



Wind and Fire
A Pentecost Sermon
Acts 2:1-19

Sunday, May 20th, 2018 ~ Pentecost
First Federated Church of Peoria, Illinois
Rev. Dr. Forrest Krummel, Jr.

The manse, or parsonage, in our first call was a roomy ranch-style home that sat on 3 acres, 3 miles outside of a town of 350 in Warren County, Illinois. While there we got a taste and an appreciation of country living. I bought a pair of “chore boots” from the Farm King and was laughed at the first time I wore them to hog lot. I was awakened at 2 in the morning to watch a farmer “pull a calf”. I became familiar with the sweet dusty aroma of the town’s feed store. We had a “burn barrel” near our vegetable garden on the west side of the yard. Under two large acorn trees wild asparagus grew in the spring. It was the first time I had ever eaten asparagus.

Being city slickers getting into the lifestyle of rural America we noticed that many people “burned off” their gardens in the fall. One afternoon we decided to burn off our garden. We pulled out our 250 feet of garden hose and set fire to the garden. Before long we heard the crackling of dried plants as ghostly smoke rose into the air.

A little while after we started the fire an unexpected autumn blew in from the north. The lazy fire perked up and grew in intensity. Small flames of debris floated up heavenward straight toward our fence line and a dry cornfield waiting to be harvested. Sue manned the hose while I ran from spark to spark stomping out new little fires. All the while I couldn’t help but to think of what people would say if the cornfield went ablaze.

Fortunately the corn field didn’t go up in smoke. We put the fire out. And I learned that wind and fire are a dangerous combination. They are dangerous because you cannot control them. They have a mind of their own. They can destroy, but they can also bring about new beginnings.

Pentecost is a sign of new beginnings. On the day of Pentecost, our lesson says, when the faithful were gathered together in one place, a sound like a mighty wind swept through the place and tongues like fire danced above the disciples heads. Each were able to speak as they never had before. And people who came to Jerusalem from the corners of the known world - Parthians and Medes, residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Egypt, visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, new converts - heard about God’s mighty power and amazing love in their own native tongue.

Last week I was the guest of a colleague at the Southside Mission’s annual banquet in the Peoria Civic Center ballroom. A sold out event attended by about 1000 people heard the Rev. John Perkins, a civil rights leader turned best-selling author, deliver the keynote address. At 88 he came to the stage with a very unsteady gait, one that made me quite nervous. But as he spoke, the years seemed to peel off of his shoulders and his voice became steadier.

As a young man he was beaten near death by an angry mob of white folks. As he lay in his hospital room he hated all white people. But then he looked around at the white doctors and nurses who cleaned his wound and were so kind and caring. He realized that there were “good” white people and “bad” white people. His “conversion moment,” though, came when his young son came home from “Good News Club” singing a little song that he learned that day. He sang the little song over and over again..

“Jesus loves the little children,
All the children of the world;
Red and yellow, black and white
They are precious in His sight
Jesus loves the little children of the world.”

Quoting from his most recent book, *Do All Lives Matter?: The Issues We Can No Longer Ignore and the Solutions We All Long For* the Rev. Jenkins said that the question of whether black lives matter is “an insane question. ... All lives matter.”

“God never wanted people to ask that question,” he continued. “(The question) shows the misery in our society. (It) shows how much we dislike each others. We are of one blood. There is no such thing as a black race or a white race or a yellow race or a red race; there is only the human race.”

We are so good, so adept, so skilled at focusing on our differences that we are blind to that which binds us together. Pentecost presents us with a new day. It seems to me that the challenge that Pentecost lays before our feet is one to tearing down the walls that divide us. Perkins challenged those in attendance last Monday night to “Listen. Listen. Listen. Listen. ... We need each other. ... Listening is prayer. Prayer is hope, prayer is expectation.” Prayer is redemptive.

Speaking through the Old Testament prophet Joel God said,

“In the last days I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh,
and your sons and your daughters will prophesy,
and your young men shall see visions,
while your old men shall dream dreams.
Even upon the lowliest I will pour out my Spirit;
and they shall prophesy.”

With Pentecost a new chapter is dawning; a new chapter is being penned in our lives. Are we up to the challenge of tearing down walls, of being color blind, and to see the face of God in the faces of the least, the last, the lost and the lonely?

Amen.