

Renegades of Funk

I'll go on record and say I don't care for the spiritual writing of C.S. Lewis. I much prefer his fiction to his theology. But a quote of his keeps rattling around my head, and I couldn't escape its echo when thinking about Pentecost: "If you want a religion to make you feel really comfortable, I certainly don't recommend Christianity." You see, too often I encounter streams of Christian thought that whittle down the radical truth of the Gospel and the wild adventure of discipleship into a cheapened form of talk-therapy, covered by a sheen of spirituality that is sure to flake off one of these days. The faith of the martyrs, the faith that was nurtured on the blood stained floor of the Roman Colosseum, the faith that caused men and women to forsake all they owned in order to follow an itinerant preacher in Judea, the faith that caused the Roman Empire to quiver in its leather boots...the faith that we have received...this is not a faith that promises comfort, stability, and an all-around well-adjusted life. This is a faith full of risk, of uncertainty, yet brimming with possibility, promise, and power. And it is a faith that is ultimately not about us. C.S. Lewis may not be the greatest theologian in history, but he was right about this one thing: "If you want a religion to make you feel really comfortable, I certainly don't recommend Christianity."

The day the disciples have been waiting for had finally arrived. They had seen their Risen Lord ascend into heaven, and their ears were burning with the remembrance of one of his promises: "*And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you for ever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.*" They were waiting with bated breath...waiting for the Advocate to come to them...waiting for the promised

Spirit to fill their hearts with comfort and peace. But I would bet all of the gold and silver in the world that they weren't ready for what happened on that day. *"When the day of Pentecost had come, the disciples were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability."* Rather than a reassuring sense of peace...rather than an ecstatic, out of body experience...rather than an overwhelming sense of comfort, the disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit for one primary purpose: to preach the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ with tenacity and creativity.

*"But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, "Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say."* That's not the beginning of a pastoral treatise on the comforts and joys of the Holy Spirit. That's the beginning of a manifesto, of a declaration of something profound and earth-shattering. And from what we know of Peter's life, it's the beginning of a preaching ministry that would ultimately lead to his inglorious death, hung upside down on a cross. His encounter with the Holy Spirit at Pentecost lead him not into a life of quiet contemplation, but a life of public ministry full of risk, of peril, yet overflowing with the transformational power of the Gospel. He, like the other disciples, were filled with the Holy Spirit not for themselves, but for the life and salvation of the entire world. The day of Pentecost is often called the birthday of the Church. But let us remember precisely what the Church is and is not. As Archbishop William Temple once said, "The Church is the only organization that does not exist for itself, but for those who live outside of it."

Even before the day of Pentecost, when the Spirit of God descended upon our Hebrew forbearers, she came not for comfort or solace, but for the proclamation of the truth: *“Two men remained in the camp, one named Eldad, and the other named Medad, and the spirit rested on them; they were among those registered, but they had not gone out to the tent, and so they prophesied in the camp. And a young man ran and told Moses, “Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp.” And Joshua son of Nun, the assistant of Moses, one of his chosen men, said, “My lord Moses, stop them!” But Moses said to him, “Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the Lord’s people were prophets, and that the Lord would put his spirit on them!”* Time and time again, throughout the Scriptures, we see God bless the people with a new outpouring of the Spirit, and Moses’ cry evokes a deep truth about these outpourings: *“Would that all the Lord’s people were prophets!”* Just imagine with me, if every member of the body of Christ saw fit to seek the anointing of the Holy Spirit for more than just solace and comfort? Imagine what would happen to the face of the earth if every single Christian sought to be filled with the power of the Holy Spirit in order to preach and prophesy with power, clarity, and conviction? You know what, forget the whole world. Just imagine what would happen to this county if every one of us in this room sought the fresh wind of the Spirit for nothing less than the power to preach and proclaim the saving grace of Jesus Christ? Bucking the trends of a culture that are increasingly self-absorbed and isolated, our clarion call could be the song of a prophet who declares, ‘No matter how hard you try you can’t stop us now!’”

But before we can utter that cry with integrity, we’ve got to take a hard look at ourselves. *“Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, ‘Out of the believer’s heart shall flow rivers of living water.’”* Jesus’ words afford us an opportunity to honestly and fearlessly engage in self-evaluation, and discern what it is that

flows out of us. And while our translation this morning has the word ‘heart’, a more faithful rendering would be ‘belly.’ Jesus isn’t just talking about that place of feeling, but the deep place that makes us human...the belly, the place of desire and animation. Out of the deep hollow inside of you, out of the deep place of what makes you human, what flows out? Is it the power of the Holy Spirit, the faith passed down to the saints, a renegade spirit that bucks the depression and depravity of the world? Or is it something else? Even when at his most mystical and esoteric, as is often the case in the Gospel of John, Jesus’ words pierce our soul as only he can.

If you are ready to take the next steps in your journey of faith...to be filled with the fresh wind of the Spirit...to take your place on the grand stage of God’s theater...if you are ready to answer God’s call to set the world ablaze with love...if you are ready to embrace the risk and adventure of the Christian life...embrace this day as a summons to Spirit-filled action. Don’t let this moment pass you by. Open yourself up to God’s call. To quote an unnamed preacher: “Set yourself on fire with passion and people will come for miles to watch you burn.”