

“Breath of God, Fire of Hope”

Sermon for St. John's Presbyterian Church

Acts 2:1–21 and Psalm 104:24–34

Day of Pentecost

Introduction

When I was growing up in Kenya, matchboxes were not always common in the village. Fire was precious. In many homes, the cooking fire was not something you casually allowed to die. Every evening, before people went to sleep, someone would carefully cover the glowing charcoal with ash so that by morning there would still be enough heat to start the fire again. That little hidden glow beneath the ashes meant warmth, food, and life for another day.

And when a family's fire went out during the night, there was no shame in going to a neighbour's home to collect some fire. In fact, it happened often.

What I still remember deeply is this: you did not stand timidly at the door and say, “Excuse me, may I please borrow some fire?” No. You simply walked into the kitchen and announced, “I have come to pick some fire.”

Because in the village, fire was understood to belong to the community.

If your neighbour still had fire burning, then your home still had hope.

One flame could light another home without losing its own strength. The neighbour's fire did not become smaller because it was shared. In fact, the whole village became stronger because people refused to let one another sit in darkness.

And those village kitchens were places of warmth in every sense of the word. Many kitchens had the traditional three-stone fireplace, with a blackened pot slowly boiling over the fire. Sometimes it was sweet potatoes cooking. Sometimes cassava, arrow roots, beans, or maize. The smell of wood smoke and boiling food filled the room.

And something beautiful happened in those kitchens. As you bent down to collect a piece of burning charcoal with a metal shovel or a piece of firewood, you could just lift the lid of the pot and say nothing at all while you picked a piece of sweet potato or cassava to eat on your way home.

Nobody questioned you.

Nobody said, “Why are you eating our food?”

Nobody accused you of taking advantage.

As long as you were not packing food into a container to carry away, what you picked with your hand was understood to be hunger, not greed. It was community life. People understood that a hungry neighbour was everybody's concern.

The fire was shared.

The food was shared.

Hope was shared.

And every time I read the story of Pentecost, I remember those village kitchens.

Because Pentecost is also a story about shared fire.

It is the story of God placing holy fire upon ordinary people so that hope could spread from one life to another, from one household to another, from one nation to another.

Allow me to share some background to this text. Now the book of Acts was written by Luke as the continuation of his Gospel. In Acts 1, Jesus ascends into heaven after commanding the disciples to wait in Jerusalem for "the promise of the Father". Acts 2 is the fulfillment of that promise.

Pentecost, was a Jewish festival celebrated fifty days after Passover. Pentecost (Greek: *Pentēkostē*, "fiftieth") was originally a harvest festival (Leviticus 23:15–21) and later associated with the giving of the Law at Mt Sinai.

It was also called the feast of weeks because it happened 7 weeks after passover

It was a big festival and so Jews from many nations had gathered in Jerusalem, making this event significant for the global mission of the Gospel.

1. The God Who Sends Breath

The Psalmist declares:

"When you send forth your Spirit, they are created;
and you renew the face of the ground." (Psalm 104:30)

In Hebrew, the word for Spirit is *ruach*

While in Greek the word is *Pneuma* – it means breath, wind, Spirit.

The same breath that hovered over creation in Genesis.

The same breath that entered dry bones in Ezekiel.

This is the same breath that came rushing through the upper room in Acts 2.

The Spirit is not merely an abstract force.

The Spirit is the life-giving presence of God.

Psalm 104 celebrates a God who sustains creation continuously:

- oceans teem with life,
- creatures receive food,
- the earth is renewed.

Creation itself depends on the breath of God.

And church family, so do we.

Without the Spirit:

- worship becomes routine,
- ministry becomes exhaustion,
- faith becomes memory,
- and the Church becomes merely an institution.

But when God breathes again, dead things awaken.

2. Waiting Before the Wind

Before Pentecost came, there was waiting.

The disciples had seen the risen Christ.

They had heard His promises.

But they still waited in uncertainty.

And perhaps that is where some of us are today.

Waiting for healing.

Waiting for direction.

Waiting for reconciliation.

Waiting for strength.

Waiting for God to open a door.

Waiting can feel uncomfortable because we prefer control.

But Acts teaches us something important:
sometimes God prepares us in the waiting before He empowers us in the sending.

The disciples waited together in prayer, dependence, and unity.

And then suddenly—
Luke says:

“A sound like the rush of a violent wind came from heaven.”

Notice:
the Spirit came from heaven.

This was not human energy.
Not clever planning.
Not emotional excitement.

This was God’s initiative.

Pentecost reminds the Church that true renewal does not begin with human strength.
It begins with God.

3. Fire Upon Ordinary People

Then Luke tells us:

“Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them.”

Fire in Scripture represents:

- God’s holiness,
- God’s presence,
- God’s purification.

But notice where the fire lands.

Not on the building.

Not on the temple.

On people.

Ordinary people.

Fishermen.

Former tax collectors.

Women and men who once hid behind locked doors in fear.

And now they are filled with the Holy Spirit.

The miracle of Pentecost is not simply strange signs and sounds.

The true miracle is transformed people.

Peter, who denied Jesus publicly, now proclaims Him boldly.

Fearful disciples become courageous witnesses.

And church, that is still how the Spirit works today.

The Holy Spirit still:

- strengthens the weak,
- comforts the grieving,
- convicts the wandering,
- empowers the timid,
- and renews the Church.

God delights in using ordinary people for extraordinary grace.

4. The Fire Was Never Meant to Stay in One House

In the village where I grew up, fire was never meant to remain in only one kitchen.

If one family still had burning charcoal, then the whole community could keep cooking.

The fire spread from house to house.

And the remarkable thing was this:

the fire did not grow weaker because it was shared.

It multiplied warmth.

It multiplied life.

That is Pentecost.

The Holy Spirit did not come only for the comfort of the disciples gathered in one room.

The Spirit came so that the fire of God could spread into the world.

The disciples leave the upper room and begin proclaiming the mighty works of God in many languages.

People from every nation hear the Gospel.

Parthians, Medes, Egyptians, Romans — all hear good news.

Pentecost reverses Babel.

At Babel, humanity was divided by pride and confusion.

At Pentecost, humanity is gathered by grace and understanding.

The Spirit breaks barriers:

- ethnic barriers,
- language barriers,
- social barriers,
- generational barriers.

Peter quotes the prophet Joel:

“I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh.”

Young and old.

Women and men.

Servants and free.

The Church of Jesus Christ is born as a Spirit-filled family where hope is shared freely.

5. A Church That Shares Fire

Brethren, I wonder sometimes if the world is filled with people whose fires have quietly gone out.

People smiling on the outside while inwardly exhausted.

People carrying grief silently.

People losing hope.

People spiritually cold.

And maybe the calling of the Church is not simply to protect our own little flame.

Maybe we are called to share the fire of Christ.

Not through loudness.
Not through judgment.
Not through superiority.

But through kindness.
Hospitality.
Prayer.
Encouragement.
Compassion.
Presence.

Perhaps sometimes people come into the life of the Church saying, in one way or another:

“I have come to pick some fire.”

And what a tragedy it would be if the Church had no warmth to offer.

But what a beautiful thing when people encounter:

- living faith,
- genuine love,
- patient listening,
- hopeful worship,
- Spirit-filled community.

Because one flame can still light another without losing its own strength.

6. “Everyone Who Calls on the Name of the Lord”

Peter ends with this promise:

“Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

Everyone.

The tired.

The grieving.

The doubting.

The lonely.

The fearful.

The searching.

Pentecost is about grace reaching outward.

The fire of God is not sent to destroy people.
It is sent to bring life.

And perhaps someone today needs to hear this clearly:

God has not abandoned you.

The same Spirit who renewed creation,
the same Spirit who filled the upper room,
the same Spirit who strengthened the apostles,
is still moving today.

Still breathing life.
Still renewing hearts.
Still giving hope.

Conclusion

Acts 2 reminds us that renewal begins when the Spirit moves among God's people.

Church family, Pentecost tells us:
the fire still burns.

The breath of God is still moving.

And maybe today someone sitting beside you needs a little fire —
a little hope,
a little encouragement,
a reminder that they are not alone.

May St. John's Presbyterian Church be a community where:

- fire is shared,
- burdens are shared,
- food is shared,
- compassion is shared,
- and hope is shared.

Because the Spirit of God was never meant to remain hidden in one room.

The Spirit was given so that the whole world might know the warmth and life of Christ.

Thanks be to God.

Amen.