

Sermon: Waiting for Lightning to Strike
Text: Acts 2:1 – 14
Date: May 31, 2009 AM
Place: Jesup First UMC

They say that lightning never strikes twice in the same place, but it does. One day, Mark was playing in the tree house during a thunderstorm when a bolt of lightning struck and fire ran down the trunk of the tree, through the tree house, all the way to the ground. Mark survived, but he lost his hearing and the toes on his left foot were completely burned off.

You know, few things get you attention quicker than a bolt of lightning. A flash of lightning can stop a sporting event quicker than anything. A flash of lightning can put an end to a quick swim in the pool. It scares us, and sometimes, it causes great destruction. But it can also change the life of the church forever.

Jesus told His disciples: **“But wait in Jerusalem until you have been endued with power from on high ... and when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in Judea and Samaria, and to the utter most parts of the world.”** And so, they waited; they went into the Upper Room and they fell on their faces before God in prayer. And suddenly, a sound came from heaven like a mighty, rushing wind and it filled the entire house and they looked up and saw tongues of fire descending from heaven and resting on each of them and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit. This was the flash of lightning that gave birth to the church.

And I can't help but wonder ... what would happen if something like that happened here? What would happen

if, in the midst of worship, we heard the wind blowing and we saw fiery tongues descending and the Holy Spirit fell afresh on us? How would we respond? Would we know what to do?

One day a pastor went to the nursing home for a visit. And as he stood to leave, the lady said: *“Pastor, would you pray with me?”* So, he took her hand and prayed that God would strengthen her and heal her. And when he finished, she said: *“Pastor, I feel much better. Will you help me up?”* Well, he didn’t know what to do, but he reached down and helped her up and watched as she took a few tentative steps. Then, she started jumping up and down and crying for joy until the whole nursing home came running to see what was going on. Well, as soon as he could, the pastor slipped out the back door, ran to his car, jumped in, grabbed the steering wheel, and prayed: *“Lord, don’t you ever do that to me again.”*

I think that’s how we feel about the infilling of the Holy Spirit. “Lord, don’t you do that to me.” But I believe the greatest need of our church today is a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit. And I believe it can happen again, right here and right now. Lightning does strike twice in the same place.

Well, Mark wasn’t able to keep up with the rest of his class and he just didn’t fit in anymore, so he dropped out of school when he was 16 to work on the farm. And one day, when he was bailing hay, a storm blew in and Mark drove the tractor under the oak tree in the front yard. And suddenly, lightning struck again

and fire shot down the trunk of that tree all the way to the ground and it jumped across to the tractor and knocked Mark to the ground.

Last Sunday, I told you about John Wesley's heart-warming experience and how it set him on fire for God. Well, listen, I believe what God wants to do in us, among us, and through us is just that powerful. A storm is brewing; lightning is flashing in the distance and God wants to renew His church, to warm our hearts, to set us ablaze with fire from heaven. Now, maybe some believe a fresh touch from God isn't possible. Maybe some believe we don't really need it! And maybe some are scared to death that something extraordinary might actually happen.

And so, I want to spend a few moments reflecting on what happens when the Holy Spirit comes. What happens when the Holy Spirit falls afresh on our lives? Let me share just three things with you:

First, when the Holy Spirit comes, we will receive God's power. Acts 1 says: ***"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you."*** Now, the word "*power*" is the Greek word "*dunamis*". It's where we get the word "dynamite." It's an explosive, dynamic, life-altering display of power. That's the kind of power that the infilling of the Holy Spirit brings to the God's people. Jesus didn't leave the church powerless; He gave us the Holy Spirit to empower us.

Now, what's this power for?

Well, the Holy Spirit gives us power to resist sin and its temptations! Friends, we have an enemy. Now, I don't

believe there's a demon behind every bush, but the Bible says Satan is a "*roaring lion, roaming to and fro, seeking whom he may devour.*" Sin is real and the temptations that you and I face every day are real.

And the Bible says: "**Resist the devil and he will flee from you.**" The Apostle John wrote: "**Little children, I write these things to you so that you will not sin.**" But you can't do it on your own strength. You can't resist Satan and his temptations by depending on your own wisdom and abilities. That's why God has given you the Holy Spirit ... to give you power to resist sin and its temptations.

The Holy Spirit also gives us power to fulfill the righteousness of Christ. Somebody asked Jesus, "**What is the greatest commandment?**" And He said: "**You will love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength ... and you will love your neighbor as yourself. In this is fulfilled all the law and the prophets.**"

And so, on the last night of His earthly life, Jesus talked to the disciples about two things. He said: "**A new commandment I give to you that you love one another even as I have loved you ... by this will everyone know you are my disciples if you love one another.**" And on the same night, He said: "**If I go away, I will send to you another comforter who will be with you.**" You see, without the infilling of the Holy Spirit, we can't fulfill the law of Christ; we can't love God the way we should; we can't love each other the way we should. That's why Jesus gave us the Holy Spirit to help us fulfill the righteousness of Christ.

The Holy Spirit also gives us power to witness. Jesus said: **“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you will be my witnesses.”** Now, on our own, we don’t have the strength to witness for Christ. Sharing the gospel is a tiring, draining, zapping experience. But the power to do evangelism, the power to share our testimony with others comes from God. That’s why Jesus gave us the Holy Spirit to help us witness to others.

When the Holy Spirit comes, we will receive God’s power.

Second, when the Holy Spirit comes, we will receive God’s presence. Jesus said: **“I will not leave you orphaned. I will come to you.”** He said: **“I will send you another Comforter who will be with you and within you.”** Oh how lonely they must have been for those 10 days between the Ascension and Pentecost. They didn’t understand; they couldn’t understand. Jesus had left them. The One they had built their lives around was gone. They had seen Him ascend into the clouds, but on Pentecost, Jesus made His presence known. He was with them through the infilling of the Holy Spirit.

Because of the Holy Spirit, you and I never have to feel forsaken by God. We don’t live outside of the presence of God. He is as close as the air we breathe! He is with us and within us through the infilling of the Holy Spirit. When the Holy Spirit comes, we receive God’s presence.

Third, when the Holy Spirit comes, we will receive God’s perception. When Peter preached

that day, he said: *“These men are not drunk as you suppose, but this is that which was spoken by the Prophet Joel, ‘In the last days I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh and your sons and daughters will prophecy, your old men will see visions, and your young men will dream dreams.’”* It’s the infilling of the Holy Spirit that allows us to see things differently. We can see things with the eyes of Christ.

In 1889, a Methodist preacher named John Wesley Hughes got off the train in a small community called Wilmore, Kentucky. He looked over the rolling hills and smiled to himself. His traveling companion said: *“What are you looking at John?”* John said: *“I’m looking at a Methodist college that will educate and train pastors and send missionaries to the four corners of the earth.”* The man looked and saw nothing. He saw nothing, but John Wesley Hughes had a vision; He had God’s perspective. And a year later, John returned to Wilmore and bought a piece of land with one building on it and started a Methodist college. That college became known as Asbury College and today, there are Asbury graduates in almost every country in the world.

The Bible says *“Without a vision, the people will perish.”* You see, when we look at things with physical eyes, we see nothing. All seems hopeless and the future seems bleak, but when the Holy Spirit comes, we receive God’s perspective.

That’s what we need today. We need a fresh wind to blow within us, among us, and through us. We need God’s power, God’s presence, and God’s

perspective. And here is the thing: All we have to do is ask for it. The Bible says: “*You have not because you ask not.*” And so, as we come to the close of this service, let us seek His face together for a fresh outpouring of His Spirit – within us, among us, and through us.