

Sermon, June 5, 2022
Acts 2:1-21 and John 14:8-17
“The Gift: The Greatest Miracle”
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We mentioned something as a prayer request a few weeks ago, and since we mentioned it in passing, I wanted to bring it up again to make sure we are still in prayer over this. A few weeks ago, the Coshocton United Methodist Church caught fire. And it was a devastating fire as you can see. I know people who named this as their home church or where they grew up. It's an historic downtown United Methodist Church, which might sound familiar. Please pray for them as they deal with the loss and rebuilding of their church. As you can see, everything was burnt up in the church, but they remain faithful because they have this reminder Jesus is still there. I admire their faith, but I pray for all they will have to go through on top of surviving a pandemic to rebuild their ministry.

It was just a little over two years ago we prayed for Junction City United Methodist Church as it caught fire and was gutted by that fire. Church fires are not as uncommon as we might think. I know of several United Methodist Churches devastated by fire just in the West Ohio Conference. And that doesn't include other churches of other denominations.

And they happened for all sorts of reasons. It can be arson as in the case of Junction City. Maybe human error, someone forgot to blow out a candle or thought they were out. But often it's an accident. Faulty wiring in an older building. But while the reasons for a fire might vary, the end result is always the same. Loss, change, and a need to make something new.

Now loss, change, and the need to make something new need to be in the forefront of our minds today as we worship. Today, as we said earlier, is Pentecost Sunday. It is a day where we see the Holy Spirit coming in tongues of flame. It's marked by fire, something we still see in the symbol of the United Methodist Church. And in the fire, we are witnesses to one of the greatest miracles of God.

Maybe if not the greatest, one of the most amazing miracles of God. If I ask you what are the top ten miracles in the Bible, what would you say? What's in your top 10? Personally, the resurrection of Jesus and the virgin birth have to go at the top. They are singular, and they are primary evidence to the fact Jesus is the Son of God. But beyond that, what are your top ten? You have a lot to choose from. The Red Sea parting? Moses lifting his arms and the sun stills as Israel gives battle. Samson. Elijah calling fire down there's that word again on the prophets of Baal, a personal favorite. Jesus casting out demons, healing the blind, making the lame to walk. The resurrection of Lazarus. Did I hit yours yet?

As I said, while it may not be the greatest miracle, I think the most amazing miracle we see in the Bible is the one Jesus talks about in John. Jesus says the ones who believe in Me will also do the works I do and in fact greater works than these because I am going to the Father, and the Holy Spirit will come. Jesus says I will fill you with the Holy Spirit, you will be transformed into My image, and do great works.

Now, why is that such an amazing miracle? It's not so much the what but the who. Do you realize who Jesus is talking to? Jesus is talking to a group of people who will betray him, who spend most of their time fighting with each other as to whom is the favorite. Doubters like Thomas, introverts like James, the lesser and Bartholomew. Impulsive no filter people like Peter. Brawlers like James and John. Common fishermen, tax collectors, political agitators. They are a group of people you might not let in your house, and you certainly would not appoint to your Administrative Council.

And yet Jesus decides to take these people and transform them by the Holy Spirit into His likeness. Can you imagine? Them? But this becomes the greatest singular evangelism tool, the greatest evidence for the resurrection of Jesus and the power of the Cross. It's not the empty tomb, because people could attempt to

explain the empty tomb away. But what you cannot explain, what you cannot reason away, is the change in these men from hiding in a small room to preaching the Gospel, performing miracles, and being willing to die for their faith. No money or fame. You simply cannot explain the disciples other than the resurrection and the gift of the Holy Spirit being placed upon them.

And then we realize He isn't done. Jesus calls women into holiness preaching and leadership. Not as some cultic high priestess, but as people transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit. This had never been seen before. This had never been done. You can't just explain it away.

And then like the proverbial cherry on top, Paul. Has there ever been a greater transformation than what we see in the life of Paul? How does someone go from persecutor to the greatest apologist the world has ever known, how does he go from wanting to kill every Christian to writing most of the New Testament? His transformation is one of the most amazing miracles we will ever witness.

Over the next several weeks, we are going to talk about what happens when we experience the miracle of the gift of the Holy Spirit. We will see how the Holy Spirit, once it fills us, can change who we are and how we live. We hope you'll join us for the entire series.

But as we look at this amazing miracle, isn't there a part of you that longs for that same miracle? Because here is the most amazing part, go back to your Gospel lesson. Look at what Jesus says, the one who believes in me will do great things. Not the disciples, but the one. Anyone. That means even people like you and me. And I know the temptation is to say *what? Not me*. Why not you? Seriously, why not you? If God can transform a Paul by the power of the Holy Spirit, why can't He do a miracle with you? If He can change a John and James, why not you? If He can change Peter, why not you, If He can call the women in the first century middle east and use them in ministry, why not you? You could be one of the most amazing miracles God has ever done. Will you let Him? Will you experience your own personal Pentecost and receive the Gift of the Holy Spirit?

But remember, when you experience the fire of the Holy Spirit, you will experience what fire always brings, loss, change, and a need to do something new. If Jesus is to make you into His image and fill you, there will be loss, the flame of the Holy Spirit will take away certain things in your life. It might be fear. It might be pride. It might be another sin. It could be certain friendships. Whatever it is, rest assured, the fire of the Holy Spirit will remove it.

There will be change. God never causes a loss that He doesn't fill with something better. The loss of sin will usher in a heart and life of holiness. Fear will give way to courage. Self-centeredness will give way to compassion, pride will give way to humility. False relationship will give way to authentic communities of faith that love you and hold you accountable.

And He will bring something new. One of the greatest testimonies to Jesus is that the disciples, the women, and Paul were no longer like they were before. They acted new, they thought new, they did things in ways that had never been done or even seen before. You cannot remain as you are and be filled with the Holy Spirit no more than a church can catch fire and not be changed by the heat.

It's not easy, and any fire brings a certain amount of pain. Transformation is never easy or simple. But it is a miracle. Will you receive the gift of the Holy Spirit and become one of God's amazing miracles as He changes you? A church can catch fire for all sorts of reasons. Arson, error, or just old wiring. But the church can also catch fire because of the gift of the Holy Spirit. What if we were that church? Amen.