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**Pentecost 00 – June 5, 2022**

**“Tenders of the Fire”**

**Read: Acts 2: 1 – 21/ Memorize: Acts 2: 2 – 3**

**This is Pentecost, often called the birthday of the Christian church. It is fifty days after the resurrection. The apostles were still too frightened to tell their story to anyone. He had told them to go back to Jerusalem and wait. So, on that morning, they were waiting. They believed that God was going to come to them. They clung to one hope: that Jesus was coming back soon.**

**There is another thing we should know about Pentecost. It coincides with a Jewish pilgrimage festival named Shavuot or Pentecost. It celebrated two things: the giving of the Torah, the first five books of the Bible as well as the grain harvest of the summer. People came to Jerusalem to celebrate it. That’s why there were so many people there. Isn’t it intriguing how God worked that all out?**

**The Holy Spirit filled that room with His presence. Luke reports, “Suddenly, there was a sound from heaven like the roaring of a mighty windstorm, and it filled the house where they were sitting. Then, what looked like flames or tongues of fire appeared and settled on each of them.”**

**Looking back, we know that it was nothing less than the power of our living God, through the Holy Spirit, coming into the midst of the followers of Jesus. Luke tells us that as a result of the Spirit coming, the disciples were transformed into courageous witnesses for Jesus.**

**Where once they hid, now they’re in front of a crowd, proclaiming Jesus. Peter stood up to preach that great sermon that results in 3,000 people being converted on this day. God is entrusting the tending of the fire of the Gospel to people. God’s intention was that the flame of faith would spread and so it did through the power of the Holy Spirit.**

**God had a plan. Jesus told them that they would be witnesses to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the ends of the world. God even uses the persecution of the church to**

accomplish His purpose. What might have seemed disastrous to them, being scattered from Jerusalem, fulfilled God's plan for the fire of the Gospel to spread far afield.

It grew even more rapidly when a man named Saul was called by Jesus. In Acts we hear that Ananias came to bring healing and a message. Jesus wanted him to be His apostle. Through Paul, that word would spread throughout Asia Minor. He would even take the flame of faith to Europe, bringing it to the very center of his modern world.

The Apostles tended that fire and passed it down to new generations. Generation upon generation passed it down so that in less than one hundred years the fire of the Gospel of Jesus Christ spread widely. It was carried as far as Spain to the west, India to the east and Ethiopia to the south. It is still spreading, just as God planned.

This was a time of tremendous growth. The Church grew because people were attracted by that fire and had their lives changed. They were excited by the Gospel and found what they dramatically wanted, the peace of God that passes all understanding.

They would experience terrible, terrible persecution because of it. The Roman authorities sought to wipe it out. Instead, their persecution did exactly what persecution has done throughout the ages for the church, it brought more fully devoted followers to embrace the faith, even as they faced death.

As the Church grew, one of the big things people noticed was how faith communities treated people differently. Jesus had told the disciples that people would, "see how they love one another." That attracted even more to be followers.

People saw another difference. In a time when disease was rampant and people fled from it, the people of the Church moved towards it. Their commitment to Jesus Christ translated into care for the sick and the dying. It would found movements of health and healing for centuries to come.

People noticed how the Christian faith moved people to treat one another with love. They saw how Christians seemed to be motivated to make a difference in the world. Christians demanded the best of themselves and the world around them.

I wish I could tell you that the story is always one of continuing growth and passion. But I have to be frank with you, the Church, at times, went astray. The fire of the Gospel was reduced to a glowing ember. People twisted the message, just as the Israelites had done, to believe that chosen meant only. There was persecution by the church. There were people who killed people in the name of Jesus Christ.

Corrupt leaders perpetrated injustices. People used the church to advance themselves, rather than the Gospel. Thank God that the Bible talks about a remnant that would always be faithful, who would tend the fire of the Good News and faithfully carry that flame to others.

The Gospel has spread tremendously, yet there are still some who don't know Jesus. The fire is burning bright in many, many places. On the continents of Africa, Asia and South America, they are ablaze with Christian missionary work. The fire does not always burn as warm or brightly in other places. That should be a concern for all who follow Jesus.

One thing we want to remember is that the Church is always building on the foundation of the faithful. Someday, you'll meet them in heaven. They may ask you where you're from and you'll say, "Canandaigua." They'll ask what church and you'll say, "Good Shepherd." And they'll respond, "Me, too!" Perhaps, you'll see if you know any of the same people.

That fire of the Gospel is now ours to pass on. We want to tend it carefully. There's a lot of wind trying to blow it out. We should not fool ourselves into thinking that the task is harder now than it was in past generations. It has always been hard for the Church to grow faithful disciples. Jesus tells us that suffering, persecution and danger are always at hand. We should never take the future of a congregation for granted, even ours. Yet, in the face of that danger, we have Jesus' promise that the gates of hell will not prevail.

Our challenge is to speak our Christian faith into the world despite what the world may want to hear. Just as the early Christians faced difficulties in the Roman Empire, yet also heeded the commandment to honor those in authority, we also want remember that we have a responsibility to the state.

We should pay our taxes, serve in the military, vote and pray for our government officials. On this past Memorial Day weekend we remembered those who have given their lives in service to our country. We should always honor them. At the same time,

**we want to be careful to not replace God with country. We have a higher authority. The church is to be a safeguard that God gives us to speak to what can be the intrusive power of the state.**

**Without becoming embroiled in the social strife of our society, we cannot avoid speaking about things like gun violence, discrimination, poverty, and other social problems. Those are not our main focus, but we cannot ignore them, either, as a matter of justice.**

**As the Church, we want to address the crisis of the human spirit with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. To do that we need to tend the flame of the faith. Use it to reach out into our community and beyond it. It may look different than the way our grandparents or our parents, did it. That's o.k. God does want us to be concerned for the people who live around us. He has put us here to be a light to all people.**

**Throughout history, the Church has had to adapt in order to make changes to reach the present generation, so that they will be strong enough to pass on the flame of faith to the future. There are some things that can't change: the centrality of Jesus Christ, the need for prayer, the celebration of worship and communion among them.**

**We want people to experience the power and presence of God. We want to allow that presence and power of the Spirit to shape and form us to be the people God wants us to be. Our fellowship together helps that Spirit to accomplish that work.**

**Fellowship is not just having a cup of coffee and a baked good in the Gathering Space. Fellowship is sharing mutual consolation and care with each other. We come together to hear the Word of God and study it. We also want to experience music that lifts our spirits and calls our attention towards God which helps us to pass on that fire of the faith. We use our gifts of service. We do all these for one reason: To share that fire with all to reach the world for Jesus, one person at a time.**

**We want to encourage one another by practicing the presence of the Spirit to strengthen us to tend that fire and pass it to the next generation. We call it, "Sharing Christ, Changing lives!" but it can only happen when we are faithful to God's call for generations to come.**

**Here's your question: To whom will you pass the fire of the Gospel?**