

“The Spirit Brings Life”

Acts 2:1-21

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Rev. Jeong Park

Fair Oaks United Methodist Church

It is good to be back after my preaching seminar in Nashville! I heard a cute story. “One pastor never prepared during the week, and on Sunday morning he'd sit on the platform while the church was singing the hymns desperately praying, "Lord, give your message, Lord give me your message." One Sunday, while desperately praying for God's message, he heard a voice from above, "Ralph, here's my message. You're lazy!" God will not help our work, if we are not prepared. The Holy Spirit always wants to work in us and through us. And we are not passive participants of God's work, but we are always active representatives of God's mission. God calls us to work for transformation of the world.

Today is Pentecost Sunday. Pentecost refers to the fifty days after Passover. The disciples gather together in a house and remember Jesus Christ's ministry after His death. They also revered Jesus' promise that the Holy Spirit comes and dwells in them. We celebrate our church beginning and witness the presence of the Holy Spirit. Pentecost is the first significant personal experience of the Holy Spirit. Let me ask you this question. What is the simplest word you can use to describe the Holy Spirit? And how do we know that the Spirit dwells in us? This Sunday morning, I want to invite all of us to embrace the Holy Spirit.

Our Scripture reading describes the Holy Spirit like a "wildfire". In verse 1-3, "when the Feast of Pentecost came, without warning there was a sound like a strong wind- no one could tell where it came from. It filled the whole building. Then, like a wildfire, the Holy Spirit spread through." These images show us that the nature of the Holy Spirit is something **wild, unpredictable, dangerous and uncontrollable**. We cannot measure the Holy Spirit's influences, impact and changes. This image of a rushing, mighty, and powerful wind nevertheless did not extinguish. When we experience the power of the Holy Spirit, it will transform our lives, our church, and grant us energy to move forward. We want to know more about the Holy Spirit.

How can we experience the Holy Spirit? The images of a strong wind and a wildfire symbolize God's passion. If you are not excited about what you do, you cannot make any difference in your life. Powerful new beginning began at Pentecost. Where can we find the fire in us? We need to check in on ourselves. Are we excited, nervous but anxiously looking forward to the Holy Spirit that

can reshape and redesign our church's future? A German Lutheran theologian and a scholar of comparative religion, Rudolf Otto (1869-1937) explains the experience of the Holy. He calls the experience "Numinous". It has three components: The Latin phrases *mysterium, tremendum, et fascinans* (fearful and fascinating mystery). *Mysterium* meaning "wholly other, experienced with wonder and *Tremendum* meaning fear, majesty, energy, and vitality and *Fascinans* meaning attractiveness in spite of fear and terror.

The experience of holiness is a personal powerful experience that God is working in us and through us. When the Holy Spirit comes to us, the Holy Spirit encourages us to dream, makes us visionary people who can envision new possibilities. Our Bible describes that the Holy Spirit came and filled the whole building. If we apply this image to our empty souls, we can better understand. What can fill your soul? Do wealth, pleasure and personal glory fill your soul? The early Christian father, Augustine made a humble confession. He said, "There is a room that we cannot fill, but only God will do."

John Wesley, our Methodism founder inspires us. Following a difficult and discouraging mission trip to America, he questioned his faith. In 1738, at the age of 34, John Wesley attended an evening worship service in London which moved him deeply. He wrote his experience of the Holy Spirit in this way, "In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society on Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther's preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while the leader was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, *I felt my heart strangely warmed.*"

After he felt the Holy Spirit, he became the leader of the Methodist movement. John Wesley emphasizes passion, saying that "**I am not afraid that the people called Methodists should ever cease to exist either in Europe or America. But I am afraid lest they should only exist as a dead sect, having the form of religion without the power.**" After he embraced the Holy Spirit, Methodism spread through England and America. When the missionaries reached the West Coast, they were given two specific goals: One to spread the Bible, and the other to spread the Holiness. Here holiness means personal holiness and social holiness. A Spirit-filled congregation is led by the Holy Spirit's vision and dream with a wildfire passion.

Where do we most need the Holy Spirit in our church? I hope to see there are many more fellowship opportunities like a men's support group, mission support group, new energy for leadership. I envision that our youth group and young people ministry continues to grow, and participate more in our morning service. The real work of the Spirit gives us blessings with different languages,

ages, gender, gifts and talents. We are different in many ways, even our personalities are unique. Each of you is very special to God's eyes. The work of the Holy Spirit challenges us to move out of our comfort zones and dares us to move forward even taking risks. The work of the Spirit sometimes causes us fear, and discomfort, but brings us a new life out of the dead. The Spirit encourages us to be bold and makes us courageous to take a next step. May the Spirit of God continue to work in us, touch on our lives, challenge us and guide us in our direction on our pathway to renewal. Amen.