



## It Only Takes A Spark

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### Acts 2:1-3

*When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly a sound came from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues as of fire, distributed and resting on each one of them.*

Can you imagine what it was like that day, back there in ancient Jerusalem, back there in that house where those first few Christians met, back there on the day when the Spirit blew in? It must have been like Hurricane Charley blowing in - minus the destruction, but full of the power.

They didn't expect it. That wind came as a surprise and blew them away.

Suddenly, everything changed.

Suddenly, they were swept up with emotion.

Suddenly, they were filled up with excitement.

Suddenly, they were on fire.

The Spirit of God blew in and took charge of their lives. From that moment on, they weren't the same people any more.

They weren't the same meek and mild Christians everybody in the neighborhood had gotten to know - not any more.

They weren't the same careful, cautious people who never made a scene - not any more.

They weren't the same conservative, quiet ones who kept to themselves - not any more.

When the Spirit of God blew in, it turned them on. It shook them up. They exploded with enthusiasm. Every man had something to shout about.

Every woman had a story to tell. Every child bubbled over with something good to say.

The spark of the Spirit blew in and set them on fire. They were burning with joy, burning with hope, burning with enthusiasm. Even if they had wanted to, they couldn't keep their joy bottled up. They had to shout out the good news. Even when the neighbors told them to hush up and quiet down, their enthusiasm kept coming out loud and clear.

The Spirit blew in with such a strong gale force, that its power drew people from all over Jerusalem. They had to rush over and find out what was going on.

Can you imagine what it would have been like to have been a disinterested next-door-neighbor? You wouldn't have known what all the commotion was about, but you probably wouldn't have liked it.

You couldn't read your Sunday newspaper in peace. You couldn't enjoy working out in your yard. You couldn't have a quiet barbecue like you had planned. You couldn't do any of that because those neighbors of yours, those stirred up Christians, those emotional Christians, those on-fire Christians were making such a ruckus they were disturbing your peace.

Back there in ancient Jerusalem, back on the day it happened, back there, next door to that little house-full of Christians; the neighbors were disturbed. The neighbors were upset. The neighbors wanted to know why those Christians were making so much noise. Although the scripture doesn't say it, I imagine the neighbors wanted to call the police.

When my daughter was in graduate school, she attended the university in my home town. She lived in an area where all the old houses had been turned into college student apartments. She called us one night and told us that every house on her block of High Street was having a party, every house but hers.

All those parties attracted a lot of party-goers. She said there were college students in the streets, students in the yards, students hanging out the windows and crowded on the porches. Everywhere she looked, she saw students partying.

"You can't imagine how loud it was," she said, with all the screaming and laughing, with all the yelling and gabbing, with all the drinking and partying going on up and down the street. "It was so bad," she said, "the police brought out the mounted patrols to break up the party."

That's the mark of a really big disturbance down in Athens, Ohio, my friends, when the police send out the horse patrols to disperse the revelers.

Had you been a neighbor to that house back there in ancient Jerusalem, a neighbor to that house-full of Christians, a neighbor who couldn't sleep, or read, or rest because of the commotion those Christians were making - I imagine you would have wanted to call out the mounted police.

"Make them quiet down," you might have demanded. "Tell them to behave." "Arrest them if they don't shut up."

Those Christians raised a ruckus. Their ruckus drew a crowd [Acts 2:6]. The crowd caused a scene. Some of their neighbors thought those Christians were drunk [Acts 2:13]!

Here we are today - another group of Christians. We've gathered together in this place - not a house, not even a church, but in a Lodge Hall. We've got neighbors living right around us. I wonder, "What's wrong with us?"

We're Christians, too, but we're not disturbing the peace. We're a group of Christians, but our neighbors aren't calling for the mounted police.

What's wrong with us? Where did that empowering Spirit go? Who poured water on our emotional fire? Who dampened our enthusiasm?

I don't know about you, but I think it's a shame that when we come together as a group of Christians, the neighbors don't even blink. We're so well-behaved and so middle of the road, that the neighbors don't even care.

What's wrong with us? We're no trouble, not any more. We're no threat, not any more. We don't ever disturb the peace, not any more. Where did that Spirit go that used to get us Christians all fired up?

Well, it's time to face the facts.

If we're going to be able to build our new church home,  
if we're going to have a glorious future together,  
if we're going to make a difference in our community,  
if we're going to be true followers of Jesus Christ,  
we've got to catch on fire!

We've got to burn with enthusiasm.

We've got to burn with excitement.

We've got to burn with good times,  
and good friends,

and good news.

If we don't start burning, we're going to smolder and smoke, and cool off and die. How are we going to catch on fire?

When I was a child, Smoky the Bear taught me that it only takes a spark to get a fire going. All we need is a spark to get going.

Take a look at those first Christians in that house back there in ancient Jerusalem. The spark from the Spirit of God blew in and set them on fire. I found three different sparks that lit up those first Christians. Maybe those sparks can get you going, too.

The first spark was their common devotion. Those first Christians were together in that house because they were devoted to Jesus Christ.

How about you? What are you devoted to?

Some of you are devoted to the Buffalo Bills, and you can't wait for the season to get started. You're all set to start cheering them on to victory.

Some of you are devoted to golf, and you spend all your free moments thinking about being out on the links. Others are devoted to keeping a spotless house. You might be devoted to your job, or your spouse, or your children.

Whoever or whatever it is, you eat, sleep, and drink the object of your devotion. Nothing can keep you away. Nothing can come between you and your devotion.

Are you devoted like that to Jesus Christ? Those first Christians were, and they were on fire. How about you? Is that spark of devotion to Jesus smoldering in your soul, ready to burst into flame; or is it slowly turning to ash?

Those first Christians were devoted to Jesus. They were in that house together because they wanted to be there, with their brothers and sisters in the faith. They wanted to sing praises to God. They wanted to study and pray. They wanted to learn and listen to preaching. They wanted to spend time together and with their Lord.

They were devoted to Jesus. Nothing was going to keep them away. Illness couldn't get them down. Tailgating before a Bills game wasn't on their schedule. A game of golf didn't entice them away. Sleeping late wasn't an option. Mowing the lawn, or doing the laundry, or going on a picnic - it didn't matter what was offered; nothing was going to keep them away from worship.

They were devoted to Jesus. They put him first.

How about you? Is the spark of devotion burning in you? If your faith is fleeting and flickering, if it isn't burning very brightly - maybe you need to be a little more devoted to Jesus Christ.

The second spark that ignited those first Christians was concentrating on the basics.

The scripture story tells you that when the Spirit's spark inspired them to speak about the wondrous works of God, they all spoke in different tongues. They spoke in different languages. Some of them spoke in languages no body knew.

What a cacophony it was! All those people talking at once, it was loud. It disturbed the neighbors. It stirred up everybody who could hear it. It was a great jumble of words and grunts, of foreign languages and unknown words. People came running from all over the city to find out what all the racket was about.

The miracle that happened that day was that through all the commotion and clamor, through all the disturbance and babble - everybody understood what everybody else was saying.

There's a good reason why everybody understood everything. It didn't matter what words were being said, or what languages were being spoken. It didn't matter because everybody was saying the same thing. Everybody was talking about the basic things, the first and surest things.

Here's a spark to inspire your religious fervor: if you want to be on fire, concentrate on the basics. Talk about love and acceptance. Talk about sin and salvation. Talk about forgiveness and second chances. Talk about hope and freedom.

Don't get sidetracked by non-essential issues. Concentrate on the love of God, and how you can be a loving person. Concentrate on forgiveness through Jesus Christ, and how you can be a forgiving person. Leave all the rest of it up to God.

If you want to catch fire, the spark that can do it comes when you concentrate on the basics. When you center your life around those things, people will be drawn to you. When you base your life on good news and hope, people will flock to you. When you hold onto the basics, people will love you.

If our church is going to be on fire, you need to focus your attention on the common experiences of life and on our common devotion. You do that when you start sharing your personal stories of all the wonderful things God has done in your life: how He helped you in your needs, how He touched you in your loneliness, how He picked you up whenever you fell down.

That's what those first Christians were saying when the tongues of fire leapt from them. They were telling everyone who would listen about the great things God had done for them.

To whom have you told your personal faith story lately?

The third spark comes when you trust the Spirit.

This is really a hard one for people like me, people who like to be in charge, people who like to keep everything under control, people who want to know what's happening.

The older you get, the more you learn that you just don't control everything. You're not responsible for everything. You don't have all the power. Everything is not up to you.

You've got to trust what you can't see,

- trust what you can't control,
- trust when you're powerless,
- trust when you're out of ideas,
- trust when your plans fail,
- trust when you're at the end of your rope,
- trust when you've got nothing left to offer,
- trust when you're afraid,

- you've even got to trust when the planning board says you've got to wait another month or two!

If you want to be on fire, you've got to trust God's Spirit to leap like a flame in your soul -

- burning brighter than you can imagine,
- heating up with more excitement than you've ever had,
- bringing more joy than you can contain,
- causing you to be more effective than you've ever been,
- taking your father than you've ever gone,
- bringing you more love than you've ever had.

O yes, you can burn like that. The Holy Spirit's got a spark just for you. So, claim your Spiritual spark, and trust it to lead you into tomorrow.

We need a church that burns. We need a church that upsets the neighbors once in a while. We need a church that raises a ruckus, and causes a disturbance, and stirs people up.

We need a church that's excited and enthusiastic, a church that's noisy and loud, a church that's going places and doing things.

And we'll get it. We'll get it because the Spirit wants to give it to us. The sparks that will get it for us come,

- when we're devoted to Jesus Christ,
- when we stick to the basics of faith,

- and when we trust the Holy Spirit to lead us.

I think it's what we want. I know it's what we need. And, I believe it's what we'll get -

- when we join together,

- devoted to Jesus,

- telling our stories of faith,

- and trusting the Spirit to guide us -

- and we will be,

- a church that burns,

- with the fire of forgiveness,

- the blaze of acceptance,

- the flame of love.

I want to be in a church like that. Don't you?