

**A SERMON GIVEN BY REV. PAUL J. KOTTKE
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Sunday, May 16, 2010

Title: God's Indwelling – A Holy Fire

Scripture: Acts 2:1-6 and Revelation 21:1-6

Theme: The Holy Spirit within us gives us the spark for the passion for sacred living.

Perhaps you saw this article on the front page of the *Denver Post* yesterday, of Frank Bingham's graduation from the Sturm College of Law, University of Denver. You will remember about three and half years ago, November 10, 2006, he, his wife, and two children were crossing the street in Larimer Square area of downtown Denver. A drunken driver sped through a red light, smashing into all four of them. It happened so quickly that there was no time for reaction. Frank Bingham had a wonderful life. He was a stellar principal at Bromwell Elementary School just north of the Cherry Creek shopping center. Bromwell was/still is a school of choice for many of the Denver Public School families. And then in the flash of a drunken eye all that was taken away. Frank was the only one of his young family to live. I am sure that there were days when he wished that he had died as well.

Denver's mayor, John Hickenlooper is quoted: [Bingham] was the voice of innovation for school principals around the state... He was so full of ideas. After the accident, he was so empty, almost like a shell... He was determined to come back, but he was lost."

And now less than four years later he is graduating from law school. His classmates selected him to deliver the commencement address. His theme: hope, love, and forgiveness. "My faith survived, and my ability to love survived, and forgiveness is a big part of that." Forgiveness – it is one thing for me as a pastor to speak of forgiveness – easily dismissed. But for Mr. Bingham to say that

forgiveness was an essential part of his survival – well, one has to take note.

In the article, Bingham is quoted as saying, "I'm going to talk a bit about how other people, who had survived similar tragedies, lost their entire families, reached out to me and became friends. They provided me with incredibly valuable testimony that these things can be survived and that we are stronger than we think we are."

That is so true. I am aware within our own congregation of how many of you have survived devastating tragedy in your own lives. And yet you have managed to go on living, not without struggle – but you have been able to reclaim meaning and purpose in life. I am also aware that for all of us, of how close we are all the time to having our hearts broken, our lives caved in. How is it then that the vast majority of us do not collapse into an existential anxiety? How is it that we can have the temerity to claim the goodness of life, of life and even of God's grace? Frank Bingham gave the answer that has been proven true throughout the ages – a statement that strikes to the core of our Christian faith: hope, love, and forgiveness. Archbishop Desmond Tutu has a quote: "Without forgiveness, there is no future." How important that we learn the wisdom of forgiveness!

The liturgical year speaks to the power that has enabled Frank Bingham to live, and not just live – but to live with a purpose. It is found specifically within the Easter/Pentecost cycle.

For the disciples, things were going well, very well – a huge crowd cheered Jesus on as he entered Jerusalem that day long ago. He taught at the Temple with people packed the space – momentum was clearly on their side – then the arrest and the humiliating death. All was over so quickly. There was no expectation for anything to come. Yes, the women had strange tales of life victorious over death. But it is clear with all four of the gospel accounts, the disciples struggled to make sense of all this in their lives. The gospels vary as to what happened. The tradition has it that the Risen Lord was with them in some form for forty days, teaching them with a new understanding.

Another way to envision this is what happens naturally following a tragedy. People pull within for a period of time. That period of time, as hard as it is, is a sacred time. Each family knows this sacred time following the death of a loved one. A time for setting aside our normal busyness, a time for gathering, a time for remembering, for telling stories, for tears and for laughter. The scriptures refer to this time as “40days/40years” – not an actual calendar time but a time of wrestling with our shadows, our fears – and finding there the presence of God and the ability to continue on living. For Frank Bingham, it was well over a year that he struggled with depression. For others, it can be two or more years. The time varies with each individual.

A time comes when the wrestling is over with and the spirit comes. This is the story of Pentecost. The mighty Wind of God. The Holy Flame. The disciples who had been gathered in the Upper Room, without authority, without direction – found themselves filled with a spirit of that brought forth a boldness, a passion. This is the Spirit which Jesus had promised and is an extension of God.

Notice the characteristic of this Spirit – These simple disciples from Galilee who were not trained in the languages of their day, none the less began to speak in a variety of languages, such that all who were gathered in the courtyard outside, could understand what was being said in their native language – a type of

General Assembly for the United Nations – the Spirit was the translator, the Spirit was the unifying presence of God. This is critical to understand. Far too often the Spirit of Pentecost gets interpreted into a far too restrictive understanding of how God engages the world.

Pentecost is a clear affirmation of the characteristics of God – not of conformity to a narrow belief system, but of a commonality found through our diversity, in the diversity of languages spoken that day in such a way that brought forth understanding and not division; in the same way that the Apostles were able to go forth into the world and bring a gospel message that was relevant to vastly different people in their context; in the same way that Creation itself witnesses to the kaleidoscope of God’s Beauty.

Pentecost therefore is the culmination of the Easter message. The Risen Christ of Easter witnessed to the power of life over death. The Christ event witnessed to a profound reconciliation over the brokenness of our human experience through God’s love. But it is the Holy Spirit of Pentecost that represents the Second Coming as promised by Jesus. It is the Holy Spirit of Pentecost that represents the birth of the Church as the Body of Christ within the world. It is the Holy Spirit of Pentecost that is the presence of God within us that none can take away. It is the Holy Spirit of Pentecost that holds precious the vision of Revelation: “See, here is the home of God among the people of God, and he will wipe away every tear from their eyes.” It is the Holy Spirit of Pentecost that witnesses to our ability to continue to live life even through the profound struggles of human tragedy. It is the Holy Spirit of Pentecost that enables us to claim hope, love, and forgiveness for the sake of life. It is the Holy Spirit of Pentecost that calls us forth as Disciple leaders of God’s love into the world, practicing Stewardship and Hospitality.

Come, Holy Wind. Blow through our lives to give us the strength of Divine Abundance. Come, Holy Fire. Grant us Thy passion to witness to a radical faith of hope, love, and forgiveness!