



May 23/24, 2026 – Festival of Pentecost

Preacher: Pastor Scott Oelhafen

Sermon Theme: Fire Up with the Holy Spirit

1. With Repentance 2. With Spiritual Growth 3. With Christian Service

Sermon Text: Acts 2: 36-47

"Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ." ³⁷ When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" ³⁸ 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. ³⁹ The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off--for all whom the Lord our God will call." ⁴⁰ With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation." ⁴¹ Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day. ⁴² They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. ⁴³ Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. ⁴⁴ All the believers were together and had everything in common. ⁴⁵ Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. ⁴⁶ Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

Dear fellow believers of the Savior we call Jesus,

I finally will admit it. Sometimes, sermons can seem a little long. Any truth to that statement? A preacher once spoke at the chapel of Yale University. He spoke for 15 minutes on how the Y in Yale stood for "**Youth,**" then another 15 minutes about how the A stood for "**Ambition**". He spoke for 15 more minutes on how the L stood for "**Leadership**" and finally spoke for 15 minutes how the E stood for "**Energy.**" As this preacher finished his message, a student came forward and knelt in prayer. The preacher was caught off guard and had to ask: "Son, what in my message moved you so?" The student answered: "Actually, I was just thanking God that this school isn't the Massachusetts Institute of Technology!" Of course, it's not the quantity, but the quality of the message that matters. The apostle Peter, one who first spoke the words of our sermon text would agree. Some sermons are like Tabasco sauce: fiery and give heartburn. At the end of this sermon, I pray you'll consider this to be a Tabasco type of message and I pray you have heartburn – God's kind of a heart burning with greater faith in Jesus. So on this festival of Pentecost and as we focus on the words of Acts, chapter 2, let's **Fire Up with God's Spirit.** Let's fire up with repentance. Then, let's fire up with Christian growth. And finally, let's fire up with Christian service.

The sermon Peter preached in our sermon reading today, wasn't more than a few minutes long. But, it packed quite a punch. Through that one sermon, the Holy Spirit converted more than 3000 people. It signaled the birthday of the Christian church. And the day was called Pentecost. Christians like to celebrate the birthday of Jesus, and the world pauses to celebrate Christmas. Just a few weeks ago, we celebrated His resurrection, and most of the world recognizes it as Easter. Today is Pentecost and not many people know about it. Let me give you some background. Pentecost was originally a Jewish festival, that took place 50 days after Passover. Remember, Pentecost means 50th. It marked the end of the barley harvest and the beginning of the wheat harvest. Pentecost was also the anniversary of the giving of the Law on Mount Sinai. Now, I doubt this background of Pentecost will fire you up. But, it just might explain why thousands of Jewish pilgrims flocked into Jerusalem on that first Pentecost and ended up taking the Gospel message of Jesus Christ home. In other words, what started out being a farm festival, ended up in Acts, chapter 2 as a harvest of human souls. No doubt, these early believers were fired up with God's Spirit, 50 days after Easter.

Fire is what I want you to think of when we refer to Pentecost. The color red is what we see on our altar, pulpit, on my stole and it reminds us of fire. We think of the tongues of fire that appeared over the disciples' heads on Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came upon them. The fire of the Holy Spirit moved Jesus' ordinary followers to do extra-ordinary things: like perform miracles, speak in foreign languages that they had never studied, and preach like there was no tomorrow. Think about how the Holy Spirit acted in power. Just eight weeks before, Peter and the other disciples were cowering behind locked doors for fear of the Jews. Now, the Holy Spirit had transformed them into bold witnesses for Jesus. That was then. This is now. So where is Pentecost these days? Where's the fire? Actually, it hasn't disappeared. The Holy Spirit is still active and living in the heart of every Christian. So let's carry on the torch of Pentecost and fire up with God's Holy Spirit.

How can we do that? First, let's Fire Up with the Holy Spirit with repentance. That's the point Peter was making in the opening words of our reading: ***Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both LORD and Christ.*** Peter shows us how to **Fire Up with God's Spirit**. When Peter spoke to the crowd in Jerusalem, he hit them hard as he told them the truth. He told them where they stood spiritually. He convicted them in their sins and told them they were spiritual and eternally lost because their sins separated them from God. Now, the crowd could've ignored them. People have been doing that for thousands of years to God's call to repent. The crowd could've gotten rid of Peter and the others. Sadly, people have been shooting the messengers who brought God's Word. Instead, these believers did something different. Our reading says: ***When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles: "Brothers, what shall we do?"*** They believed Peter's words. His words hit home. That tells us something about our Christian witness: when we share God's Word with others, they do take it to heart, more than they admit or we even realize. The Holy Spirit makes sure of

that because as the Bible clearly says: *No one can say Jesus is LORD except by the Holy Spirit.*

If we ever have trouble getting fired up for Jesus, if we ever feel that our new life in Christ is no big deal, let's go back to the heart of the matter. Remember Peter's directive: ***Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins.*** The word Peter uses for ***repent*** means to have a total change of heart, to take a spiritual U-turn, and go the opposite way. We need to remember that it was our many sins that sent Jesus on His great rescue mission from heaven, to earth, and to the cross. It was our sins that made Him willingly bleed and die. And it was our sins that made the Son of God give His perfect life as the perfect sacrifice. If we want to **Fire Up with God's Spirit**, it means we need to take a long look in the mirror of God's law and admit our guilt and sins. And it means we need to look to Jesus and Him alone as the only way to heaven, the only truth, and the only life. It's the only way the Bible gives us to be saved and go to heaven.

The Holy Spirit doesn't rip us to shreds so He can leave us in despair. Instead, He shows us our deep need for His forgiveness, so that He can build us up again with the Spirit and make into the people He wants us to be. He wants us to **Fire Up with God's Holy Spirit** with Christian growth. Have you ever thought: "If only I could see some miracle like they did that first Pentecost, then I would really be fired up for Jesus? If only I could see someone cured of terminal cancer or a stroke patient restored to health – then, I'd believe." God can do that. God has done that. But, know this -- God doesn't ordinarily work through miracles, though miracles happen everyday. In the early Christian church, God gave his apostles special power to perform miracles to back up their teachings. But, for serious spiritual growth, we find what those early believers did. Our reading tells us: ***They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.*** There's only one way to grow spiritually, and that is to faithfully use the tools of the Holy Spirit. With Father's Day right around the corner, tools are a favorite gift families give the dads in their lives. But, in our reading, the Holy Spirit promises His gifts to us of His power tools. These power tools aren't named *Binford* or *Milwaukee Tool*. No, the Holy Spirit gives us more faith every time we use His power tools of the Gospel in Word and Sacrament. Every time we hear God's Word, every time we remember our Baptism, and every time we take the LORD's Supper, the Holy Spirit fires us up with Christian growth and helps us handle tests of faith like medical troubles, family struggles, temptations or even death. But, not everyone thinks this kind of spiritual growth is necessary. In the late 1800's, a pastor was inviting a man to his church, without much success. They were sitting in the man's living room. It was winter, and coal was burning in the man's fireplace to keep those in the house warm. The man objected that he could be a strong Christian without attending church. The pastor finally stopped talking. He stepped up to the fireplace, took a tongs pulled a blazing coal from the fire and set it off by itself. In silence, the two men watched as this single coal smoldered and finally burnt out. Finally, the man spoke as he studied that burnt-out coal: "I see your point." Sometimes, we wonder why we're not fired up with God's Holy Spirit. But, then we need to examine our worship patterns, especially in the summer time when there are so many other things to do. We wonder

why we spiritually struggle, but then we need to ask ourselves when is the last time read the Bible seven days in a row. Get in touch with the Holy Spirit's power tools! The Bible tells us: ¹⁸ ***But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:18)*** because when we do, we do get fired up with God's Spirit.

But, it doesn't end there. As we **Fire Up with the Holy Spirit**, we want to serve Jesus with a thankful heart, thankful for what he's done for us. Those Christians in the book of Acts had a spirit of serving Jesus that just wouldn't quit. Our sermon concludes: ***All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the LORD added to their number daily those who were being saved.*** Talk about serving and going the extra mile. They had a clear understanding that our faith isn't something we keep locked up so no one can see it. Faith that's alive, faith on fire, is something that can be seen. It's the way we care about each other, how we help each other in need, and the reason why we commit the best of our time, talents, treasures, and testimony to share God's blessings with each other. God promises when we do, He will add to our number daily. He will add more believers because we'll be sharing our faith with others. **So let's fire up with God's Holy Spirit.**

When the disciples were walking with Jesus on the road to Emmaus that first Easter, I'm sure they didn't feel like cheering. They thought that Jesus was dead. Their hopes and dreams for the future were dead too. But, in the greatest comeback in history, Jesus rose. He walked and talked with those Emmaus disciples. And when they realized it was Jesus who was with them, they said to one another: ***"Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us? (Luke 24:32)."*** My friends, when we let go of our worries and put our faith in Him, we too **Fire Up with the Holy Spirit.** May our hearts burn, today and always with Jesus. Amen.