

May 24, 2015

Pentecost

How many of you like to go camping? What is the best part of camping???

Nature? Quiet? Being away from everything- tvs, phones, computers?

My favorite part of camping is the camp fire! Not only will we cook on it (or burn on it if I am cooking), but we keep warm by it, I love to sit and just stare at it... I love a camp fire! How about you? But have you ever gone camping and it rained the entire time you were there? Not much fun, right? And why is that? Because you couldn't have a camp fire. Sure, you probably dug the hole and set up the wood, but you could never actually set it on fire! What good is a campfire without fire?

That brings us to today's topic. What good is the church without a little fire?

I want to take you back, to 1st century Jerusalem.

The Jerusalem Jesus knew nowhere near resembled the city David conquered in the tenth century BC. At that time, it had been a small, isolated hill fortress, valued more for its location than its size or splendor. In the 33 years of his reign (37-4 B.C.), King Herod transformed the city as had no other ruler since Solomon. Building palaces and citadels, a theatre and an amphitheater, bridges and public monuments. These ambitious building projects, some completed long after his death, were part of the king's single-minded campaign to increase his capital's importance in the eyes of the Roman Empire. No visitor seeing Jerusalem for the first time could fail to be impressed by its visual splendor. King Herod worked hard to build up the city and his power and prestige within the Roman Empire.

Jerusalem was also the center of religion. During important religious seasons, many devout Jews would flock to Jerusalem. During these times the enormous crowd of pilgrims into the Holy City inflated its population of 25,000 to at least four or five times that number. This brought an important stimulus to the city's economy. Besides creating a huge demand for food, lodging and sacrificial animals, the incoming Jews were required to spend a tenth of their annual income within Jerusalem. This "second tithe" was in addition to the tithe they had to pay directly to the temple.

The overcrowding and the excitement of the festivals frequently led to outbreaks of violence and anti-Roman rebellion. On more than one occasion the huge mass of pilgrims had been stirred up by zealous nationalists or would-be Messiahs. For this reason, the Roman governor made a point of being present during these occasions, and extra soldiers were stationed at strategic locations throughout the city.

The increasing tension would eventually lead to a revolt against Roman power in 66 AD. This war would last 4 years and would end in massive deaths, starvation, and the burning of Jerusalem and the temple.

I am not sure that I can possibly put into words the tension and struggle that was happening during the time of Jesus' death and resurrection. So let's watch a clip. This clip is from the NBC series A.D. The Bible Continues.

(PLAY VIDEO CLIP)

So what has happened so far...

Rev. Thomas Brown writes, "Chapter one of Acts has Jesus ascending into heaven and telling the disciples to wait in Jerusalem until they receive the Holy Spirit. Peter holds an administrative board meeting where they elect Matthias as a replacement to Judas.

In chapter 1 it numbers the people present at 120. It says they were in constant prayer. Can you imagine it, 120 people packed into a house waiting? Waiting for what? They are waiting for the Holy Spirit. But what is the Holy Spirit? I will open that question up to all of you. What is the Holy Spirit???

If people in today's time have a hard time describing the Holy Spirit, you can imagine the disciples were at a loss as well. They were to wait, in a very precarious time, in a violent place, for ... something that would come. What would the Holy Spirit look like? What would the Holy Spirit do?

They are scared. And rightly so. The Roman guards are out to kill them. Jesus is gone. Now they are huddled in an upper room. Not exactly a position of power or a

demonstration of faith. But, let's give them a little slack, Jesus told them to wait in Jerusalem, and the scripture records their being in constant prayer, which is a good sign.

Can you imagine being one of these disciples? Scared. Away from your family. Your leader is gone. And people want to kill you. You are huddled in a small room just trying to stay alive. And you are told to... wait. I'm sure by now you'd have your doubts. If nothing happened soon, many of the disciples will decided to leave and go back home, to their families, where it is safer.

They wait there for 10 days... waiting and hiding. And then what happens?

SURPRISE!

They hear the sound of a violent wind.....Some describe a tornado as sounding like a freight train, and it probably sounded something like that. Rumbling and shaking, almost like they could feel a vibration in the building.

The sound moved into house where the followers are all together and not only is there is noise, but SURPRISE... suddenly there are something like tongues of fire over everyone's heads.

With a big SURPRISE....everything changed!

God re-entered the world and specifically the room. Something indescribable happened. Something like a big noise and like fire - something like only God could do happened. These men and women has been praying for something...They did not know what it was, how it would come or even if they would know when it happened.

The gift of the spirit changed all the people in the room. With the sound everything changed.

- Cowards became preachers

-Uneducated fisherman spoke with power and authority not to mention the whole multi-language option.

-Jews wondering by on the street heard the gospel and believed

SURPRISE – things were different!

The presence of God changes everything - if we want it to happen.

The real question that every Christian must answer...

-Do you want to be filled with the Holy Spirit?

-Do you want to be used by God?

-Are you willing to be on fire with the Holy Spirit?

What is that sound? People from all over the city hear the noise. They come to see what happened. The Jews that came in response to the sound were curious and then they were amazed by the power of the Spirit. They did not come to be changed, however; they were curious and open to seeing something new.

The disciples were told to wait, and they did. I doubt they expected anything this life changing. However, they waited and prayed and expected something!

Then, SURPRISE, with a dramatic noise and a supernatural light show God entered the room and filled these people with power. God changed everything.

With a SURPRISE, the Holy Spirit came down and lit the disciples on fire. They were now on fire for ministry, on fire for mission, and on fire for evangelism. With a SURPRISE the disciples could now speak in different languages and transfer their fire for God to others. So people who came with open hearts and minds, left on fire with the Holy Spirit.

Two thousand years later, we sit here in pews, singing songs, and praying. Are we still on fire with the Holy Spirit? Are we on fire for missions, ministry, and evangelism? Do we let God continue to inspire, fire, and SURPRISE us?