

John 20:19-23

Acts 2:1-21

Introduction

In our reading from Acts of the apostles we heard about flames appearing above the disciples heads. That's quite a strange picture isn't it. Can you think of different sorts of flames that we come across?

Gas hob, fire, log fire, candle, acetylene torch, fire eater, house on fire, match, oil lamp, steam engine, lighter, Bunsen burner.

Some of these are tremendously powerful, like a fire which can burn things thrown into it, the gas hob which cooks our food, the acetylene torch which can melt metal, a house fire that can burn a whole house down, forest fire or oil fires terrible destructive power – but some of these flames are quiet and gentle and produce soft light, - a match or candle, gas light. Fire is something we all have to respect as it can burn and destroy as well as giving us light and heat.

When the spirit came upon the disciples at Pentecost they saw it as flames of fire. We need to seek out the Spirit because although he is very powerful he isn't intrusive and will not come into our hearts and lives unless we welcome him in. The disciples were waiting,. Jesus had promised them that he would send them his holy Spirit to lead and guide them and to give them power from on high. They stayed where they were told to and were waiting for him to come. We need to believe that if open ourselves to God and seek him we will find him – and we will.

In our reading the holy spirit was described as flames of fire with the sound of a rushing wind.

Like fire the spirit can be strong and powerful in our lives *hold up first flame*

The Holy Spirit has the power to transform us completely, to change us and deal with our weaknesses and failure. He also can work in us to do God's work healing and transforming in ways that we don't expect and can't even begin to imagine. It

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is the Holy Spirit that can work through us to bring people to know God and to bring healing to their lives

Sometimes the Spirit is gentle and quiet, whispering deep into our needs and telling us what is right *hold up second flame*. When Elijah was in real trouble he went up onto a mountain top to find God and looked for him in a storm, in the fire and in the thunder but he wasn't in any of those. God spoke to Elijah in a still small voice – and that is how he often speaks to us. His voice is gentle and loving and quiet and can get drowned out by all the other voices we hear in our minds but if we listen very carefully and ask him to help us hear him we will hear God's spirit speaking directly to us, reassuring us, telling us how much he loves us, guiding us when we aren't sure what to do and encouraging us when we please him.

Like fire, the Spirit is warming, spreading love and a real desire to put things right, and stand up for goodness and truth. *Hold up third flame*. The fruits of the Spirit include love, joy, peace, patience, kindness and self-control. These things in our lives warm and strengthen us and it is God's love working through us that can touch other people's lives, can warm their hearts and open them to receiving God's love for themselves. God's spirit warms us and heals us.

Like fire the Spirit is purifying, burning away all that is evil and selfish in us so that we can become like pure refined gold, glowing with the light of God's love. *Hold up fourth flame*. Most metals are dug out of the ground as ores, combined with other substances. In order to make them pure they have to be melted to very high heats so that all the impurities float to the surface and the pure metal can be drained off. That happens when producing Gold, iron and copper. In some ways we are a bit like metal ores where the pure metal is mixed up with impurities. The Holy Spirit in us is a bit like a furnace melting away the impurities and producing pure gold unblemished and uncontaminated. The process can be painful, cleansing often is but it is always worth it because the product is so beautiful.

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When God's spirit burns away our impurities he makes us beautiful and shows how precious we are.

And like fire, the Holy Spirit is enlightening, shedding light for us on the Bible, our conversations and relationships and the events of our lives, so that we can see God more clearly through them. *Hold up fifth flame.* It is God's spirit working in us that helps us to know and understand God. He opens our eyes to see God at work in our lives and in the world around us, opens our ears to hear God speaking to us and opens our minds to understand his word the Bible. It is God's Holy Spirit that enables us to believe in him and to trust him and as he sheds his light in our lives we are more and more able to put our lives in God's hands for him to transform and to use to his glory.

So God sends his Holy Spirit upon us in the same way that he did on his first disciples. We need to desire his spirit, to ask him to fill us and to transform us.

Let's ask God to fill us all with his spirit now as we celebrate the birthday of the church.