

Acts 2:1-21

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?’ 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.”

Luke 24:13-27

13 Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, ¹⁴and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. ¹⁵While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, ¹⁶but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. ¹⁷And he said to them, 'What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?' They stood still, looking sad. ¹⁸Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, 'Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?' ¹⁹He asked them, 'What things?' They replied, 'The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, ²⁰and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. ²¹But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. ²²Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, ²³and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. ²⁴Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him.' ²⁵Then he said to them, 'Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! ²⁶Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?' ²⁷Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

THE PENTECOST BURN

Wow! Wouldn't that be great; having Jesus lead a Bible study! That's what he does in our Gospel lesson; he explains scripture to these two disciples on the road to Emmaus, and afterwards one asks the other, "Were not our hearts *burning within us* while he was talking to us?" That's a good case of heartburn if ever there was one. Here we are on this Pentecost, a day that Luke describes in our first reading, when a violent wind and tongues of fire filled the upper room. Fire and burning are great metaphors for what happens when the Holy Spirit lights upon you. John Wesley had his own Pentecost experience, which we Methodists call his "Aldersgate" experience, and he describes it with the emotional reserve so typical of an Englishman saying, "My heart was strangely warmed." Face it, John; the Holy Spirit just set you on fire!

That's the way the experience is described in the Pentecost account that Carol read for us earlier – divided tongues as of fire appeared among them. These guys, who had been hiding out for fear of arrest, rush out into the streets acting drunk and speaking in different languages. Weird. But supernatural experiences are not easy to describe. John Wesley got that feeling after hearing someone reading Martin Luther's preface to the book of Romans – you should put it on your reading list. But here's the thing; Luther was inspired by Paul, and Paul was inspired directly by Jesus. The fire got passed down from one generation to the next so that even today people are feeling the burn, and I don't mean Bernie Sanders. I mean the Pentecost Burn!

And the Pentecost Burn is what we celebrate today. It's not merely the anniversary of a strange event in Jerusalem; it's the beginning of the Church. It's literally the *INSPIRATION* that came to the disciples (that's what the word 'inspiration' means: to have the Spirit inside you). The way Luke describes the scene, it's strange and scary. But really it's no different from what happened to Paul, or to Martin Luther, or to John Wesley, or to anyone who has been *INSPIRED*.

And inspired people don't hold things in. The disciples in the upper room ran out into the streets and started talking to everyone (3,000 people joined the church that day). The two guys whose hearts were burning as Jesus gave them a walking Bible study were inspired, and rushed all the way back to Jerusalem to tell the other disciples what had happened. Paul was inspired to spend the rest of his life starting churches. Martin Luther started a Reformation. John Wesley started the Methodist movement. I became a pastor. *When you experience the Pentecost Burn*, you get busy! You get loud! Often you get in trouble, but that's okay, because the burn feels so good!

I have to ask you, have you ever felt that way? Have you experienced the Pentecost Burn? If so I invite you over the next few months to share your experience with others, even though it may be hard to describe, because it may be the just the sort of story that will literally inspire someone else. I think that the Pentecost Burn is something that today's church desperately needs, and it's not some artificial high brought on by sleep deprivation.

Note what causes these two men on the road to Emmaus to feel the Pentecost Burn: they're with Jesus, but they don't know that. Jesus is in disguise, and all he does, besides calling them foolish, is explain the Bible to them – probably not all of it, but the gist of it. That is what makes their hearts burn within them; that's what causes heartburn. Yes, Bible Studies could cause heartburn. No, Bible Studies *should* cause heartburn, Pentecost Burn. That's what happened to Wesley and Luther and millions of other disciples of Jesus Christ throughout the ages, *and it may happen to you if it already hasn't.*

Now some of you may remember that I was supposed to talk about prophecy today, as part of our "Rise Up" worship series, where we have explored so many of the key elements of the Christian faith, buzzwords like *salvation, belief, suffering, judgment, and the Kingdom of God.* Those are all key concepts and tools that we use to explain our religion. Prophecy is also one that is mentioned in both of today's readings; in Acts Peter indicates that the disciples who are acting rather drunk are either prophesying or going to prophesy (prophesy with an 's' is the verb form of the noun 'prophecy' with a 'c'). In the Gospel lesson Jesus explains himself as a fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy, as the promised Savior of the World. *And they get it!* How do we know they got it? Because they got heartburn!

Now here is my take on prophecy, and you're gonna say this sounds kind of obvious, but there are in our midst good prophets and bad prophets, or true prophets and false prophets, and here's the thing; if you're not well-grounded in scripture, you may not know the difference. If you're not prayerful and staying in close contact with the Holy Spirit, you may not know the difference. And if haven't the Pentecost Burn, you are probably going to be confused or disillusioned...a frequent topic that comes up in our Bible Studies is the frequency of "End of the World" predictions. Every generation has known two or three or more 'prophets' who claim to know when Gabriel is going to blow his horn and the sky is going to fall, and all sorts of bad things are going to happen. And every generation has a whole bunch of loonies, who are really just confused, vulnerable people, like up behind the comet's tail in their special tennis shoes and hang out, waiting for the end of the world. The leaders of such nonsense movement are not only biblically ignorant but their also extreme egotists. If they had studied scripture a little bit more, they might have read the first chapter of Acts where Jesus tells his disciples, "It is not for you to know the times or the dates." (Acts 1:7), or the 21st chapter of Luke where Jesus says, "Many will come in my name,

saying, 'I am he,' OR 'The time is near.' DO NOT FOLLOW THEM!!!" Yes, it's written in the Bible.

But people of weak or little faith and little knowledge are susceptible, because they live in fear or they need their ego stroked – you know, one so called prophet started telling people during a time of worship, individually, what their interests were and where their careers were heading. She made the mistake of calling on one of my friends and getting things quite wrong, but that wasn't what cued me in to the fact that this person was not a prophet. Two other things did: First, she was giving individual prophecies to individual people in front the entire congregation during a worship service, and you have to ask yourself, "Who is she glorifying?" I mean, if the Holy Spirit gives you something specific to say to a specific person, you don't tell that person publically at a time when you're supposed to be engaged in worship *communal* worship; you can tell them privately, unless you just want to draw attention to yourself, hence they want their ego stroked.

The second way I could tell that her prophecies were false was that those kind of prophecies are so unlike the prophecies that we learn about in the Bible. Rarely are the prophecies regarding one person in such a specific way. Yes, there are many Old Testament prophecies that foretell the coming of Jesus, but the vast majority of prophecies are sweeping indictments of groups of people ranging from Temple priests to the entire Jewish population of Palestine. "Thus sayeth the Lord, 'You have not heeded the cry of the needy! You have deprived the widows and orphans. You have not welcomed the stranger.'"

You know what else makes me suspect that this person was a false prophet? Nobody likes what a prophet has to say...at least the first part, because it's usually about the bad things you're doing and your need to repent. That's usually followed by the promise that if you do change your ways, things will be great. God will smile upon you, or hold off on punishing you – that's the story of Jonah and the people of Nineveh.

Is there good prophecy today? Yes, of course. There are prophets who speak of the need for change among people who have gone so far astray who don't even know who God is, of people who have made idols of things, of people who so

afraid to love others because they think the cost is too high. And some prophets are killed; many are merely silenced or ignored. That's the plight of the prophet.

But to get back to Pentecost, the Pentecost Burn is the reason that prophets can endure, because the Holy Spirit cannot be silenced nor can it be discouraged. Prophets can see what God sees; and so they can say what God says; that's why they start their prophecy with "thus sayeth the Lord..." And prophets keep on trucking, even though so few people pay them any attention.

Prophets also do what the Lord commands aside from making prophecies. *They address the challenges we face in building God's kingdom here on earth as it is in heaven.* That is because they have the Pentecost Burn going.

But rather than trying to figure out who is a true prophet and who is a false prophet, I challenge you to BE a prophet. Okay, you may not like the title 'prophet,' but you should aspire to BE PROPHETIC, advocating for God. In order to do that, yes you need to know God. In order to do that you need to pray and study scripture and devote yourself to seeking God fervently. Before you can say what God says, you need to see what God sees. You do that by getting to know God, and by doing what he commands you to do; otherwise you'll have a hard time telling others to do what God wants them to do. YOU HAVE TO GO THERE FIRST SO YOU KNOW WHAT IT'S LIKE.

So may you get a terminal case of the PENTECOST BURN, a case that keeps you on the narrow path your entire life. May the Holy Spirit cleanse you of all pride and prejudice that prevent you from seeing through God's eyes. And may it empower you to boldly advance God's kingdom here on earth. Amen.