

Easter People: On Fire for Jesus Sunday, 6/5/22

Last week we took a closer look at what Paul meant when he said that we are many parts of the one Body of Christ. As Easter people, we need to find our places in the Body for the common good of the Body and the mission of Christ.

Today we celebrate the Day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit was poured out on God's people with a sound like a mighty wind and something that looked like tongues of flame. Fire is a frequently used symbol in the Bible, representing God's presence, power, holiness, judgment, and Spirit. When Jesus rose from the tomb on Easter morning, he may have been greeted by the fire of the morning sun, climbing over the horizon. Was the fire of the Holy Spirit that came upon the disciples of Jesus, 50 days later, a unique event, or can we still expect that kind of powerful presence of God in our lives? Is it still possible to live our lives as if we were on fire for Jesus?

Let's continue reading the Pentecost account from Acts 2. I'm picking up in verse 14 in the New Living Translation. [{Read Acts 2:14-21}](#)

Kyle Idleman is the author of *Not a Fan*, a provocative book in which he asserts that many would-be followers of Jesus are actually more like fans than followers.¹ Fans are those who've made a *decision about* Jesus but not a *commitment to* Jesus. Fans *know about* Jesus while followers have an ongoing *relationship* with Jesus. Fans *include* Jesus as an important part of their lives while followers hold Jesus as the *most important*. Fans try to keep the external *rules* of Jesus while followers seek to have their *hearts transformed* into the heart of Jesus. Fans seek power and control *for themselves* while followers acknowledge the *power of the Holy Spirit*.

Those are hard words, and I'm guessing any honest Christian could search their heart and find themselves lacking in one or more of those dimensions. That's why we need grace. That's why we need the Holy Spirit. But let's take a moment on this Pentecost Sunday to honestly assess our commitment to Christ. If you had a spiritual thermometer, what would your temperature be?

Hopefully there aren't any ice cubes in your glass, so you're at least room

¹ Kyle Idleman, *Not a Fan: Becoming a Completely Committed Follower of Jesus*. Zondervan, 2011.

temperature, say 68° F. As a reference point, a candle flame burns on average between 1,100 and 2,500 ° F. Lightning is somewhere around 54,000° F.² Just how “on fire” for Jesus are you? Is your spiritual temperature at least 212° F, the boiling point of water? Or are you tepid, like a lukewarm glass of water? Easter People are followers rather than fans of Jesus, with the fire of God’s Spirit giving us the energy and urgency to carry on Christ’s mission.

We need the fire of God in our lives in order to hear *from* God, and not just hear *about* God. Moses heard God speak to him from the burning bush.³ Notice that it was a dialog, not just a voice coming out of a fiery shrub. The flame of God’s Spirit allows us to communicate with God, something that’s crucial for us to be able to know God and be known by God. It’s interesting that Moses didn’t set out that day to find God and have a conversation, let alone receive a mission to deliver God’s people from bondage. God initiated the conversation. In fact, I’d guess the spiritual temperature of Moses was running a little cold, judging from his fearful reluctance to take on God’s assignment.

Looking back from this side of the resurrection, we know better. We know that Jesus died so that we can sit in the flame of God’s presence without fear of being destroyed by our sin. It’s one of the great overlooked gifts of Easter. Each one of us can approach the throne of God directly in the name and Spirit of Jesus. You don’t need a pastor to do that, but you do need the fire of God’s Spirit.

So when do you do that? Is there a time and place that you intentionally chose to turn your heart to God in prayer, listening and speaking to God? If there isn’t, I believe God has been calling out to you from burning bushes, because God wants to have a relationship with you so that you can discover who you are, whose you are, and what your true purpose is for God’s Kingdom.

God didn’t keep his presence rooted to the burning bush while Moses did all that leg work leading God’s people through the wilderness. God sent a pillar of fire to guide them by night⁴ and to rest above the Tabernacle as an assurance of God’s presence.⁵ The flame of

² <https://www.tcforensic.com.au/docs/article10.html>

³ Exodus 3:1-17

⁴ Exodus 13:21

⁵ Numbers 9:15.

God still guides us today- not as a pillar of fire, but through the wisdom of the Holy Spirit, also named by Jesus as the Counselor,⁶ Advocate,⁷ Helper,⁸ or Friend.⁹

One common way for the flame of God's Spirit to grab our attention is to convict our hearts when we've done, or are contemplating doing, something wrong. This is much more than what we might ordinarily call our "conscience," because our conscience is completely relative to our upbringing, psychology, and history. God's Holy Spirit, on the other hand, is rooted firmly in God's Word. The conviction of the Spirit can usually be traced to something we should already have known if we'd spent the necessary time with our Bibles.

God's Spirit sometimes also prompts us to action. We might be stirred to give someone a call or pay them a visit. Sometimes the prompt is deeper and requires a more significant response, like God's call to begin a new ministry or to make a major change in your life. How can we tell the difference between the Spirit's prompting and our own capricious wills? Sometimes that's difficult. Looking to God's Word and God's people for affirmation is always a good idea before making a big decision in your life. God's flame will never lead you somewhere that's inconsistent with God's revelation that we have in the Bible, and the counsel and history of God's people can help us to reason that out.

Easter People strive to be alert to the conviction and leading of God's Holy Spirit.

Sometimes we need the fire of God's Spirit to remove the dross in our lives that keeps us from growing in holiness. The Scriptures are replete with examples of God redeeming our suffering by increasing the holiness of heart and life for his people. Isaiah received this word from God: "I have refined you, but not as silver is refined. Rather, I have refined you in the furnace of suffering."¹⁰ Similarly, Malachi wrote, "He will sit like a refiner of silver, burning away the dross. He will purify the Levites, refining them like gold and silver, so that they may once again offer acceptable sacrifices to the Lord."¹¹

Have you ever prayed that God would bring you into the refiner's fire? I have. It's a

⁶ John 14:26. Revised Standard Version

⁷ John 14:26. New Living Translation (2nd Edition)

⁸ John 14:26. New American Standard Bible (1977)

⁹ John 14:26. The Message

¹⁰ Isaiah 48:10. New Living Translation (2nd Edition)

¹¹ Malachi 3:3. Ibid

dangerous prayer. Don't pray it unless you're really committed to change, because it's a prayer that God loves to answer.

Easter People know that the flame of God's Spirit requires holiness of heart and life to burn the brightest. It's true that God's Spirit often brings us assurance and comfort, but we should also expect some affliction in life that God will use to burn away some of the stains on our hearts.

You might be wondering if Pentecost was a once and done thing or if it's something we can experience again, today? The answer is, again, "yes!" It was a unique time in history, with God fulfilling prophecy and giving birth to the Church. On the other hand, God continues to fill and refill us with the Holy Spirit throughout our lives. Baptism is the sacrament where we acknowledge the gift of the Holy Spirit in the lives of new believers, but clearly God continues to delight in revealing himself to us over our lifetimes, leading us, convicting us, and refining our hearts by the flame of the Holy Spirit. Pentecost should be a reminder of our baptisms, but also an invitation to follow Jesus more closely, on fire by God's Holy Spirit.

The day of Pentecost was made possible by Easter. Jesus had to rise from the grave and ascend to the Father before he could send the Spirit to us. But the good news of Easter isn't limited to Easter Sunday. We're called to live as Easter People 365 days a year.

Easter people embrace the changes God is bringing into the world and the sacrifices that often come with them. Easter People are marked by hope and faith, trusting in God to form their lives and their view of reality. Easter People learn to live in the tension of the Kingdom of God already here, and yet still coming. Easter people practice their salvation with acts of devotion and love. And Easter people are on fire for Jesus, burning with the light, power, and love of God's Holy Spirit.

We are Easter People, and Alleluia is our song

Please take some time now to ask God to fan the flames of the Holy Spirit in your life.



Bill Reinhart, Pastor
pastorbill@buffaloumc.com