

Wet with the Spirit's Fire

a sermon
by Dan Griswold
Trinity Reformed Church
June 4, 2017

Acts 2:1–21

1 Corinthians 12:3b–13

In just a little while, after I've said what I'm going to say in this sermon, three of our young people, three *exceptional* young people, will make profession of faith. Jauntah, Josiah, and Rose have recently completed a confirmation class led by Greg Halsey (thank you, Greg!). They have already met with the elders, who examined them in what they've learned and heard them profess their faith in Jesus Christ. And in a few minutes, they will publicly profess their faith and make promises here before all of you.

(Oh, and by the way, you, too, will make promises!)

These three are already, in an important sense, members of this church. They are members because of their baptism. That's really most important. What makes them members of the church is not some achievement on their own part,

not the completion of some class,
not the passing of some test,

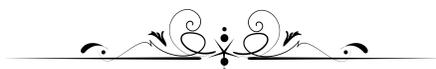
but instead the unmerited, undeserved grace of Jesus that has welcomed them and washed them and joined them to Jesus ... and to us. We ought never forget that.

And yet it's a good thing, an important thing in its own right, that they themselves take this step,

and own their baptism,
and declare their faith in Jesus,
and say that they are and, with God's help, will be
faithful members of this congregation.

Here I want to talk directly to them. Which might make them a little embarrassed. I hope it's okay; I don't mean to embarrass them. But I have in mind especially them in what I will say.

The rest of you, though, are welcome to listen in. Well, I do think you should pay attention, because even though I'm talking especially to them, what I say is important for the rest of you, too.



Jauntah, Josiah, Rose: I am glad today.

I'm glad that you believe in Jesus.
I'm glad that you are growing in faith.
I'm glad that you've decided to make your profession of faith.
And I'm glad that this is happening on Pentecost Sunday.

You may know this, but on Pentecost Sunday we remember and celebrate something that happened only seven weeks after Jesus rose from the dead. It's described in the Bible passage I read, the one from Acts. And there we learn about the time when the Holy Spirit came to the followers of Jesus.

This is when the church really came alive.

This is when Christians really began to tell others about Jesus.

This is when other people who had not heard of Jesus began to hear of him and then believed in him.

This is when evangelism and mission work and all the rest really started and then took off.

And here's what is so important to know from the Bible's description of that day: none of this could happen without the Holy Spirit.

On that morning of Pentecost, the followers of Jesus were touched by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit came on them like tongues of fire, and they were filled with God's awesome and loving power.

They started talking about how great God is;

they started talking about Jesus, made alive by the power of God.

All this talking, though, was in a bunch of different languages, ones they didn't know, ones they had no reason to know, but which now they *did* know. Better yet, people around them who knew these languages, who had grown up speaking those languages, they could understand them.

You might say that they were on fire, on fire with the Holy Spirit.

But not everyone was impressed. Some thought they were drunk. So they just laughed and made a joke of it. "Aw, they're just filled with new wine!"

Peter stood up to explain, and to set things straight. No, he said, they're not drunk. No, they're not filled with new wine. Instead, they're filled with the Holy Spirit. This is the movement of God, the fulfillment of God's promise to pour out the Spirit of God on all people: young and old, slave and free.

Now, I think there's an interesting turn that happens here. The pictures, the images, used to talk about the Holy Spirit and the work of the Holy Spirit, they *change* in this passage. At first it's about *fire*: the Holy Spirit came upon them and rested on them like tongues of fire. And then things change, with God *pouring* the Spirit upon all flesh. And in between, the believers were accused of being *filled* with new wine (a *liquid*), but Peter's answer to them basically says, Sure, they're *filled*, but not with *wine*, instead filled with the *Holy Spirit*.

Have you ever found it hard to describe an experience you've had? Or a feeling? It can be really hard to put some things into words. So you might use words that normally wouldn't go together. But, somehow, as a way of describing what happened or how you felt, they do go together. They work. They help you explain what happened.

There's this scene in the Disney movie *Pinocchio* when Jiminy Cricket gets so fed up with Pinocchio, and in absolute frustration shouts at him, "You buttered your bread; now sleep in it!"

Poor Jiminy was just upset, so much so that he got confused mid-rant. But maybe his confusion said what he meant better than would any more carefully chosen words.

What we find here in the Bible is not confusion. Instead, it's as if the reality of what had happened to the followers of Jesus couldn't be described in only one way, with one kind of word, but instead had to be described in several ways, with different, perhaps even somewhat contrasting images.

The gift of the Spirit is like fire, a holiness or a divine purity burning in the soul. *And* it's like a flowing, rushing torrent of blessing and goodness and conviction and truth and love.

The gift of the Spirit sets a believer on *fire* with devotion and courage. And it also *fills* a believer with the soothing and bracing waves of compassion and repentance and love.

In all this, God makes the Jesus people, God makes *us*, wet with Holy Spirit fire.



There's an important lesson in all this. For you, Josiah, Jauntah, and Rose. For all of us.

Because so many of us act as if we think we can do it all alone. So many of us heap so much pressure onto ourselves. So many of us seem to forget that without the Spirit of God blessing us, filling us, guiding us, *we can do nothing*.

We can't believe.

We can't help.

We can't bless.

None of it, not really.

But *with* the help of the Holy Spirit, we can do all that, and more.

We can believe, we can help, we can bless.

We can speak about our faith.

We can be an example to others.

We can make a difference in other peoples' lives.

With the Holy Spirit — blessing us, filling us, guiding us — we might even find ourselves in the middle of amazing things God does with others: bringing them to faith, giving them purpose, changing their lives.

I hope that when you are overwhelmed, when you are lost, when you are confused, when you are despairing (and, I'm sorry to say, you will have those times),

that you will soon remember that you don't have to do it all alone,

that you *are* not alone,

that the Holy Spirit has blessed you and filled you,

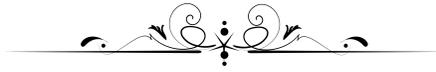
and will do so again,

that the Spirit has also blessed and filled others,

people like me and Mr. Halsey and Lesley and Michael,

all of us willing to be of help to you as you grow.

I ask you — you who are already wet with the waters of baptism — to remember to pray, and to ask God to make you again wet with the Holy Spirit's fire.



There's another lesson I would like you to learn from Pentecost. We see this, too, in that passage from Acts. We see it also in the other passage I read, from Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, the one that says this:

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit;
and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord;
and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God
who activates all of them in everyone.

This is what I'd like you to know: the Holy Spirit doesn't make us all the same. Isn't that a relief? We're not the same, and we're not *supposed* to be the same. We're different. And God wants those differences.

The Spirit is moving in your life, Rose; and in yours, Jauntah; and in yours too, Josiah. And what's happening in each of you is not exactly the same as in the other two, nor in me, nor in anyone else here. The gifts given to us will differ, and so too will the opportunities given to us, opportunities to love Jesus and follow Jesus and serve Jesus.

Those differences don't make one of you better than another. Those differences don't make one of you worse than another. God decides to give us

different abilities,
different circumstances,
different gifts,
different jobs.

Thank God.

The ways in which we are wet with the Spirit's fire are different. And that's all good. It is a blessing, one I want you to remember, and celebrate.



So, my friends, rely on the Holy Spirit.
Pray for God to reveal to you the special gifts given to you
Pray for God to show you opportunities to use those gifts.
And, my friends, do this as well: rejoice that you are wet with the Holy Spirit's fire.