

Shaped By Fire

Acts 2:1-8

June 4, 2017

The largest business in a small Midwest town was completely engulfed in flames. Five departments from all over the area were battling the fire, but to no avail. The mayor announced that any fire department who could extinguish the fire, there would be a \$50,000 reward. But seemingly nothing could be done.

Then off in the distance came the mournful sound of a lone fire engine. The siren kept getting louder as it got closer. Finally it was in sight. What appeared was a 1950's era fire truck, driven by its 75 year old fire chief, with three 80 year old firemen riding on the back.

They went flying by the crowd of onlookers, crashed through the front doors of the burning building, disappearing into the flames. Slowly the flames began to dissipate, and the fire was extinguished.

The old firemen came stumbling out of the building, hair singed, their faces covered with soot, and their coats still smoking. The mayor congratulated them and gave them a check for \$50,000 and asked them what they would do with the money. The chief said, "The first thing we are going to do is get the darn brakes fixed on that darn fire truck."

Fire, in the Old Testament, represented God's presence. It was a pillar of fire that led the Israelites through wilderness to the Promised Land. In the New Testament fire represented the Holy Spirit. Today is Pentecost when we celebrate the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on those first believers and the day we mark as the birthday of the church.

The Holy Spirit came 50 days after Jesus' resurrection. Forty days after his resurrection Jesus returned to heaven, but before he left he told his followers to stay in Jerusalem and wait for him to send the Holy Spirit.

So ten days after Jesus ascension into heaven, his followers are gathered together and it says a sound like a violent wind started to fill the room they were in, and tongues of fire were resting on them.

Why tongues of fire? Tongues symbolize speech and the communication of the gospel. Fire symbolizes God's purifying presence which burns away the undesirable elements of our lives and sets our hearts a flame to ignite the lives of others.

Remember John the Baptist telling those who came to be baptized by him, that I am baptizing you with water, but one greater than me will baptize you with the Holy Spirit. That's what happened at Pentecost to those early believers. The wind and the fire of God's Spirit swept into their lives and they were given power and a sense of direction and they were changed forever.

How many of you have been some place where they make glass. A lot of people go to the Fenton glass company just across the river into West Virginia. You can watch them make glass. They heat the glass in furnaces up to temperature of 2500 degrees Fahrenheit. Then a glass blower will reach into the furnace with a hollow rod, and chooses just the right amount of molten glass for whatever he is making and he starts the shaping process. Then he blows the glass into the beginning shape and then uses wooden molds and tools to finish the process.

God does the same thing with us. At our creation, God breathes life into us. Then at our baptism, God breathes the presence of the Holy Spirit into our lives and the shaping begins to take place. God too, uses a wooden tool to shape us in the fire of the Holy Spirit. That tool, of course, is the cross of Christ.

Once the glass piece is shaped and molded, then it is cut. The actual cutting is done with a cutting wheel. Because that cutting generates so much heat that the crystal would shatter, the wheel is constantly cooled with water. The water acts as both a lubricant and as part of the cutting process.

Each piece, though created to look like each other are in fact, unique. No two glass cutters hold the piece or cut the piece, in exactly the same way. Each piece is unique, just like you and I are a unique creation of God's.

The final step in the process of making something out of glass is the etching or stamp of authenticity that is marked on the piece. This further enhances its' value and in some cases makes it priceless.

I believe the stamp God places on our lives, is the calling he places on our lives. Last Sunday we talked about our purpose, God's plan for our life. We may be still trying to fully discover what that may be, but he etches it on our hearts and our spirit.

On that first Pentecost, the fire of the Holy Spirit came down on those first believers and it spread like wild fire. The people went out into the streets and witnessed to their faith in every language and dialect, it was truly a miracle. The gospel spread throughout Jerusalem and then the surrounding towns and villages and to other countries and throughout the world. That same spirit that was given to those first believers on that first Pentecost is available and at work in us today.