

Sermon

The Rev. David Martin

Sunday, June 9, 2019 (Pentecost Celebration)

Acts 2:1-21

Your Head Might Explode

Did you all hear that story earlier this morning? Did you hear it? 'Cause if you did, I can't imagine why you're still sitting down in those pews. A bunch of people were gathered – just like us – right here, right now – and suddenly there was a rush of violent wind! And then tongues of fire appeared out of nowhere! Just floating around in the air, I suppose. Can you imagine that! And then a flame rested on each person's head!

Wow! Fire! On top of their heads.

And if that wasn't enough, each person on fire then had the ability to tell of the wonder of God's amazing love so that no matter what language a non-flaming person spoke, they understood exactly what was being said. Everybody now knew about the redemption of the world by the death and resurrection of Jesus.

That must have been something to feel, see, and hear. Feel the wind. See the fire. Hear the spoken word so you understood it.

What if that happened to us today? What if a huge wind rushed through this very room? What if each of us had a fire on top of our heads? And what if each of us had the ability to speak of the reason we have gathered here today so absolutely everyone could understand it?

What if we felt, saw, and heard right now everything those early followers of Jesus experienced on that Pentecost? Let's think about that.

What if St. Mark's felt that violent rush of wind?

You know what? I think we already have. Although the majority of us here today weren't in attendance to feel it.

Ten years ago, a gust of wind came through St. Mark's and took a huge chunk of the congregation and blew it away. Just like a tornado, a hurricane, or a typhoon, that wind did a heck of a lot of damage. St. Mark's was a skeleton of what it had been. But what was left behind was a dedicated group of loving, accepting, Christians who didn't let that wind destroy this faith community. Instead, with a lot of love and commitment and faith and determination, St. Mark's has grown into an amazing community of love and acceptance for every single person who walks through our doors. On this LGBTQ+ Pride weekend, I look out on this amazing and wonderful diverse group of people and I say "thank you" to that wind, because I, a gay man, now have the honor and privilege to proudly serve you as your deacon.

But you know, not all wind is violent. In fact, some moving air is gentle - more like a breeze. And even a slight breeze can change the direction of sailboat. What if today some of us feel one of those gentle winds which slightly changes our course?

I don't know. What if you feel the nudge to change something in your life? What if a conversation with someone about their new job makes you stop and think about the fact that you've been needing to change your career as well? Ah, you feel that gentle wind pushing you in a new direction?

What if you suddenly feel yourself being blown away from some a self-destructive behavior? Substance abuse? Spending too much time at work and not with your loved ones? Bingeing on Netflix instead of reading something that might improve your mind and your attitude? You feel pushed by a little wind to a make a move you know will completely change your life for the better. Ah! Doesn't that gentle breeze feel good?

Now, what if some fire showed up here among us right now? Sure, we had some flames to start our service, but what if real fire just suddenly appeared. Maybe it would land on some of our heads like it did in today's epistle reading. Oh man, that would be really cool.

Would it feel kind of warm and cozy? Would it illuminate your path? Would it be uncomfortable up there above you?

In today's story, the fire didn't seem to have a purpose other than to indicate which people were chosen by God, or the Holy Spirit, to spread the Good News.

So, if WE were to encounter fire today, would it be for the same reason? I don't think our fire would be so benign. If fire showed up at St. Mark's this morning, I don't think it would gently rest on our heads. I'll just bet that fire would be lit under our pews.

Yeah. What if that fire was actually lit under us instead of over us?

And what if it really felt like fire? A fire under you that made you move!

How many times in a week, heck, how many times in a day, do you see or hear or read something and you throw up your hands and say something like "This is insane! Something's got to be done about this!"

I believe this could be the Holy Spirit getting ready to light a fire under us. But before that fire can ignite, most of us simply shake our heads, wring our hands, and either decide there isn't anything WE can do about it, or move on to some other outrage and forget the last one.

But what if we allowed that fire to kindle under us- *in* us? Instead of being afraid that fire is going to burn us - or CONSUME us - what if we allowed that passionate flame to guide us to make a change?

Look at the current situation with immigrants and those seeking asylum in our country. We hear news stories that seem impossible to believe. Thanks be to God there are people who allowed a fire to be lit under their comfortable bottoms. They got up and got moving. Parishioners here at St. Mark's have been working closely with Albuquerque Interfaith to physically help where help is needed. Others have spent many hours helping process these children of God from another country and help them get to sponsoring families elsewhere in the country. The parish of St. Michael and All Angels has been in charge of taking over many buses: providing information, clean beds and clothes, help with directions to sponsors, and a friendly, loving, compassionate face of Jesus to many people who have come to the United States looking for a chance at a better life.

Has any of that been easy? No. Is it tiring and sometimes discouraging work when you don't even know what the outcome will be for the people you've helped? Yes.

But when a fire is lit under you, or in your soul, when you feel a deep passion, there is nothing else to do but act!

That's what happened to the apostles today. A fire was lit and they acted. They spread the Good News of God's redemption without even thinking about it! The text makes it seem like they didn't have any choice. We didn't read that any of them put their hands on top of the head to try and put out the fire, did we? The Holy Spirit put the fire in place and off they went.

Oh, if only we were the same. Think about it. What fire are you trying to extinguish?

I should really spend some time with...

I've been putting off...

I haven't spoken to that person in such a long time...

I've got some free time, I could really volunteer at...

That organization does such great work and always seems short-staffed...

I believe the Holy Spirit is kind of like a permanent flame thrower. The Holy Spirit is constantly lighting fires – on our heads, under the part of the body we sit on, in our hearts, in our souls

And I believe all too often we spend most of our time putting out the fires the Holy Spirit tries to ignite. We want to drench those embers. Don't do it! God challenges us to stoke those fires. We are challenged to be on fire.

Finally, what if, like those apostles, we were able to share the love of God with everyone? It doesn't matter where that person is from or what language they speak. It doesn't matter if you've ever met this person before. What if you had the ability to let anyone – everyone - know about God's love?

There is a comic called "Coffee with Jesus." It sometimes can be found in the local Alibi newspaper but it comes from the website Radio Free Babylon. It is always a four-panel comic strip. A person has coffee with Jesus. That person appears in the first and third panel. Jesus responds in the second and fourth. A recent strip hit home:

*Carl: Should I add a little fish symbol to the corner of my landscaping company's logo, Jesus?*

*Jesus: To what end, Carl?*

*Carl: Obviously so people will know they are dealing with a Christian company.*

*Jesus: Let's leave it off and see if they can figure that out by your workmanship, work ethic, and honesty instead.*

Jesus is telling Carl that we don't spread the Good News of God by TELLING people we are Christians. We do so by SHOWING people we are Christians.

It appears the apostles were given gifts by the Holy Spirit to speak in tongues so everyone could learn about God. That is not required of us. We can use a universal language. Our friend, Carl, who had coffee with Jesus, thought the best way to teach others about God would be to use marketing techniques. Sounds kind of self-serving.

We are called to spread the Good News of the Gospel, the redemption of the world by the resurrection of Jesus, the all-inclusive non-judgmental love of God. Sometime that requires words like the apostles received and shared today. Sometimes it requires us to keep our big mouth shut.

Take communion to someone who can't make it to church

Make a simple phone call to someone you haven't seen in a long time.

Makes amends with someone – even if it wasn't your fault – especially if it wasn't your fault.

Get to know your next-door neighbors.

Sign up for newsletters about topics which concern you. Find out how to get involved with them.

Don't be so hard on yourself – and make sure you help others do the same.

Don't argue with each other – especially over trivial matters.

Always listen when someone is speaking. Look them in the eye and listen, instead of thinking what you are going to say next. Ask someone to have coffee with you.

Ask someone to have coffee with you.

So, let's all take a deep breath and think about ways we can experience that first Pentecost:

Feel. Feel the wind and follow where it might lead us.

See. See the fire. FEEL the fire and let it fill our hearts with passion to act.

Hear. Hear the word of God and share it so everyone can understand.