

“Holy Wildfire”

- This past weekend was Memorial Day, and in addition to the gratitude for our service men and women who gave their lives
 - My family and I spent the day on the patio, and near a bbq grill!
 - Perhaps you all did something similar- the weather was great,
 - And with the rectory kitchen still disassembled, a grill was the perfect choice
 - I went simply this year- hamburgers with cheese!
 - And with garlic butter toasted buns, and grilled purple onions for the adults
 - And here is the relative part to today, Pentecost Sunday...
 - I was using 80/20 beef... and it was even more juicy than it is sometimes
 - I was cooking eight patties on my two burner grill, essentially using the entire lower surface
 - And I made a strategic mistake... I flipped them, and then sort of mashed them down a bit... just a bit, not too much
 - Not enough to dry them out... but enough that much of that juice, that yummy, flavorful, flammable juice, went down into the grill
 - It flamed up. At first, not too much, but then more.
 - I had to move the patties around to keep them from becoming “burnt offerings”, so to speak
 - Moving them just made the flames higher, and spread everywhere
 - And they did not go out... I realized that I was in a bit of trouble when the hair on my arm was singed after trying to flip one
 - I decided I needed some water, and quick, so I ran into the house, got some water in a cup
 - And rushed back out to douse the flames
 - But not too much... I didn’t want to start over with the heat
 - Just a little, just to bring them back under control
 - Burgers turned out pretty good, the buns may have gotten a little too toasted, but still edible
- Later in the week I turned my attention toward Pentecost Sunday and this sermon

- And I thought forward to the Holy Spirit's arrival on the scene today
- The tongues of fire resting on the apostles' heads
- And the baptisms we were planning
- Fire, and water.
- And us somewhere in between these powerful symbols that signify life, death, balance, and God in our midst
- I wondered to myself if the waters of baptism might just be the very thing that allows us to be fully present to the fires of Pentecost
- Protecting us, perhaps, allowing us to be exposed like the burning bush and not consumed.
- Maybe among many other way of thinking about these two symbols, Baptism is God's way of saying:
- The fire may look hot, it may look out of control, it may be scary sometimes, but you have nothing to fear...
- You are anointed and can be a part of this Holy Wildfire, that spreads and reshapes this world for the good
- As Episcopalians, we believe our intentional and conscious walk with God begins at Baptism
 - It is when we formally join God's family through spiritual adoption
 - We become children of God, as the reading from Romans says, and heirs
 - For us parents who bring little ones to the baptismal waters, it is we who make some big promises
 - We vow to raise our children in the light and love of the Lord
 - We promise to teach them the faith and the values that we believe are right and holy
 - We promise to bring them in to God's Kingdom that is breaking in, and remaking creation at every moment, to help our kids grow up aware of it
 - It is a huge undertaking amidst all of the other parental responsibilities, there is no doubt
 - I remember for both of my boys deciding to resist the urge to do the baptism myself
 - And instead stand there with Katy as 100% parent.
 - Because I knew these promises were big, and could only be made with my full attention
 - And could only be kept, as we say, with God's help and the help of a community of faith
 - We recommit, as parents, and bring in to this family a new member
 - Now God already knows and loves this new baby- God created it!

- But now we name that holy truth, we turn our own hearts and minds to God's presence
- We commit to making sure we know and love God in our households, like God knows and loves us
- This new baby begins their intentional and conscious walk in the faith
- Then one day, should the baptized person desire and choose it, they are Confirmed
- It is then that they take the reigns of their own walk with God from their parents
- And continue the good work begun
- When intentionally and consciously a part of this family of God, we are able to become aware to God's movement all around us
 - Especially the Holy Spirit
 - While we believe that the Holy Spirit had been moving through creation all along, moving over the dark waters in Genesis 1
 - Blowing through the hair of the prophets of the Old Testament, offering wisdom and courage
 - Troubling the water at the healing springs, giving hope and healing to people who had none
 - But it is now that the Holy Spirit takes center stage in the apostles' lives, coming into the spot light
 - Scripture has the disciples gathered together again following Jesus' ascending into heaven
 - They are without him again, but in a very different place than they were before his resurrection
 - Jesus had told them to wait there in Jerusalem for what was coming next
 - And they had no idea what was coming... what it would do to them, for them, and eventually even for people beyond Jerusalem
 - They are gathered perhaps in the liminal space Deacon Tim spoke about last week
 - And also at place of hope- if resurrection was possible, what did God have in store next?
 - The reading from Acts out of The Message translation says that the Holy Spirit arrived with gale force winds
 - And the fire, that some way and some how looked something like tongues of fire above their heads,
 - Spread like "wildfire"
 - I imagine them running for their lives out of the sudden fire that was being whipped by the wind

- On a side note here, that is really the primary purpose of a church having a building, if you ask me
- We have this beautiful space only so that when we get here, God can melt our hearts of stone
- Mend us, heal us, put fire in our hearts and bellies
- And then blow us right back out there into the world
- They ran out into the street and behold they were able to speak in different languages
- This moment in Scripture is symbolically a reversal of that apocryphal story of the Tower of Babel
- It was back then that humanity, in its hubris, tried to build a tower to reach heaven and become gods
- They were scattered by God, and given different languages so that they could not understand each other
- And it was at this moment that God symbolically reunited everyone
- And instead of hubris and selfishness to build a tower and become gods, God gave them a message of hope and peace
- And a mission to help remake, recreate, this world into the place God had always dreamed it could be
- I believe that if they could speak in these languages, they could also hear and understand in these languages
- God bridged the gap between people, races, cultures, histories, politics and ideologies...
- With the word of Good news, that everyone who calls upon the Lord will be saved
- There is resurrection, and God's love is stronger than death
- The Holy Spirit had given them just enough fire to get them moving- and moving quickly
- It reminds me of our ladybugs that we release today
- If you ever wonder why we release ladybugs on Pentecost, you can entirely blame it on your priest
- In my first couple of years after being ordained, I was desperate for something that was red, that we could release
- And that did not harm the environment like red balloons
- Thus the idea was born- ladybugs!
- They bravely crawl out into the unknown and begin working to change a garden for the better
- They are capable of eating 50-60 aphids in one day, keeping those harmful insects from hurting your plants
- Did you know that ladybugs have even traveled to outer-space?

- They were on board a NASA shuttle in 1999 as a part of Eileen Collins' experiments
- They were able to survive even in microgravity settings
- Resilient, adaptable, and a force for good
- And you can store them- for 2-3 months in the fridge waiting to be released
- The cold slows them down, and they wait ready for the warmth to begin moving around again.
- Let's be like that!
- This morning we get the water and the fire
 - When it gets too hot, remember that God has covered you with the healing and comforting waters of Baptism
 - God has promised that we will never be abandoned, never alone, and as adopted children we have God's peace at our fingertips
 - Jesus says, do not let your hearts be troubled.
 - And yet we do not get to stay sheltered in place, safe in our watery cocoons of comfort and shelter
 - We are set ablaze, not to be consumed, but to be God's agents in the world
 - Taking this light and fire and water to everyone who needs it
 - Mending it, offering something greater than pride, selfishness, and hubris
 - To be a part of something much bigger than ourselves that has been going on since the beginning of time
 - And this world needs to hear about good news, peace, and healing.
 - Now more than ever, it seems
 - May God light a fire in our hearts, and under our... tails
 - May the fire of good news spread like wildfire, being stirred up with gale force winds
 - And let it start with you and me

Amen.