

Everyone knows that if you want to put out a fire you use water, or in some cases you throw a rug or heavy blanket over top. Either way, you kill the supply of oxygen to the flame and essentially smother the fire. With some forest fires, I understand that they drop chemicals that kind of suds up and do the same thing. But all of these approaches are about killing the flame's access to its source of life - the almighty oxygen molecule.

That's why then, as it stands to reason, when you are trying to get your fledgling flames to catch you gently blow on them, giving them added oxygen. As the flames grow, so do your bellows. Forges are a use of this principle, creating intense fires with bellows built into the furnace.

Fire fighters, protecting our beloved forests of Oregon and elsewhere, carefully study the weather and the winds. They know that their attempts at controlling the infernos they are sent to extinguish rely heavily upon the whims of the winds. As the fires heat up the landscape and the atmosphere around it, the air begins to dance and makes the fire unpredictable.

Unpredictable. And dangerous.

That's exactly the conflagration we have described for us in this second chapter of Acts. God has descended upon all those faithful gathered and things have gotten unpredictable and maybe even dangerous.

Up until now, the followers of Jesus have been modestly gathered. Cautiously moving forward. They've replaced Judas with Matthias, through an age-old tradition of casting lots. They have preached some. But they are uncertain as to what their next moves should be.

And so, being the good Jews they are, they are gathered in Jerusalem to remember Pentecost - the day set aside for giving thanks for the law. Pentecost was the celebration of the gift of the law to Moses. Those essential commandments that structure Jewish life and custom. The backbone and foundation of their faith. Pentecost was the festival giving thanks for the gift of order.

And into this modestly assembled party, there to give thanks for the law of the land, into this humble party comes wind and flame. The two ingredients to create a mammoth fire.

It takes a certain kind of person who is willing to run into a fire. Whether it is a burning building or a fiery forest, it's not everyone who has the temperament to run into that

kind of threatening danger. The heat alone is enough to melt most persons' resolve. Let alone the lack of air to breathe, the risk of falling timbers and the very limited vision.

Persons who are called to fight fires do so at great risk. And yet they show up every day to the task. They bring resolve, strength, and an openness to the great unknown, uncontrollable flame.

The risk so often with this Pentecost story is that we want to domesticate the flames into a campfire around which we can play our guitar and sing our songs and generally feel good about our faith.

But listen to the wind that blows through that room. It is not a gentle evening breeze by the campsite. It is a rush of a violent wind and it fills the whole space, catching up robes and scarves and turbans and beards and knocking everyone about.

And it stirs up the flames that have rested upon each person's head. This is primal, and disorderly, and unconstrained. God is at work in that room and it is a fierce and undomesticated God at that!

A God that requires we find our uniforms and suit up to face the blaze of God's love.

God is upping the ante here at Pentecost. Raising the stakes as it were. From a believing because you witnessed the resurrection or the healing miracles to an experiencing - of the heat of God seizing your heart.

Despite the ministry of Jesus, those early followers were still learning of the limitless bounds of God's love for all people.

They were still learning that their ministry was going to extend far further than they could anticipate. And that its expansion was going to take on a life of its own, and get out of control pretty quickly.

Just like a summer forest fire.

So I wonder what kind of temperament we find ourselves to be. We have a strong history of standing boldly on the side of our brothers and sisters who encounter discrimination and exclusion because of whom they love. We declare with our actions and words that we will not tolerate such limits to the church.

And to do so has meant that we have sometimes found ourselves often in the heat. Perhaps never personally. But we have been always keenly aware of our relationship, our standing, with the larger Methodist Church because of our strong views.

While this is important work and work that personally makes me very proud of for this congregation, I believe that it is time to suit up in a new way. To ask ourselves, where is the heat of God's love getting stirred into a fire by the Holy Spirit. Where are we being called to stand next?

How might the limits of the church or even our own particular practices here at Lincoln Street need to be fed into the furnace of God's hot love and be transformed.

When the flames at that first Pentecost fell upon all those gathered, they didn't even have a sense of the the word church. They had no sense that Jesus' ministry was to go beyond their small band. They were seeking meaning through order, sense through structure.

And God's gift to them was to say, "Have a little of this wild side."

God stirred things up. And dare I say, in the name of God we are called to do the same. Not change just for change's sake. Not chaos leading to destruction.

We suit up - like fire fighters, ready to take on a little risk with resolve, strength, and an openness to the great unknown - but we do this not in order to *contain* the blaze, but rather to work with it.

We take the gift of God's creative spirit, God's fiery imagination, and we dare to dance with the unpredictable and perhaps risky Spirit. Leading us to see visions, dream dreams and to know the power of the work of God among us.

Where will it all take us, if we let it? God knows. And we put ourselves and our church in God's hands. May it be so. Let us all pray that it is so.

Amen.