr. Jeff Roberts

May 31, 2009

Can you remember from your childhood the amazing and magical moment of catching a firefly? Many of us can remember that fond childhood memory of chasing a firefly and putting it in a mason jar. We would poke holes in the tin top of the jar so the fly could live and we could observe it. Soon, however, we would set it free and let it rejoin the others. Even if you did not chase them and catch them, you can remember warm summer nights at dusk; it would seem the woods, fields, and even suburban back yards were filled with fireflies. When was the last time you saw a bunch of fireflies? Most of us would have to say it has been a long time. For some of us the reason is simply because we have not taken time to notice them. We are so busy that there might be fireflies in our backyard; we just have not taken the time to watch them.

However, most scientists seem to agree that something is happening with the firefly population. Some experts believe that fireflies have diminished as much as 70% in recent years. There is so much evidence to this fact that there was recently a symposium of 100 entomologists in Thailand to discuss the diversity and conservation of fireflies. There are many reasons that are suggested for the decline in fireflies. Some suggest it is the usual suspects like urban sprawl and insecticides as well as industrial pollution. One researcher suggests that maybe it is a simple problem of distraction. The male firefly is the one we notice, because he is constantly lighting up as a way of attracting female fireflies. The females stay mostly on the ground and do not flash. It has been suggested that there is so much artificial light now in our world – in our backyards and even in rural areas – by which the females are distracted and the mating ritual never occurs. In other words, there are other lights which are

more attractive and the fire of the firefly is dying.

I wonder if that might be our problem as we arrive today to worship on the day of Pentecost. Have we been so distracted in our lives that we have forgotten the importance of the light of the Spirit in our lives?

As Christians, this day is the day we are to remember that God keeps his promises, and just as he sent Jesus to us, God also sent the Holy Spirit to dwell in us and empower us. I find Pentecost an odd day in the Christian calendar, mostly because, as a Baptist, we have done so little to recognize and celebrate it. I think most of the time this is due to us not knowing what to do with this text and the person of the Holy Spirit. It seems we are more comfortable with stories of Jesus' birth and resurrection than we are the story of the coming of the Holy Spirit. We tend to be more comfortable in our image of the Trinity with God the Father and God the Son than we are God the Spirit. Although we intellectually know that the Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity and is as much the expression of God as God the Father and Jesus, we tend to still not know how to embrace the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Thus, I think we tend to avoid this Pentecost text.

The Pentecost text is a strange text. It is filled with sounds of blowing winds, tongues of fire, and different languages being spoken. It leaves even those who experienced it that day perplexed and amazed. Yet, that is what God moments do. This text is no odder than stories of a baby, a manger, a virgin, angels, shepherds, stars and wisemen. This text is no odder than graveyards, angels, men in white, weeping women and a man who has

been raised from the dead. All of these stories are God moments. They are moments that are hard to explain and sometimes hard for some to accept, but the way they are written remind us that where God is at work, it is sometimes hard to explain. So, in our text we have phrases that describe the coming of the Holy Spirit as “a sound like the blowing of a violent wind”, or “what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them.” These descriptions are just more evidence that what happened that day in Jerusalem was God breaking through one more time into human history. It was God keeping the promises of Jesus that he would send a comforter, a guide, and one who would grant power.

On the day of Pentecost, God arrived, yet again, in power to dwell with his creation and his people. The Holy Spirit’s arrival at Pentecost is a day worth celebrating and remembering. It is the day that the power of God became fully available to you and me. It is the reminder that God’s work through Jesus would continue in you and me. It seems to me that we need to be reminded of the lessons of Pentecost, so that the fire of Pentecost might not be extinguished by our lives but might be experienced in our lives.

Let me suggest three lessons of Pentecost that go beyond our struggles with the odd events of the text. First, we need to be reminded that most of the time God moments require waiting. Waiting is one of the most difficult tasks we are called to do. Whether it is waiting in line at the bank, store, or doctor, we just don’t like to be kept waiting. The other day, a lady apologized to me for having me wait in line 30 seconds. I responded by telling her that we don’t all need to be in such a big hurry. She laughed and said “Either way, sorry for you having to wait.” It has become so much a part of our culture that you should never have to wait, that just a few moments of waiting require an apology.

Yet, waiting in the Bible plays an important part of God’s revelation process. The disciples had been told to go to Jerusalem and wait for what God had


promised. Remember, Acts is the second volume of Luke’s gospel. Luke ends his first gospel by Jesus reminding the disciples that they will be his witnesses, but before they are to go and tell, they are to remain in Jerusalem and wait on God’s power to come to them. How hard it must have been for them to wait. They had witnessed the resurrected Jesus, and I am sure they wanted to tell this story and this good news; instead, they are told to wait on God. They were instructed to wait for the right moment... the God moment.

What is required to wait on God’s timing? There is obedience. The disciples were obedient. Now notice that waiting does not mean inactivity. They did not return to Jerusalem and do nothing. They chose a new apostle, and we are told by Luke they went to the temple and worshipped. They continued to do what they knew to do as they waited. They were obedient not only to the command to wait, but they were obedient to God while they waited.

Obedience is the key to waiting on God. There are so many times that we want to rush ahead of God. We want this event to happen in our lives, or we want this characteristic to be magically produced in our life; instead, we have to learn that waiting on God’s timing is not only important it is a necessity.

Therefore, what we must learn to do is be obedient while we wait. Do you feel God has called you to something new in your life? Maybe it is a new ministry opportunity, a new job opportunity, or a family situation? Is God developing a new quality in your life? Remember that these God moments come at the end of waiting. What is required of us is that we remain obedient to what we have been called to do in this moment, so that when God is ready for that which is new, we will be ready as well.

The other quality that waiting produces is faith. The disciples learned to not only be obedient as they waited, but they exercised their faith in God’s promise. Maybe because they had witnessed the resurrection they knew that God was not through



*“Have we been
so distracted in
our lives that
we have forgotten
the importance
of the light of
the Spirit
in our lives?”*

with them. Maybe it was the fact that Jesus had told them to go and wait for God's promise that they had the faith the promise would come. Maybe as they remained obedient and waited their faith in the future grew. Whatever the case they had faith. That is why they waited. They were obedient and they believed that God's promise would be fulfilled in their lives.

Waiting on our own God moments will require obedience today and faith in tomorrow. Waiting for God's presence to be revealed will require a faith in what we have yet to experience. We choose to believe by faith that because God promised it and God keeps promises we will experience God's presence for our self.

In some ways, every one of us who dies before Christ returns dies waiting on God. We die being obedient to what we know to do and we die with a faith that God's promise of eternity is true. Pentecost is one of those moments when we are again encouraged that waiting on God is always worth the wait.

Pentecost reminds us that as Christians there must be evidence of Christ in our lives. When Luke describes the events of Pentecost, he uses metaphorical language to describe the God moment. He says that when the Spirit came it was like the blowing of a violent wind. He observes the fire of the Spirit and says it is like tongues of fire came and rested on each of them. Luke is experiencing a transcendent moment and he describes it in human terms. What is clear is that the believer is empowered in such a way that the Spirit of God becomes evident in his or her life.

Notice Luke mentions something that is experienced. There is a sound, there is a sight, and there is evidence of spirit by the experience of everyone hearing the gospel message in their own language or dialect. There have been many interpretations about the "speaking in tongues on the Day of Pentecost." Some believe the miracle was in the speaking of a strange tongue that everyone heard. Others believe the miracle was that of hearing that when the disciples spoke the listeners heard their own dialect or language. There is evidence for various views but the weight of the story seems to be a miracle of speaking in known languages for understanding. The point of the story is not that

the disciples communicated some strange message that was beyond understanding, but the disciples spoke with clarity of message that could be understood by all who gathered. The point is that good news had come to everyone. The disciples, filled with the Spirit, were evidence that God's power had arrived.

Pentecost is the reminder that our lives as well must have evidence of the Holy Spirit. When others view us, is the Holy Spirit's power evident? How is the Spirit revealed in our lives? It will be in our countenance. In our lives there will be joy and peace when others are not experiencing joy and peace. It will be in our response to others. When others withhold forgiveness we will forgive. When others reject people we will include them. When others overlook people we will notice them and their hurt. When others have the things of this world as their priority, we will be a reminder of the things that really matter in the Kingdom of God.

After Moses had spent time alone with God, we are told that he returned to the Israelites and the glory of the Lord was evident on his face. In fact, Paul tells us that this glory which Moses experienced faded, but the glory of the Spirit in our lives does not fade. It is more glorious because our experience with God and God's presence is constant and daily; it is not just a moment here and there. So, the evidence of the Holy Spirit in our lives is something that can not only be constant but growing in appearance.

Paul describes to us this evidence of the Holy Spirit in 2 Corinthians 3:18. There Paul writes:

And we who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

There are many translations to this passage. Some write:

*We are with unveiled faces beholding or contemplating the Lord's glory, or
We are with unveiled faces beholding a glass of the Lord's glory, or
We are with unveiled faces reflecting like mirrors the Lord's glory, or
We are with unveiled faces mirrors that brightly reflect the Lord's glory*

All of these translations have two qualities. They tell us that we behold the Lord's glory like looking in a mirror, and we reflect the Lord's glory like a mirror.

We behold the Lord's glory like looking in a mirror. It is like looking at the image of ourselves in the mirror but not at a glance; instead, it is like really looking and studying that which we see. At the same time, it is reflecting the image of God so that we mirror the image of God. Paul says that when we are beholding and reflecting, we are transformed into his likeness with an ever-increasing glory, or more and more. This comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

There is a story about a little girl who, on the way home from church, turned to her mother and said, "Mommy, the preacher's sermon this morning confused me."

The mother said, "Oh! Why is that?" The girl replied, "Well, he said that God is bigger than we are. Is that true?" "Yes, that's true," the mother replied. "He also said that God lives within us. Is that true, too?" Again the mother replied, "Yes." "Well, if God is bigger than us and he lives in us, wouldn't he show through?"

You know you would imagine so. The Day of Pentecost is the reminder that the Holy Spirit should be evident in our lives.

The Day of Pentecost is also a reminder that God has enabled us for ministry. Luke tells us that the tongues of fire separated and rested on each believer. So, the Spirit did not just come to the 12 apostles or to just a few who had gathered, but he came to all who had believed in Jesus and were waiting on God's promise. When they were empowered by the Spirit, they were enabled by the Spirit. I want to simply remind us today that the Holy Spirit dwells in us not only to give us strength but to enable us to perform the work of God in this world. It is the Spirit that gifts each of us for the purpose God has for us within the body of Christ. God has gifted you with his Spirit so that you might participate in the work of the church. There is no one here that God has not en-

abled. God has called us each to various tasks, and the church is only strong as long as everyone is finding their place and doing their part, as they have been enabled to do.

The ministry of the church is not for a few chosen ones. The evidence of the Spirit is not for a few. The power of the Holy Spirit is for all who will believe and follow Jesus. The Day of Pentecost is the day we celebrate that each and every one of us has been empowered and enabled for ministry.

One June evening, just past dusk, a little boy was playing outside his home when he noticed some fireflies. He was fascinated by their brightness, and so he ran inside the house and excitedly asked, "Daddy, what makes the fireflies glow?" His dad, not sure how to answer, said to his son, "I really don't know, son. Why don't you ask your teacher at school?"

The boy was not discouraged by his father's non-answer but simply ran outside to admire the fascinating creatures some more. He tried to catch one. Several times he swatted at them with his hands but missed, but then his hands clapped together on both sides of one's flight and it squished between his palms. Making a face as he felt the mashed insect's body between his hands, he slowly opened them to see the wasted creature. To his surprise the dead firefly was still glowing in the palms of his hands.

Excitedly, he ran back into the house, yelling, "Daddy, Daddy, I found out what it is that makes the fireflies glow!" His dad, pleased that his son had figured out the answer to his own question, asked, "And what is it, son?" "It's the stuff inside!" he replied proudly, showing him the palm of his hand.

It is what is inside us that really does count. Is the fire of the Spirit still burning brightly in your life? The Day of Pentecost reminds us that God's Spirit is worth waiting on, should be evident in our lives, and enables us for good works in Christ.

We did not start the fire! It began with the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. However, now is our time to make sure the fire of the Holy Spirit burns brightly in our lives. ✨

