

## ***"Holy Fire"***

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Let's open our hearts together in prayer. Let us pray: **Gracious and loving God, like the rush of a violent wind, fill us with your Holy Spirit as if tongues of holy fire are resting upon each of us. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.**

This is an ordinary balloon; it has no life in it. It just continues to lie wherever you put it. It doesn't move. It has no power.

Now, if we take this balloon and breathe life into it - what happens? It's full of air; full of potential; but it's still not going anywhere until that power is released. When the power is released, the balloon can move, enlivened by the power breathed into it. We know that it's going to go somewhere, but we don't know where! Jesus, referring to the Holy Spirit, said we don't know where the wind comes from or where it's going. Jesus wants the power of the Holy Spirit to be released into the world and we don't know exactly what will happen.

What happens to the balloon after it has used up the power that it's been filled with? It's lifeless again. But the power can be replenished - refilled - time and time again. We come to church every Sunday to be refilled with the power of the Holy Spirit.

Nicki Gumbel, the Anglican priest who led the original ALPHA program, uses a different Holy Spirit analogy. Nicki says that the Holy Spirit is already in all of us, something like a little pilot light burning in a stove. When we're filled with the Holy Spirit and the power is released, it's like having the gas turned on to full - and whoosh, we are full of the wind and flame and power of the Holy Spirit.

Another good analogy for the Holy Spirit is copper wire. Copper wire can be used for a lot of different purposes: you can use it for a clothes line, or you can bend it around your gate to keep the cows from getting out. But it has much more potential than that. Inside the copper wire are protons and electrons, and when the copper wire is connected to an electric power source, all those protons and electrons create an electric current. With electric current running in the wire, lots of amazing new things are possible.

At Pentecost, the faithful people were connected to the power source and they did lots of amazing new things. They got hooked up and were electrified by the power of the Holy Spirit, and began to make a huge difference in the world.

Not to carry the analogy too far, but an electric circuit has to be hooked up to an external load like a light bulb or a motor that uses the power, or it will short circuit and blow a fuse or breaker or eventually get so hot that it will burn out. Some of us are feeling a little burned out with the routines of life and we need to get hooked up to an external load. Volunteering and working together on charitable church committees is a great outlet to use the power of the Holy Spirit and it generates in us the fruits of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

The faithful people gathered at Pentecost were filled with the wind and flame and power of the Holy Spirit: there was a sound like the rush of a violent wind; there were divided tongues as of fire appearing and resting on each of them; and they were able to speak in foreign languages that the simple Galilean farmers and fishermen could not possibly have known.

Pentecost literally means "the fiftieth day" and it refers to a day-long harvest festival more commonly known as the "Feast of Weeks" that comes

fifty days after Passover. Pentecost is one of three great Jewish pilgrimage festivals when all of the people of Israel gathered in Jerusalem to celebrate the goodness of God. It's now also one of three big Christian celebrations: Christmas for the birth of Jesus; Easter for the death and resurrection of Christ; and Pentecost for the coming of the Holy Spirit and the birth of the Christian church. It's a celebration of the goodness of God, who's doing amazing things in the world.

At Pentecost, many of the people gathered around watched with awe and wonder and some watched with cynicism, thinking they were drunk. The Holy Spirit filled the faithful who were gathered at Pentecost and Peter's exhortation to the crowds marks the first church sermon. Later that day about three thousand people were baptized and joined the church. It was a celebration of faith just as we celebrate our new members today.

Tony Campolo told a story of what happened when he was asked to speak at a Pentecostal college. Before the service began, eight men asked Tony to kneel so they could lay their hands on him and pray. Tony said he was always glad to have prayer, but one of the men didn't even pray for him. The man prayed for a neighbour. The man's prayer went like this, "Dear Lord, you know Charlie Stoltzfus. He lives in that silver trailer down the road a mile. You know the trailer, Lord, just down the road on the right-hand side." Right about then Tony said that he wanted to interrupt and tell the man that God already knew where the guy lived and didn't need directions. However, Tony said that as the man prayed, he just remained silent and tried to keep his head upright. The man continued to pray, "Lord, Charlie told me this morning he's going to leave his wife and three kids. Lord we need you to step in and do something. God you can bring that family back together."

The prayer time ended and Tony preached. After the service, as Tony was driving home, he saw a hitchhiker and felt the Holy Spirit say that he should pick up the hitchhiker. He stopped, the man got in and they drove a few minutes in silence.

Then Tony said, "Hi, my name's Tony Campolo. What's yours?"

He said, "My name is Charlie Stoltzfus."

Tony said that at the next exit he got off the turnpike and headed back. Charlie just looked at him and then he said, "Hey mister, where are you taking me?"

Tony replied, "I'm taking you home."

Charlie gave Tony a funny look and asked, "Why?"

Tony replied, "Because you just left your wife and three kids, right?"

Charlie was shocked. He plastered himself against the passenger side car door and never took his eyes off Tony. Tony said that Charlie almost passed out when he drove right to his silver trailer and pulled into his driveway. With eyes almost bulging out of his head Charlie asked, "How did you know that I lived here?" Tony replied that God told him.

When Charlie opened the trailer door, his wife said, "You're back. you're back." Charlie went to his wife and began to whisper in her ear as he kept looking at Tony. The more he told his wife, the bigger her eyes got. Finally, Tony told them to sit down, that he was going to talk and they were going to listen. That afternoon Tony led those two people to faith in Jesus Christ.

All of the coincidences are unbelievable and no human could possibly have orchestrated everything from getting Tony to accept the preaching engagement at the Pentecostal college, to the unusual prayer group prayer, to picking up a hitch-hiker, to getting the family back together. It was the work of the Holy Spirit!

William Blake, the author of *And Did Those Feet in Ancient Time* that we sung to the tune *Jerusalem* last week, also wrote a poem about catching the holy fire of Pentecost:

Unless the eye catch fire,

The God will not be seen.

Unless the ear catch fire

The God will not be heard.

Unless the tongue catch fire

The God will not be named.

Unless the heart catch fire,

The God will not be loved.

Unless the mind catch fire,

The God will not be known.

May we all be caught with holy fire. Thanks be to God for the miraculous power of the Holy Spirit! Amen.