



# Auburn Presbyterian Church

*Passionately loving the Lord Jesus Christ and radiating that love to every individual*  
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## **“On Your Mark, Get Set, Go!”** **Acts 2:1-21, 36-39**

[continuing the reading of Acts text, vss. 36-39: “Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.” When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. <sup>39</sup> The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.”

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Our hope this morning is that you got at least some of the impact the visitors to Jerusalem would have received, as God’s Spirit finally released all the pent-up enthusiasm of Jesus’ first followers. I want to move into the text with you this morning, and then look at our comparative lack of enthusiasm. And finally, I want to set you up for praying and receiving the filling with God’s Spirit that changes everything.

Let’s join with these disciples in Jerusalem. From Luke 24:49, when Jesus had been raised from death, is appearing to his disciples and is saying ‘good-bye’, he says, “I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.” Now, putting that on this year’s calendar, this event—the Ascension—would have been about May 17th. Today is May 27<sup>th</sup>, ten full days later. The disciples—more than the Eleven, we’re pretty sure—then return to Jerusalem. They hang out at the Temple, telling people about Jesus, but there’s not much response. I imagine people started moving away from these guys, when they saw them come into the Temple courtyard. *What—are these guys nuts?*

I have a hunch. During the evenings, I think the disciples got together at someone’s house in the City, or across at Bethany—perhaps Mary, Martha and Lazarus’ home. There, they talked of Jesus, too. But now as they talked with each other, they began to remember more. On one night, one of the disciples’ remembers another scripture that Jesus had fulfilled. And then another. And then another. Excitement begins to build. They were discovering what had been right before them all along, as if for the first time, because Jesus had opened their minds to ‘get it’ about him. As the days wore on, their visits to the Temple got more intelligible; they had more to say, based on the scriptures that were so central to the Jews’ life. They began to see some glimmers in the eyes of the people they met in the Temple courtyards. This made them all the more excited. They met at night again, and again, and their excitement grew. Now, they could hardly sleep. They were remembering more of what Jesus did. They couldn’t wait to get back to the Temple and tell these people the new things they remembered, the new connections they understood.

And then, BOOM! There is a sound of a mighty wind that came and filled the house where they were staying. It seemed like tongues of fire appeared and touched each of them. They were filled with the Holy Spirit!

The blessing of Pentecost reverses the curse of Babel. Remember Genesis 11, after the Flood, people again rebelled against God's rule of the world, and started building a tower so they could take over heaven? One of the sources of the people's strength was their unity—they all spoke the same language. So God put his finger into it, and confused their languages so they couldn't understand each other. But here at Pentecost, God does the reverse—though the disciples, filled with God's Spirit to overflowing, think they're saying the same words, the hearers perceive many different languages being spoken, the same languages they speak in their home countries. *Babel reversed*—a new language, a new order, and it's all about Jesus! This is AMAZING!

Peter's sermon cuts to the heart the people in the crowd, for attracted by God's miracle of hearing, they are fully open to what Peter and the others are telling them. They receive the Holy Spirit, too, and join in this new life of Jesus. The record says, some three thousand responded to this altar call, right then and there.

Now, how does our enthusiasm compare to this? Not so hot—no “licking tongues of fire” on US, thank you very much. In fact, don't we kind of look sideways at people who seem *too* excited about Jesus?

Then maybe we don't know the Spirit of God at all. Do you think the Holy Ghost, to use the King James phrase, is like “Casper, the Friendly Ghost”, who wouldn't hurt anyone, who is shy and peaceful, and makes no waves?

Weren't you paying attention to what God says? The Holy Spirit is like a fire! The Holy Spirit is like a rushing wind. The Holy Spirit shakes things up. Mary gets pregnant with the Son of God by the Holy Spirit. The oldest prophets fall down in ecstatic utterings when the “breath of God” blows on them. The disciples are propelled into taking on the whole world by the Holy Spirit.

But most of US ask, “Where's the fire?”

People under 60 sure ask, “Where's the fire?” The way we “do Church” is so bo-ring to most younger people; but as the founder of Young Life—a Presbyterian pastor—said, “It's a sin to bore kids with the gospel.” No wonder youth ministry is so often “in trouble”, or looked at with suspicion, by the larger church. At least there's some fire there!

I have a theory why the Holy Spirit gets relatively little attention by most churchgoers. The Holy Ghost IS spooky; it's the scariest part of the Trinity. See, God is “in His heaven”. Jesus was “back then”. But the Holy Spirit has the power to come to us NOW, and challenge us with actually giving up control of our lives NOW. (Speaking in tongues can be a symbol of that release of control, but that's a tiny part of what “giving God control” means. Deep down, I think we know that. But if we jump on ‘speaking in tongues’, it justifies us, we think, from giving God control.)

Some of our elders have joined me in a study called, ‘Experiencing God’ by Blackaby and King. One of the first things the authors point out is that in the Bible, God almost never gives people the big picture of what He wants them to do. Instead, he asks them to take one, small step. If we follow His direction in faith, then He gives us the next small step. He may have us wait—for years. All of this is a huge challenge for us. Here in the first unit of this study, we are being challenged with giving up control of our lives to God. How dare there authors do this? These guys are daring us to “step into the fire”!

God is not particularly interested in giving us a nice life—did you ever think of that? Look at God’s faithful followers in the Bible. Few of them got nice, simple, comfortable lives. Their lives were harder, more challenging, with high highs, and very low lows. God never asks people to do easy stuff, does He? Haven’t we cut God down to our size, to make us more comfortable?

And yet, don’t you want MORE? There’s a book for pastors that came out a few years ago called, *Dying for Change*. The point the writer makes is that people—and not just the young—would pay a price for the adventure that is “the Jesus life”, but are not willing to sign up for the ‘same old thing’. They want to be involved ‘hands-on’ in mission, in making a difference. They don’t want to be in a class, and certainly not on a committee. Their time is too valuable to waste.

Think of any adventure story you’ve ever read, or movie you’ve ever seen. What draws us in to the story? It’s the uncertainty, the surprises, the risks and danger of the adventure. One of the reasons the Mormon religion grows so fast is that they demand that everyone go on mission, talking to people about their religion. They go away from the home they’ve known; they get training with other missionaries who are as uncertain and excited as they are for adventure. They meet people they’d never meet otherwise. They face failure, rejection and hardship, and the challenge to solve problems on their own that can make or break the success of their mission. Or they can sit with us and sing polite songs with a beat about a God they really don’t know very well. How does that comparison look to you?

Where’s the fire? What are you doing with and for Jesus that makes you face risk you cannot control, face problems you don’t know how to solve, with people just as committed—and just as anxious—as you are? Every organization tends, like Newton’s Second Law of Thermodynamics, to run down, get soft, lose energy—unless. Unless the Spirit of God sets a fire! Unless the awe and love we have for God gets so heated up that we just have to tell others, bring them to God in any way we can figure out with God’s help, helping them feel God’s approval and the joy of sharing in His work.

Where’s the fire?

No fire? Then, is God present among us at all?

It’s not just the Jews of Jerusalem who should be cut to the heart. We should be cut to the heart, repent, and BEG GOD for His FIRE! Why doesn’t our church provide ways for people to catch fire and burn with the Spirit of God?

Fire brings light. And this world needs it.

In Ohio many years ago, my family was visiting friends of my father, and we planned to go to the county fair. It was a humid summer night, and everyone in the county seemed to have decided to come out. We had to part a half-mile away, in some field. Together, we made our way across the lumpy earth, then the grassy shoulder of the road. Where were we going? The lights told us. The lights told us that “that’s where the action is”. That’s where we wanted to go. (And somewhere, there was fire burning, that was boiling water that was turning a generator that was pumping electrons over copper wires that was bursting forth from the lights on ever tent, on poles high in the air, on the big carnival rides.)

Where’s the fire—in us? Where’s the out-of-control adventure among us? Won’t you BEG GOD for His Spirit, and honor Him with your obedience to His control, and give up your own? God likes people who recognize Him. God loves people who obey Him. And in the end, that is all that matters in life, for anyone who claims to love God.

Beg God. And then, get ready. (*Session members, this is especially for you.*) Like the disciples at Pentecost, you have been standing on your mark for a long time. When you beg God for His fire, you’d better get set. Together, powered by the fire Spirit of God, let’s go with God to bring people to the redemption and new life that comes only from Jesus Christ.

On your mark, get set, . . . . **O God, send Your fire!**

[This sermon preached to the congregation of Auburn Presbyterian Church, Auburn, California on May 27, 2007, by Rev. Kenneth B. Winter.]