

Acts 2:1-8, 17-18
Holy Fire
Pentecost Sunday May 15th, 2016

Today is Pentecost, the day we celebrate all things Holy Spirit! We celebrate the Holy Fire and wear red in honor and celebration of the 3rd person of the Trinity.

The Holy Spirit is many things, does many things, and goes by many names and symbols in the Bible. Just in the scriptures that were read today it was called: **“The Helper, The Spirit of Truth, Holy Spirit, My (God’s) Spirit.”** It is also known as the “Comforter” and even by its simple Greek name the “Paraclete.” It is symbolized by a dove, wind and fire.



In the Ascension story last week, Jesus promised the falling of the Holy Spirit after his ascension. He promised power would come upon the Disciples to be witnesses to the ends of the earth.

In our John scripture we heard of Jesus’ promise of the falling of the Spirit before he was crucified.

In Acts we read of when the Holy Spirit finally fell. Tongues of flame rested on the disciples. Holy Fire fell and fired them up to do what Jesus had promised them they would be empowered to do. They were to teach, preach, witness, testify, heal, baptize and cast out demons.

And why? Why did God do all this? Why did God give the Holy Spirit? Ultimately, it is because God Cares. On Wednesday afternoon I was despairing getting this message together this week. After constant people and situations to minister to, reading and re-reading past messages, thinking, and meditating and I came up with nothing. At times I become wracked with deep discouragement and ask God why? Why did you pick me to preach?

I was sitting in the Stephen Ministry room at the time and after this short prayer looked up and there on the very top shelf were the carved words “God Cares.”



I took it personally. I took it to mean God cares for me, shut up, stop your whining and get to work. I did. Spent a couple of hours writing, got almost half of a sermon written but it was so bad I deleted it.

And so I kept meditating (that’s a fancy word for worrying over something. If you can worry you can meditate.)

About 9:30 that night it hit me what God was saying with that simple sign, “God Cares.” It wasn’t a sign for me. It was a sign and word for this congregation. God Cares!

It is why God sent Jesus the Christ his Son. It is why he sent His Spirit, the Holy Spirit, the Holy Fire. God cares!

For God so loved the world he sent his only begotten Son that whosoever believes in him will not perish but have everlasting life!

God cares so much, Jesus Christ cares so much, he knew he could not stay on earth and enjoy friends and family and loved ones. He had to die as a sacrifice for our sins. He had to ascend into heaven. He had to go: so the Spirit, God’s Spirit, His Spirit, the Holy Spirit could come.

When Jesus was here on earth in the body he could only minister to those who could see him, hear him, and touch him. He was limited to a small country never going more than 100 miles from where he was born. But when he ascended into heaven he sent his Spirit, the Holy Spirit, to be with us in all times and in all places. As Jesus said at the end of Matthew, **“Behold I am with you always to the end of the age.”**

In the Star Wars movie series the concept of “The Force” is a take-off concept of the Holy Spirit. It captures, though, to the secular mind what the Holy Spirit is like and does: always present, always with us empowering, gifting, comforting, guiding and teaching. I would submit to you the entire Star Wars series is a secular/spiritual rip off of the Christian Gospel. It speaks to the residual memory of Christianity in our culture.

But that series is a fascinating tool we can use speak to the true force, the Holy Spirit, who is always present with us, and all other human beings, teaching, guiding and convicting.

As Jesus said about when the Holy Spirit comes, “When he comes, he will prove the world to be in the wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment:”

And why? Because God cares. God does not want anyone to wander in life lost. God does not want anyone **trapped and enslaved by sin, living in shame because of a lack of righteousness, always in fear of the coming Judgement.**

God cares and sent his Son to set us free and through us to free others. That message, the Kairos moment when God broke through to me that he cares, wasn't just for me; it was for you, and not just for you but for others through you!!

The promise and power of the Holy Spirit was always for others. It is our privilege to be a conduit of the power to watch that power in action as people discover God cares and their lives are changed forever.

In the Ascension the promise of power was to witness, “**You shall be my witnesses..**” In John 15:27 the promise was to testify, “**And you also must testify...**”

In Acts we see that power to testify and witness being embodied in the gift of speaking in tongues. This is the ability to bring the Good News to others in their own language. It is a gift our Wycliffe Bible translator Joy Oram has.

There is of course another gift of “speaking in tongues,” which is a private prayer language that the Holy Spirit gives to some to encourage them in their faith and to help them in praise and worship. It’s called “glossolalia”. This type of “speaking in tongues” is unintelligible to the speaker and most hearers. It is what Paul spoke of as prayer that helps express **“groaning’s of their spirit that are too deep for words.”**

It is a gift of “Charismata” or power, but I believe a more excellent gift is the gift of bringing the message of Christ to others that they can understand and it changes lives.

You in your baptism have been given the same power and gifts. To use words and actions, good deeds, as signs of God’s presence love and care.

Vista is good at this but at times not self-aware of the work of the Holy Spirit it does of testifying and witnessing to Jesus. There is a desire here to invite, include, minister to, disciple, people into the image of Christ here.

Some are extremely simple things like the UMM helping people move, clean their property; pick up trash along highway 77 and distributing pens with our church name and phone number.

Stephen ministers are lay people going in the name of Christ to be the Holy Spirit’s presence, the Comforter in hospitals, and nursing homes with the sick, elderly and shut in. They try to make their lives as a living witness to Jesus. And God also has someone to send you to.

In our Acts passage the disciples spoke to people from different languages and cultural groups. You are sent into the world as living sermons, witnesses of the Christian faith to specific people and sub-cultures in our society that God has in mind. You are gifted to speak to them.

And how? Note Acts 2:17, which says, **“the Spirit has been poured out on all people.”** The Holy Spirit goes before you and is in the other

person to whom you are sent and does the hard work. It is the Holy Spirit that convicts, convinces and converts.

You are called with the groups you are involved with, the people you meet at work, in the community where ever you go to simply connect to **People of Peace**.

I want to define People of Peace. **First of all God sends you to your People of Peace.** It is the Holy Spirit that guides you. With Christians there are no accidental meetings only divine appointments.

A “Person of Peace” is someone you connect with; they serve you in some manner and are open to listen to you. The service part can be as simple as they sincerely saying, “Have a great day,” to giving you a glass of water, to inviting you to lunch. You make a connection and it is through that connection you can eventually invite them.

It works like this. At my previous church there was a lady named Patti who showed up to the Church’s Block Party. *Patti said, I wandered around the parking lot at the Block Party and I enjoyed talking to new people.*

One lady and I chatted awhile about how much fun people were having, and after a few minutes of just general conversation she remarked, “The church people are so friendly.” She proceeded to tell me that her husband is gravely ill, and the prognosis is not good. She had attended a Methodist church as a child, and is feeling the need to get involved again in a church family.

We continued to chat, and I shared that I was a widow, and could relate to her journey. I gave her my phone number, and hope to have contact with her soon.”

I have seen similar things happen many times here at Vista Church. They can happen even more when we develop and practice a constant awareness that God wants to use us to show others that he cares. There are always people of peace out there waiting for the divine appointment when our life crosses theirs.

When that awareness is cultivated there is never just a rummage sale, just a delivery of snack packs. It's always an opportunity to meet, connect, invite, and include.

Marv told me this week of speaking to an employee at Basha's when he was picking up food for Impact. Marv wanted to thank them for their generosity and told them of the poor to which the food was going. This woman opened up her life to him telling of her struggles. Marv was aware the Spirit was calling him to listen and so he did.

Walk to Bethlehem, Fine Arts Concerts and other events are never just community events; but opportunities to connect, places and times to see God working in the most common of circumstances: one person meeting another in friendship, hospitality and care.

With a person of peace you never have to be pushy or overbearing or afraid, just aware and expectant to see what God will do, because God cares.

When you despair of being able to share the Good News turn to God in prayer because God Cares that was what the disciples were doing when the Holy Spirit fell.

From the front all Christians, look like sheep.



From the back... We look like shepherds.



God has at least one person for each of us to shepherd. God cares for you and all whom you meet.

At Pentecost the Holy Spirit, the Holy Fire fell with power on the church giving it more than just the gift to communicate with words. It

gave the members of the Church many gifts. In the New Testament you can count at least 24. The Holy Spirit gave us gifts of power.

In Luke 10 it speaks of People of Peace and the power Jesus gave the disciples to preach and teach, heal and cast out demons. All of these were powerful signs of Christ presence in the Church.

Today being Pentecost I decided it was a great time to pray for the presence of the Holy Spirit to heal.

Healings are signs God uses to increase faith and convert souls. Just like that sign "God Cares", it wasn't just for me; in the same way a healing is not just for the person who receives it.

Years ago I went to visit a woman in the hospital who was gravely ill. We talked for a while and then I prayed for her healing. It wasn't an outstanding prayer. I remember nothing of what I said besides asking God to heal her. Sunday, much to my surprise, she was in church for when I saw her she was very, very sick. I was so surprised to see her I said so.

I always remember her reply. She was a bit put out with me that I was surprised she was in church rather than in the hospital. She said, "Well you prayed for me and I was healed. I went home that afternoon." The connotation was there was no other outcome possible once she was prayed for by the pastor. She went on to tell hundreds of people over the years of her healing. To her and many others it was a phenomenal sign that God cared.

Now I am not sure why God does not heal some; but I know he heals others. They then become a testimony, a witness, a sign that God cares. So today I am going to give all an opportunity to be prayed for and anointed for healing for either yourself or another person. I am praying for my nephew to be released from the demon of drug addiction.

I invite the Stephen ministers to come forward as well as Rev. Allen and Rev. Jon.

Come let us pray for the Holy Spirit's presence and power. Come bring your sickness, disease, of self and others. If you don't come down be in prayer for those who do.

Come wind, come Holy Fire fall on your people in this hour, and we will be recreated!!!

Prayers.