

## Pentecost Sunday 2021 – Acts 2: ‘The wind and fire of God’

As a teenager I grew up in quite a rough part of London. One night as I was dropping off to sleep I heard a screech of brakes outside and, shortly after that, the sound of a crowd gathering. It was about midnight so I wondered what was going on and crept to my window to look out. Just down the road a car had been dumped on the pavement and ‘torched’. Thankfully no-one was inside but the flames were roaring with the sort of intense fury that you could actually hear.

Needless to say a crowd had gathered to watch this event. It might be midnight on a rough street in London, but **there’s something about a fire that draws people to it**. It’s funny how a fire does that, isn’t it? Hundreds of us will go to a Bonfire Night event for the experience of a big fire. And it’s true in the Christian life too. When John Wesley was asked once why his preaching was so powerful, he replied: ‘I set myself on fire and people come to watch me burn.’

Today is Pentecost Sunday, and it commemorates one of the most important events in all of history. Alongside Christmas and Easter, Pentecost is (I would suggest) the other great festival in the Christian calendar, **a day which changed the world**. The pouring out of God’s Spirit into the hearts of believers, and then out into the community is more than just a religious curiosity, or a good story, or a circus act. It marks the moment that the presence of God is democratised – made available to everyone. The Spirit has always been at work in the world – God’s Spirit comes literally dozens of times in the Old Testament, but always to a select group. Now, at Pentecost the Spirit comes to all God’s people – by the end of this extraordinary day, thousands had come to faith.

And we should never forget that **the Spirit is very specifically the Spirit of Jesus** – it is not just God in a general, vague sense, it is the presence of *Christ* which now fills our hearts and floods out into the world. When Jesus ascends into heaven ten days earlier he makes it very clear that this is the precursor to the sending of his Spirit – no longer limited to his earthly body, the Spirit of Christ can now work *everywhere in all people*.

This is our inheritance. When we celebrate Pentecost we remind ourselves that we are the beneficiaries of this remarkable event in two direct ways. First it is very likely that we wouldn’t even be here sharing this message today if the Spirit of Christ hadn’t sent out God’s people to share the message across the world. **You’re here because someone shared the love of Jesus with you** – and that person from someone else – and so on in an unbroken line back to Pentecost 2,000 years ago.

And second, **what was available to the disciples then, is the same Spirit available to us now**. And so we sing: send the fire today! Send the fire today.

There are many images for the Spirit in the bible – there are comforting ones like the dove, life-giving ones like water, and ‘growing’ ones like the trainer or encourager. But we also need the two we have here at Pentecost – the wind and the fire. These are more disruptive, more powerful, perhaps a bit scarier – but also vital and necessary. It is these images of wind and fire that spread the love and message of God across the world.

**We need the fire** to ignite our passion for God, and also our passion for whatever it is God calls us to do. **We need the wind** to blow us to the places God wants us to go, or towards the people God wants us to love and share his good news with. As Jesus says in John's gospel: 'The wind blows wherever it pleases.' We need the wind of God to blow us wherever it is his pleasure for us to be.

And in this season of change and transition, I believe we need the Spirit which manifests itself in fire and wind more than ever. Over this last year, the church has been forced to press the reset button. We've had to rethink what it means to be church, and adapt to ever-changing conditions. We've stopped some things, changed lots of other things, and actually, wonderfully, started lots of new things as well. But as we try to discern how to come out of this season, my prayer for us as a church is that **we are led by the wind and fire of the Spirit.**

At any point in time – and this is never more true than now – the list of good things that any of us can do is always much longer than the time we have available. So what we need is discernment to know the things which God is calling us to – what I call the *God* things (and not just the good things). And this is where we need the Spirit of wind and fire so much. **It is the Spirit which makes our work effective for God**, which multiplies the fruit – what you might call the good outcomes, the blessings.

How does a small group of followers preach a message one day and suddenly thousands come to faith, and not just one or two? It's not their skills or time or energy: it's the same people with the same message – but there's a new power, a new effectiveness. That is the Spirit of God.

In the end our effectiveness as followers of Jesus is never about how hard we work but about how close we are to Jesus. We need the fire of God to ignite our passion for him and whatever he is calling us to. We need the wind of God to blow to the people and places he is calling us. We need to discern the God things and not just the good things, and let God empower and bless the work.

That is why Pentecost remains a message for us today, and in this season. People get drawn to a fire. People get blown by the wind. **The Spirit of wind and fire will lead us out of this season** – to invest in the right things, to be led to the right people, to take the little loaves and fish we offer and do something *extraordinary* with them. Our resources are tiny – but the King of Heaven has all the resources of the universe at his disposal – and makes those resources available to us.

May God grant us grace to receive the Spirit of God afresh, and to be empowered to be effective ambassadors for him in this season of our lives:

*Breath on me, breath of God, fill me with life anew,*

*That I may think what you would think, And do what you would do. Amen.*