

How Jesus Transforms: Jesus Conflagrates 2
Jo Ann and Tony
June 14, 2020

This is the promised follow-up to our Pentecost message two weeks ago. Thanks, Rick, for your message last week. Two weeks ago we looked at what happened on that incredible Pentecost so long ago... when the Breath of God, the Comforter, the Counselor, the Spirit of the Living God came upon and into each and all the disciples of Jesus gathered in prayer that morning... transforming them into one new temple of God, made without human hands... the Body of Christ in the world. On that Pentecost so long ago, the Church was born.

Before that day, scripture identifies only a few individuals who had been filled with the Spirit... but only for specific periods of time and particular tasks. But when the Spirit came on that Pentecost morning... the Spirit came to stay... not only in those first disciples... but in every disciple who would ever live... so that all of us who are in Christ, through all time, would be able to live the life of the Spirit. So today, we will take a practical look at what it means to live the life of the Spirit now... to be the living Body of Christ in the world today... because Pentecost continues today... and every day. The Spirit wasn't contained to one day back then... but has been present and working every day since. Here's one story of a person whose life was transformed by the Spirit of God.

Blaise Pascal was one of the most important scholars of the 17th century. He was famous in his own time as a great scientist, mathematician, and inventor... Pascal was only a nominal Christian... believing certain ideas intellectually, but living as a practical atheist... like so many Christians today. But on November 23, 1654 everything changed. Pascal was at home alone. He was probably preparing for bed when, suddenly, at around 10:30 pm, he was given a spiritual experience that lasted for two full hours! When it was over, he wrote down some words to capture what was swirling within... this is what he wrote:

FIRE.
GOD of Abraham, GOD of Isaac, GOD of Jacob
not of the philosophers and of the learned.
Certitude. Certitude. Feeling. Joy. Peace.
GOD of Jesus Christ.
My God and your God.
Your GOD will be my God.
Forgetfulness of the world and of everything, except GOD.
He is only found by the ways taught in the Gospel.
Grandeur of the human soul.
Righteous Father, the world has not known you, but I have known you.
Joy, joy, joy, tears of joy.
I have departed from him:
They have forsaken me, the fount of living water.
My God, will you leave me?

*Let me not be separated from him forever.
This is eternal life, that they know you, the one true God,
and the one that you sent, Jesus Christ.
Jesus Christ.
Jesus Christ.
I left him; I fled him, renounced, crucified.
Let me never be separated from him.
He is only kept securely by the ways taught in the Gospel:
Renunciation, total and sweet.
Complete submission to Jesus Christ and to my director.
Eternally in joy for a day's exercise on the earth.
May I not forget your words. Amen.*

Pascal took the piece of paper with the story and sewed it into the inside of his coat, which he kept with him the rest of his life. It was not discovered until after his death. Unlike his first intellectual conversion, this experience was a conversion of his heart... and every day afterward, he lived a transformed life...

So what does all of this mean for us? We are not famous and people will likely not tell stories about us 350 years from now. What does the life of the Spirit mean for us more ordinary people who are today the extraordinary Body of Christ? That's what we're going to talk about today, and we've got some really encouraging news, drawn from that very first experience at Pentecost.

First, let's notice that the Day of Pentecost was spectacular! Here's how the Bible describes it: ***Suddenly, there was a sound from heaven like the roaring of a mighty windstorm, and it filled the house where they were sitting. Then, what looked like flames or tongues of fire appeared and settled on each of them (Acts 2:2-3 NLT)***. Can you even imagine what that must have been like to those who were there? Maybe not! They didn't know it was coming, by the way... all that Jesus had said was to wait for the Spirit. They probably didn't expect earth, wind, and fire! Well, okay, just wind and fire :) ... rushing wind, tongues of fire.

But here's something... we don't see the wind and fire showing up anywhere else in the New Testament. And you probably haven't experienced them... like that...in your own journey of faith. Why not? Because the wind and the fire weren't the point... they were pointing to the point. :) They were there to help those earliest disciples understand what was happening to them. They knew that "wind" and "spirit" were the same word in their language. They knew that fire had been a sign throughout the bible of the presence of God. And so they could understand, right on the spot, that this was indeed the Spirit come to them, and not a freak storm or something. :)

So many others have described their own experience with the Spirit using those same images... particularly fire. The two disciples who walked the road to Emmaus with Jesus said later, "Did not our hearts burn within us?" When John Wesley was finally converted he testified, "My heart was strangely warmed." And Pascal's testimony begins with "FIRE" in capital letters! These experiences were spectacular, like Pentecost, like the experiences of so many others, particularly

when they encounter the Spirit for the very first time. But this is important...those initial experiences were followed in each case by a lifetime of living it out.

And living it out over a lifetime is what the momentary experience gives us power for! So, what WE learn from this is that life in the Spirit is about not only the spectacular event but also the everyday miraculous of Spirit-empowered faith. Like those before us, sometimes our experience of the Spirit may be very powerful...full of wind and fire. Sometimes it will be very quiet... like the still small voice that spoke to Elijah in a cave after, yes, he saw fire fall from heaven on Mt. Carmel. Sometimes the Spirit will even stop showing up in the same way we're used to, so we can learn to experience God differently than we have before. That's a gift. But it's always the same Spirit! It's not about the wow factor on the outside...but what happens on the inside when the Spirit is present. The primary evidence of the Spirit is a transformed life.

So, do you find yourself longing at times for a "big experience"? Perhaps a replay of one you had earlier in your Christian life? Or perhaps you didn't have one quite like that and you wonder if you're missing out on something? Do you want a little dazzle to help you trust that it's all for real? If so, here's a suggestion! Every day this week write down every time you see something miraculous, outside or inside of you...anything that is spectacularly ordinary or even extraordinary. You'll see a lot! And then "sew it into your coat," like Pascal... keep this list with you somehow to help you remember what's really true about you, about all of us who are in Christ... that Pentecost people experience everyday life with God to be spectacular.

Life in the Spirit is not only about the spectacular, but also about the ordinary. Second, life in the Spirit is not only about the speaking... it's also about the hearing. Many Christians are enthralled by the power of the Spirit speaking through Peter... and it was a miracle, he was saying things he later showed he didn't yet understand... and yet, thousands of listeners DID understand what he was saying, in their own languages!

Here we are—Parthians, Medes, Elamites, people from Mesopotamia, Judea, Cappadocia, Pontus, the province of Asia, Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt, and the areas of Libya around Cyrene, visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism), Cretans, and Arabs. And we all hear these people speaking in our own languages about the wonderful things God has done!" They stood there amazed and perplexed. "What can this mean?" they asked each other. But others in the crowd ridiculed them, saying, "They're just drunk, that's all!" (Acts 2:9-13 NLT).

Let's notice some things that really matter today. First, there were at least two miracles happening simultaneously... the first was a miracle of speaking... and not only through one man. Yes, Peter gives the main message... but notice what the listeners say, "We all hear these people speaking in our own languages..." Apparently, Peter wasn't the only one the Spirit was speaking through that morning! Most of these followers of Jesus were Galileans who spoke Aramaic. They were nobodies from a rural, insignificant part of the country... surrounded by Jews from every part of the known world. They were a minority and the vast majority around them viewed them with suspicion... after all, wasn't their leader just executed as a criminal? On their own, no one would

listen to them... they were powerless to prove to the vast crowd that their judgements about Jesus were wrong. But the Spirit spoke through them... in languages they did not know... the miracle of speaking empowers the powerless with hope, courage, and a voice to share the real truth of Jesus that has transformed their lives... in a way that goes beyond their own words.

The second miracle was a miracle of hearing. It was miraculous that thousands of Jewish pilgrims would actually stop to listen to these ragtag rebels at all... but what stopped them in their tracks was that although they knew these hill-country people should be speaking Aramaic... everyone in the crowd heard them speaking in their own languages. Those who stopped to listen experienced the miracle of understanding the good news of the gospel... and we're told later that 3,000 people gave their lives to Jesus that day! As a result of this great two-way miracle of communication... the cultures of the world were united in one community... we will say more about this in a moment...

What does this mean for those of us who live in the Spirit today? Everything. It means that no matter how powerless we feel in the face of the great challenges of our day... no matter how insignificant we feel in the face of the world's suspicion and rejection of the Church... no matter how frightened we may feel to say something meaningful that anyone will actually hear and understand... Pentecost People trust that the Spirit is still giving voice to the voiceless and power to the powerless... and is still causing people who would normally not care to stop and listen... and understand in new ways... and be changed because of it.

For most of us, this doesn't usually happen in big crowds, but one conversation at a time... as we ask God to let us both speak with the Spirit in ways that connect with the uniqueness of the other person... and listen with the Spirit to truly understand what that other person is saying to us. This means we don't talk at each other... or past each other... trying to simply convince people to agree with our ideas about God or anything else. That didn't work for Pascal, did it? He heard and believed truth about Jesus in his head... but his life remained exactly the same.

No, Pentecost happens as we speak to people's hearts, exactly where they are, in ways they can understand... and are heard not because of our many words, but because of our love and transformed lives. Pentecost can happen in our families, our friendships, our congregations, our workplaces... everywhere... as we are willing to participate in the miracles of both speaking and hearing... Pentecost people both speak AND listen... and are amazed when the Spirit enables those who misunderstand, reject, and despise each other to understand... accept... and eventually come to love each other.

What does Pentecost mean for us? It's easy in our culture to think of faith as a very individual thing... it's "me and Jesus". Then we're tempted to think of church as a sort of a "dietary supplement"... something I take when I need a boost... instead of a community of people, a family!... with whom I am now one in the Spirit. It's both! Life in the Spirit is about not only the experience of an individual... but also the experience of a community. The Day of Pentecost was actually the perfect blend of the two...so let's go back and look at the story..

First, we see that ***On the day of Pentecost all the believers were meeting together in one place (v. 1)***. We pointed out two weeks ago that in the Greek this really says they were “together, together.” It’s going out of the way to emphasize their one-ness, their relationships with each other, their being together. And then, when the wind and fire came, it says that ***everyone present was filled with the Holy Spirit (v. 4)***. Notice that the Spirit did not descend on them one by one, or one at a time. The Spirit did not descend on them in order of their spiritual maturity or moral worthiness. The Spirit did not descend on men first and then women, or older people then younger, or any other order of priority. And it was not different spirits, or parts of the one Spirit... it was ***the one and same Spirit*** given to them together. They were “together together” already and the Spirit came on them “together together” as well!

But the individuals there mattered too. When the Spirit rested on them, as Jo Ann said, each of them started speaking in other languages! Each individual participated. And each onlooker heard in their own individual languages, so each of them mattered too. And then it says that ***Peter stepped forward.... (v. 14)***. Peter used his particular giftedness in that moment to preach a sermon that was way beyond what he could have understood. Peter responded to the Spirit but it was the Spirit’s power at work in Peter... along with all the others, FOR all the others. We see a similar pattern in Pascal’s story. His individual experience led him to write one of the most famous evangelism books in history. His encounter with the Spirit made him look outside of himself to invite others to enjoy and to understand what he had himself experienced.

And the same can be true for us. How we understand Pentecost affects how we see our own spiritual lives and our relationships with each other. We don’t just have an individual faith... although each of us must make it real in our own individual lives. We are the Church. We are in this together together... and so it’s important that we live as if that’s true. How do we do that? You know... you’re doing some of us just by listening to this. We gather together, however, whenever we can, even in this unusual format for a while. We love together, which means we look out for each other, check in with each other, care for each other in our moments of distress. We worship together, which is a big deal anytime but particularly now when our world is so polarized... that people who disagree on other things can agree on Jesus together is awesome. And we serve together, because we get to participate in what God is doing in the world... including inviting others to enjoy the goodness of God, like Peter did, like Pascal did.

Saying “we are all in this together” as so many have over the past three months means a whole lot more to us than just getting through a pandemic! :) The Church has been saying that since Day One...because Pentecost people are always “together together” in the Spirit.

What does Pentecost mean to us? Fourth... it means that Life in the Spirit is about not only the transformation... but also formation... and re-formation. The transformed community born at Pentecost was full of the Spirit... but the work the Spirit began in them was not yet complete. As Tony just described, they needed to continue to live in the Spirit together... to be formed over time to be more and more like Jesus... because although the Spirit began the work with them, it was not meant for them alone. Peter proclaimed the good news that this fire was not meant to be

contained... but was to spread from person to person: ***This promise is to you, to your children, and to those far away—all who have been called by the Lord our God (Acts 2:39 NLT).***

The world had not yet been changed on that remarkable Pentecost day. Yes, the original group of 120 grew by thousands that day... and included the whole world... yet it was still only a transformed remnant being prepared by the Spirit to bring the transformation to the whole world. Pentecost initiated a pattern through which the Spirit would continue to transform lives... then form those lives over time to look more and more like Jesus... so that the whole world might be re-formed into what God originally intended it to be... shalom... peace, and so much more... completeness, wholeness, fulfillment... where seeming opposites are reconciled... the lion lies down with the lamb, the swords are beaten into ploughshares, the tears are wiped from every eye, and ***the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea (Isaiah 11:10 NIV).***

Everything necessary was already provided at Pentecost... but that work was not completed in their generation... or the next... or the next... but has continued on into our generation. They were living in an experience of “already but not yet”... the fullness of the Spirit had come, but the kingdom of God was still outworking in them... and through them... and the same is true for us...
... we are already one with Christ through HS but not yet fully conformed to His image
... we are already made holy but not yet living completely holy lives
... we are already empowered but always being empowered
... we are already gifted but not yet fully offering our gifts

In the Spirit, we already have everything we need! The good news is that we don't have to beg God to do what God has already done... the Spirit is already here, within us and the Body of Christ... and what the Spirit began at Pentecost is continuing. The only necessary thing that the Spirit cannot provide is our ongoing commitment to partner with this ongoing process of being changed in order that the world might be changed. That choice is entirely up to us. How is the Church doing with that choice? How are you doing with that choice?

So many people, including so many Christians, are so afraid of what's going on in the world right now. And, yes, the world is a scary place right now... but there's nothing new there. The world has always been a scary place... it was a very scary place on the day of Pentecost. But because a small remnant of Jesus' followers chose to commit themselves to prayer... and to worship... and to community... the power to transform the world and everyone in it was released through them... and began to spread like yeast through dough...

So... how committed are you to partnering with the Spirit in God's ongoing process of change? And how committed are you to worship? How committed are you to living in community? How committed are you to prayer... not simply to pray that God would change those other people... but how willing are you to be as radically changed as they were at Pentecost? What would happen in this world if the billion or so people who call themselves Christians would stop living as practical atheists for a moment and pray to be transformed... and then let it happen? We don't know exactly what might happen... but we want to. So we're going to pray for our own selves to be

transformed... and we also hope to see what the Spirit might do in and through the whole Church... wholly committed in love to God, each other, and the world....and through Hosanna in particular. Because Pentecost people partner with the Spirit in God's work of transformation, in themselves and in the world.

Because that is true...along with the other things we have said about Pentecost people, one more thing is true... Pentecost people are glorious. Do you feel glorious? :) What do we mean by that? Well, the Bible teaches us about "shekinah glory" of God, which shines wherever God dwells. So there's the glory in heaven, yes. But, amazingly, this God of glory has also chosen to be with us! So Moses saw that shekinah glory in a burning bush. The people of Israel saw that glory in Moses' face after he met with God face to face. They saw it in the pillar of fire that guided them by night. And they knew that God's glory had a special dwelling place, the "holy of holies" in the temple closed to all but the high priest.

Then Jesus came in the flesh...flesh like our flesh... and what did the disciples say? **"We have seen his glory, the glory of the Father's one and only Son!" (John 1:14 NLT).** They saw the invisible presence of God made visible in him. They saw the glory of God in human form. He was the holy of holies himself! And then...amazing!... when his Spirit came to dwell in us we, too, *became* the holy of holies! We...you and me, ordinary folks that we are, are now the dwelling place of God's glory on earth! Through our lives we get to make his presence, his glory, visible in the world. **We are the light of the world**, so that all would notice, be curious, and come to see the glory!... just like they did at Pentecost.

And that glory, that light is the fire of the Holy Spirit burning with us....burning until each one of us becomes a burning bush in the world...not just one burning bush for one man to be inspired to bring freedom to one group of people... but countless burning bushes... men and women, old and young, people of all tribes and tongues... revealing God's love and freedom for all people... the freedom that God has already set us free for. The Spirit has ignited a fire that burns but doesn't destroy... a fire that has dispersed outward from Pentecost and will continue to disperser until it spreads throughout the whole world... for all will be made new.

That's what God is up to, even now in these extraordinary times. And we participate. Once our own hearts have been set on fire, it is our invitation and responsibility to tend the flame inside us... then to share it with others, particularly when their own flame has gone dim or cold. This is how Pentecost people cooperate with the Spirit to turn this into a Pentecost world. And so we invite you to ponder how you may do that in these times. The video we have posted with this message is titled "This little light of mine"... it encourages us to consider how our little lights, the flame we carry, can make a bigger difference to others than we ever thought possible...

Video: <https://vimeo.com/173110478>