

Pentecost: The Physics of Fire

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Acts 2:1-21:

2:1 When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability. Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs--in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power." All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?"

2:13 But others sneered and said, "They are filled with new wine." But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, "Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel: 'In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy. And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist. The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day. Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'

First Corinthians 12: 3-13

12:3b No one can say "Jesus is Lord" except by the Holy Spirit. 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. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues.

12:11 All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses. For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body--Jews or Greeks, slaves or free--and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

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I want to start this morning with a bit of an introduction.

Hi! I'm Paul Deason. Many of you have seen me in church for years, but this is my first opportunity to bring you the Sunday message.

When I was growing up in Central California, I was torn in my desire to either be an Astronaut or to be a Presbyterian minister. I certainly did not want to continue with manual labor jobs in the fields, the garages nor in the fruit packing houses. When I could not find a US college that would allow me to major in physics and minor in theology, I decided to try for the role as an astronaut. So, I majored in physics and joined the Marines to fly, following the path of John Glenn.

So, I did not become an astronaut. I followed my physics degrees with degrees in experimental statistics, and moved from the Marines to working for the US Army as an analyst. I had an

opportunity to do some humanitarian work in the Middle East and Asia, so took a degree in Anthropology. Finally, I had the opportunity to take the courses to become a Presbyterian Commissioned Pastor in 2018, and so, et voila, here I am. Not a Minister, but along a path of service to Christ and to you, the community of Christ.

Today, we gather to reflect upon the extraordinary event that took place on the day of Pentecost as recounted in Acts, Chapter 2. We focus on the pouring out of the Holy Spirit upon the Disciples. We also look at St Paul's call to service in First Corinthians, Chapter 12 as it applies to each of us.

Let us look at Fire, the physics of fire and Pentecost

Fire is a powerful and mysterious force with the ability to both create and destroy. It can bring warmth and light, but it can also cause devastation and harm. In the Bible, fire is often used as a symbol of God's presence and power. Fire in scripture is used analogously, and spiritually, and physically. In Luke chapter 12, verse 49, in one of the rare glimpses which our Lord gives us into His inmost heart, His thought of His mission, and His feelings about it, Jesus said, "I am come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish that it were already kindled!" speaking analogously of spiritual fire. He says that He is going to set the world on fire-and He did it. His precursor, John the Baptist, as recounted in Matthew 3 verse 11, told the penitents who had come to his baptism: "I baptize you with water for repentance, but one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire." The baptism "with fire" would convey, in its turn, the thought of a power at once destroying evil and purifying good.

In Acts Chapter 2 we see the Holy Spirit manifesting in a powerful and in a tangible way. The text tells us that "suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. (Acts 2:2-3) This was not a metaphorical fire but a physical manifestation of the Holy Spirit's power.

What can we learn from the physics of fire presented to us, this physical manifestation of the Holy Spirit's power?

First, we see that fire has the power to transform. Heraclitus, an ancient Greek philosopher who lived around the 5th Century BC was convinced that fire was the cause of everything in the Cosmos. When Heraclitus spoke of the power of the flaming combustion of fuel and oxygen, it seems to almost defy an adequate explanation. Physical fire is not limited to what we are familiar with every day. For example, lightning is fire, the sun and stars are fire but much hotter than the flames that end up as carbon gas in our experience. The fire of the sun creates almost all energy related to substantial change, such as photosynthesis and evaporation which gives us plant life and rain. The point is, fire changes things, transforms things. Just as the Holy Spirit transformed the Disciples on that day, fire can transform objects and substances. It can turn wood into ashes, water into steam, and metal into liquid. This is a reminder that God has the power to transform us as well, to change us from the inside out and to make us new creations in Christ.

Second, fire spreads. Once a fire is lit, it can spread quickly and consume everything in its path. The tongues of fire that appeared on the disciples did not remain isolated to each individual but spread to everyone in the room. In the same way, the Holy Spirit's power can spread throughout the church and the world, igniting hearts, and transforming lives.

Third, fire is a source of light. The flames that appeared on the disciples provided light during darkness. This is a reminder that Christ is the Light of the World, and that we are called to be reflections of that light. As we allow the Holy Spirit to work in our lives, we must be willing to surrender ourselves to God and to allow Him to fuel our spiritual growth.

Fourth, fire requires fuel. In order to sustain a fire, there must be a source of fuel. Similarly, for the Holy Spirit's power to work in our lives, we must --you and I -- We must be willing to surrender ourselves to God and allow Him to fuel our spiritual growth and service.

Finally, fire can be dangerous. While fire has many positive uses, it can also be dangerous and destructive. We must respect its power and use it wisely. In a similar manner, the Holy Spirit's

power can be misused if we do not submit ourselves to God's will and direction in the service of Christ in His church. We are called to service in kindness and humility to our church, our community, and to God's creation.

St Paul spoke to the Corinthians about service. beginning in verse 11: All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses

There is a famous story that illustrates this spirit of service. It is said that once there was a group of animals who were arguing about who was the most important among them. The lion claimed he was the most important because he was the king of the jungle, the elephant argued that he was the most important because he was the largest and strongest, and the monkey claimed that he was the most important because he was the most intelligent.

As the argument continued, a little bird spoke up and said, "I may not be the strongest or the smartest, but I can still be of service." The other animals laughed and asked how a small bird could be of service to them. The bird replied, "I have a special talent. I can fly high up into the trees and see things from a different perspective. I can use this talent to help you all."

The other animals were skeptical but decided to give the bird a chance. They asked the bird to fly up and tell them what he saw. The bird flew up into the trees and looked down on the animals. He saw that there was a hunter approaching them with a net to capture them all. The bird quickly flew back down and warned the animals.

Thanks to the little bird's unique talent and willingness to serve, the animals were able to escape the hunter's net and remain safe. This story illustrates the importance of recognizing and valuing everyone's unique talents and abilities, and how they can be used in service to others, as stated starting in verse 4: "There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good."

How are you exemplifying the little bird, who may not be the strongest, the smartest, but able with your unique talents able to serve the community of the Lord, the community of God's world.

In conclusion, the physics of fire in Acts Chapter 2 reminds us of the power and presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Let us be open to His transformative work, and allow His light to shine through us into the world. May we be like the disciples on the day of Pentecost, filled with the Holy Spirit and ready to

spread His message to all who will listen. And as St Paul said we have a variety of gifts, a variety of services, but the same Spirit, the same Lord, the same community in the Spirit of Jesus Christ. So, as you leave today, please contemplate the phrase “Leave to Serve” and how you may be of service to your community.

In the name of the Lord, Amen