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Luke 12:49, Acts 2:1-4, 8, 12

Pentecost: “Fire and Smoke”

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In the Middle Ages, cathedrals and great churches throughout Western Europe were fitted with a peculiar architectural feature known as a Holy Ghost hole: a small circular opening in the roof that symbolized the entrance of the Holy Spirit into the midst of the congregation. At Pentecost, these Holy Ghost holes would be decorated with flowers, and sometimes a dove figure lowered through into the church while the narrative of Pentecost was read. Holy Ghost holes can still be seen today in European churches such as Canterbury Cathedral.

(Photos of Holy Ghost Hole and Falling Rose Petals – split screen)

And then there is the Pantheon, the world’s oldest building in continuous use. What was once build as the home of the ancient Roman gods is now a Roman Catholic Church – known as the Basilica of Santa Maria and Martyrs. In the Pantheon, Pentecost is celebrated with— the raining of rose petals. Once a year, after the 10:30 am Pentecost mass, petals fall from 144 feet above.

Spotless, cooing white doves, and sweet smelling and smooth rose petals are the order of the day in some places. Yet, in the original Pentecost all we had was fire and smoke, and wind just short of a category 4 hurricane. One Pentecost celebration brings comfort and pleasure, and the other brings shake, rattle and roll.

I would like to concentrate on the fire of the first Pentecost. For, what our world needs now, and what we need now, is not the sentimental, sacchrine one, but the scorching, blowout Pentecost.

Now, let's separate the scouts and campers from the motel/hotel people. How many of you know how to start a fire using the teepee and/or log cabin style? If so, raise your hand. Just to make the question a bit more interesting, keep your hand up if you can and have built a platform, and/or star and lean to style fire.

Some fires work better for certain things you are cooking up. Yet, all fires need three things: fuel, flame and oxygen. As I see it, on the first Pentecost, and even today, God gives two of the three, and we must give the third.

God gives what the Bible has called the flames of tongues, and notice that scripture says each person got a flame, and everyone got a flame over their head. I like to say, that makes everyone a red head then, not only a few of us, did the red become permanent. (If you're not smiling now, then it went over your head or you think that my attempt at humor should not be laughed at, since it will only encourage me to do more of the same, with no guarantee they will get any better). Sidetracked, now back to the Good News – each of us, individually have and we collectively have the Holy Spirit.

(Photo of Car in the Garage and on the Road)

So, you can't opt out, you've got it. Yet, like never driving a car with a powerful engine that you choose to keep in your garage, and not take it out on the open road, does not change the fact that you own a car with a powerful engine. You've got the Spirit, that's a guarantee, yet some of us don't take it out for a drive very often, much less believe it has the power to do unbelievable things. Instead, we leave it parked, saved for another day. Yet, the days can turn into weeks and the weeks into months, and the months can turn into years. According to God, we are not meant to have an old, looks like new, hardly driven car with only 562 miles on it.

As vehicles of the Holy Spirit, we as a church have put on some miles. Yet, as it is with any church, we sometimes stop driving and just say, “Wow,” we have such a nice car!” and then just brag about it, yet, never take it out again for a spin. And if we are not careful, that could have been said by and of us.

Yet, the Consistory of this church, thought it best to look at the powerful engine that is this church and see if we need to get it out once again on the road. And the answer came back, “Yes”. And so, over the next three years, you will see us pulling out of the garage and taking some drives. In addition, the Consistory thought it best, to go down roads others in town, have not driven down!

The first new adventure will be helping kids experience reading in fun, non-stressful and nonjudgmental ways, and aiding in the socialization of those with developmental disabilities that Ellwyn has now placed here in Havertown after the state mandate to move folks from institutional campuses to community neighborhoods. They are our newest neighbors. And we will do these things with the help of God, and the one of the most powerful engines – pet therapy dogs, which we will help recruit, and orient as a program site for PAWS for People.

The second down the road adventure will be to organize, facilitate and host a couple’s workshop for LGBT couples. It is hard to be the only one (the elephant in the room, which is or isn’t talked about) when you are at a couple’s workshop. Trust me, Lynne and I have done it three times, and it is hard. So, why not make it easier, as an inclusive community of love and support, and why not recognize that these couples are like other couples, and in some ways they face unique differences of which we plan to acknowledge, affirm, and give tools to help strength these couples.

Next, some of our members have been doing a lot of driving on the

road called recovery, and have spoken to the Consistory about the gap regarding workshops for families dealing with addiction. So, we have decided to pull out the St. James van (that's a metaphor now, I didn't buy a van without permission) and go down the road to help families facing addiction.

And fourth, by but no means least, the Consistory feels we should drive down the road called cancer, and help those who are traveling on that four lane, very busy, crazy highway. Now, we don't know as of yet, know what lane we should be driving in and whether it should be the carpool lane (i.e with others). Yet, none the less, we are determined to do some driving. There are two members of the church, who will be exploring the where and how of reaching out to those with cancer. Please keep Nancy and Bobbie-Lou in your prayers. And in the meantime, keep your car maintenance up, because we are going to get out the garage for a drive, trust me, we will.

This my friends is the work of putting on the fuel, so the fire keeps burning. God provides the flame, and the vision on where the fuel is, that we will need to add to the fire, to keep it going.

Now, from the flame to the fuel, to the oxygen. If you have ever built a fire, you know that if you don't give enough space between the logs, there is not enough oxygen to keep the going. Yes, God supplies the oxygen, but we must make room.

Making room needs to happen on several levels, if we are going to see God fan the flame into a bonfire, or if we are to be a place where people can prepare and eat a feast, or where those who need warmth can go. We must make the space, have voids, and configure air pockets. Some of us wonder why our fire is smoldering and dies out, because we have jammed too much together, and that always leads to two things, a fire that did not live

up to its potential, and a whole lot of effort for just smoke.

There was nothing subtle about the conference I went to in early May in Minnesota, which told us from their vast experience, that new adventures cannot start, if you do not create the space for them. Which means, you must let certain things die for which it is time for them to die, or beyond time. Our arms can only hold so much. Yet, we insist we can carry it all, and when we do, inevitably things fall, crack, and even break, often times beyond repair.

We need time, and space for God's creativity and power to come to us. After Jesus ascended into heaven, the apostles were told to wait in Jerusalem. They gathered in a room for 10 days before the Holy Spirit came. Would they have heard, seen, and responded as well, if they had a full calendar of social "obligations", sporting events, and days full of TV, much less texting and tweeting. Probably not, we must create the space, and time to wait for God by creating an opening for God to give to us what we really need to see, hear and understand, and thus meet the needs of the world through us.

(Glacier National Park Forest Fire Photo)

I would be amiss, if I did not speak about smoke – because where there is fire, there is smoke. I will never forget the feeling that came over me when I was in Glacier National Park several years ago. I was taking lots of photos, when we drove by this scene. I asked Lynne to stop the car. I got out, thinking I would just record what a forest fire looks like in a National Park. But, I got so much more in that photo, I got a view of what beauty and grandeur could now be seen, when I beheld the gorgeous mountains that came into view after the smoke. Sometimes we can't see the forest from the trees, till the forest is cleared out. After the fire and smoke, can

come something better than that which we had before.

(Insert – Burning and new view, beauty, what you couldn't see before, photo)

The Consistory has mapped out the four “who’s” of our work as a church, after five months of listening, praying, discovering and discerning. Yet, we have probably only the first year to year and half plans regarding those four groups. We are leaving space, so the oxygen of God combined with the fuel of God can be there for the last year and half of what God would have us do and be. God continues to burn in, through, and out of this – God’s house. When the Spirit comes there is understanding and the power to live into and out what the Spirit has revealed and thus we have come to understand and comprehend.

May we know that each of us and all of us, has the flame from God, and that upon listening to God we can have the fuel that will keep that fire going. But, don't forget to leave room, because a jam packed stack of wood, is nothing more than a wood pile, and not a bonfire. Breath on us, Breath of us, breath of God. Amen.