

Pentecost Reflection

Written by Jen Miller

I was watching the news last Friday night, the night that the Post Office and the Wells Fargo bank on 31st Street were burned, and the news anchor said something that stuck with me.

“Fire is something that gets people’s attention.”

This week, as we celebrate Pentecost, we hear the story of the apostles receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit, accompanied by wind and fire. We often see this story depicted with delicate little flames perched lightly atop the heads of Peter and the eleven, but if we pay close attention to the text of Acts 2:2, we get a different picture: “And suddenly a sound came from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting.”

The flames of Pentecost aren’t cute, innocuous flames. They are the lifechanging flames, the flames of a burning house, accompanied by the noise a building makes as it’s about to fall down.

Why fire?

“Fire is something that gets people’s attention.”

At the first Pentecost, in the city of Jerusalem, God wanted to get the attention of Peter and the other apostles, to show them that they were equipped to spread God’s message of salvation and love to the entire world. God wanted to get the attention of all of those in attendance, people watching from all over the world—Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia. God wanted to spread the message that God’s love was for everyone—there were no limits. God wanted to instill this message in people so strongly that they were willing to endure imprisonment and even death to make sure that it spread around the world.

Two thousand years later, in the city of Minneapolis, fire should still get our attention. Fire should shake us up and help us see that we live in a country with fundamental inequality at its core. Fire should draw our eyes to the black man named George Floyd who begged for breath, for life, and for his mother, and who was denied everything by the white man kneeling on his neck. Fire should draw our attention to the ways in which we are complicit in enabling such racism, in the ways we look the other way, in the laws we enact, in the people we elect to office.

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But God’s fire can also be seen in the aftermath. God’s fire can be seen in the neighbors cleaning up Lake Street, offering water to those, white, black, and brown, working side by side to restore their community. God’s fire can be seen in the woman playing her violin the morning after the riots, offering beauty and hope in the midst of destruction. God’s fire can be seen in the hundreds of thousands of dollars already raised to restore the businesses destroyed along Lake Street.

We should be part of this fire. Because, like on the original Pentecost, the whole world is watching. People from Miami to Seattle, from Toronto to Berlin, from Los Angeles to Chicago, are gathering together to see what happens in Minneapolis.

Let us, like the twelve apostles, risk all that we have to spread the fire of God’s love and justice. Because fire is something that gets people’s attention.