

“FEELIN’ IT!”

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Pentecost Sunday

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It’s a phrase that we hear used in a variety of contexts, a variety of settings, but nowhere is it more tangible in its meaning than on the basketball court. When a player suddenly get hot and has a feel for just how to make that ball rotate beautifully through the net, teammates and broadcasters will often

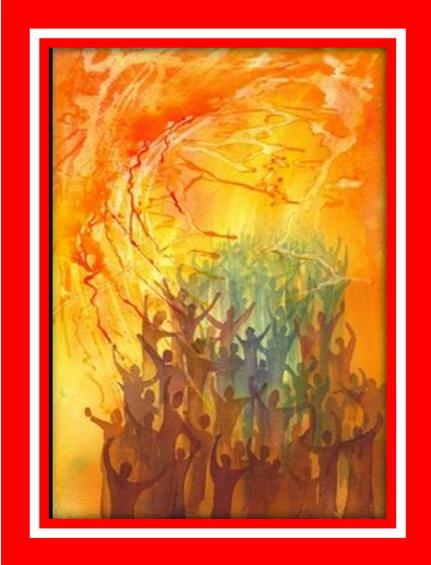
say that this player is “feelin’ it! Nothing more needs to be said. They often will stand back and let that player “feel it” till the feeling goes away.

Some of you Warrior fans will remember a game, this past season, against the Sacramento Kings in which Klay Thompson was “feelin’ it.” In fact he was “feelin’ it” so much that he was in another zone, another world all together. During the third quarter of that game, Thompson exploded for 37 points! Now, 37 points is a very significant accomplishment for an entire game, but Thompson reached that number within one quarter alone.

It was and will remain, a performance for the ages—a clear reminder of what “feelin’ it” actually looks like on a basketball court.

There is something to be said for those moments in which we feel the power and the passion that makes life come alive...those moments in which our senses are heightened and our awareness is expanded...those moments in which experience the exhilaration of life fully and deeply lived.

Certainly you could say that the disciples on that Day of Pentecost were “feelin’ it.” The promised gift of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit that Jesus spoke of as the “Advocate,” had arrived with power and passion. And in the energy of the Spirit, there was a synergy of response. The disciples moved together as one into the streets of the city, speaking in languages that everyone understood as their own. And that was just the beginning!



Peter began preaching in a way that he had never preached before. He was in such a “zone” that people were “cut to the heart,” the writer’s way of saying that his messaged touched them in a way that opened them up to the transforming power of God’s love. They repented. They were baptized. And we are told that three thousand people became a part of this new movement of Jesus’ followers. And the rest, as they say, is history—the history of the Christian Church.

On this Pentecost Sunday, we who are a part of that Church, have the opportunity to reflect upon these surprising events that took place in Jerusalem and the significance that they might hold for us in this present moment of time. I have often wondered what would

happen if we arrived some Sunday morning to discover that the Holy Spirit was creatively and actively at work, stirring our sense, and inviting us not only to think about our faith, but to experience it with power and passion. Would we be ready for that? Or would we be so cautious and reserved that we somehow, managed to avoid letting the Spirit of God penetrate our rational and orderly lives?



We United Methodists, of course, have a certainly proclivity to live in the realm of the rational. Of the four quadrants of Wesley’s quadrilateral, we are more inclined to pursue a faith where reason is predominant...a faith that operates more out of the head than out of the heart. And while I have an appreciation for the choice to cultivate a thinking faith, I can’t help but feel that we are missing out on a significant dimension of vital faith.

I heard someone say once that the longest distance in the world is really only 18 inches—the distance that separates the head from the heart. The beauty of Methodism and Wesley’s witness is that it recognizes that

when it comes to a vital and fulfilling faith, it’s not either / or, but both / and. Both the head and the heart...both the ability to reason and the ability to feel are essential.

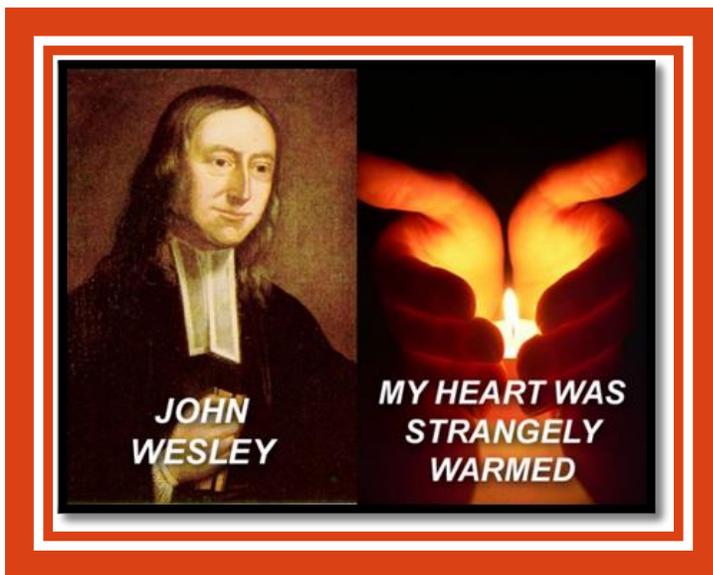
Wesley himself provides an insightful case study in this regard. For the first half of his life, he chose to pursue God and a vital faith through his intellect. He read volumes and he wrote volumes about the nature of God and the details of faith. He pushed himself

constantly to learn and grow in his awareness of the salvation that God provided. He was, at points, obsessed with his need to figure out just how the equation of faith actually worked. And, to his credit, he made some helpful and remarkable observations. His reflections on the nature of God's grace have left a lasting impression upon those of us who share in the movement of Methodism.

But here is the intriguing thing. While Wesley's intellectual pursuits were needed and helpful in the formation of his faith, they were not enough to provide the fulfillment that he longed for. After his disappointing missionary trip to the Colony of Georgia, Wesley wrote in his journal, "I went to America to convert the Indians, but who will convert me?"

In other words, Wesley wasn't "feelin' it." A spark was missing. There was little passion and very little power in his witness. On his return trip to England, Wesley met a Moravian Pastor by the name of Peter Bohler who possessed the kind of energy and power that Wesley longed for. When Wesley spoke to him about this, Bohler simply encouraged him to continue to pursue God with his heart. "Preach the faith until you have it," Bohler counseled him.

It was shortly after returning to London that Wesley went, one evening, to a prayer meeting on Aldersgate Street and there, suddenly and quite unexpectedly, Wesley encountered the living presence of God—not with his head, but with his heart. He would later reflect in his journal that his "heart had been strangely warmed."



Today, he might have written that when it came to his faith, he was "feelin' it" in a way that he had never felt before.

It wasn't, you see, until his heart was warmed, not until he incorporated the use of both heart and head that his faith became fully alive and dynamic. That convergence of head and heart would prove to be the catalyst that ignited the Wesleyan movement and changed the face of England...not to mention the newly emerging nation of the America.

What I would like to know this morning is when it comes to the matter of faith, are you "feelin' it?" Are you feeling the power and passion of a faith that is personal and powerful? Are you feeling the energy and the synergy of the Holy Spirit at work within you?



While there are some who fear that being open to a heartfelt faith is the first step on the downward slide into “Holy Roller” worship and Bible belt spirituality, I would respectfully disagree. Worship from the heart need not conform to any of those templates, but merely discover its inspiration in the movement of the Spirit that God has already set in motion for the purpose of engaging us in faith that is lively, passionate and powerful.

I don’t need to tell you that far too many churches are closing their doors today, in part, because they have failed to accept the invitation to cultivate a faith that warms the heart and engages the senses. This, of course, doesn’t mean that we need to check our brains at the door, only that we need to recognize that without a heartfelt faith, we will have a faith that is dull, passionless and boring...which, when you stop to think about it, isn’t really much of a faith at all.

In her book, **“Teaching a Stone to Talk,”** author **Annie Dillard** has suggests that we often arrive at worship unprepared for what

we might encounter. She writes:

On the whole, I do not find Christians, outside the catacombs, sufficiently sensible of the conditions. Does any-one have the foggiest idea what sort of power we so blithely invoke? Or, as I suspect, does no one believe a word of it?

The churches are children playing on the floor with their chemistry sets, mixing up a batch of TNT to kill a Sunday morning. It is madness to wear ladies' straw hats and velvet hats to church; we should all be wearing crash helmets. Ushers should issue life preservers and signal flares; they should lash us to our pews. For the sleeping god may wake some day and take offense, or the waking god may draw us out to where we can never return.

This is explosive stuff we are dealing with here! As the fearful disciples, huddling behind closed doors of their own would suddenly discover, the work of the Holy Spirit has the potential to change everything—especially our own lives!

In his commentary on this passage from the second chapter of Acts, Bruce Epperly suggests that these early followers of Jesus were **“surprised by the power of wind and flame and word.”** Apparently, they forgot their crash helmets and life preservers.

He then goes on to point out that **“Pentecost joins mysticism with mission.”**



There is an inner connection with the lively Spirit of God that explodes outward in a mission that will jump start the Church. **“Lives are joined and transformed, despite the differences of race and class.”**

Just prior to our lesson from Acts, this morning, the disciples ask Jesus, **“Lord, is this the time that you will restore the**

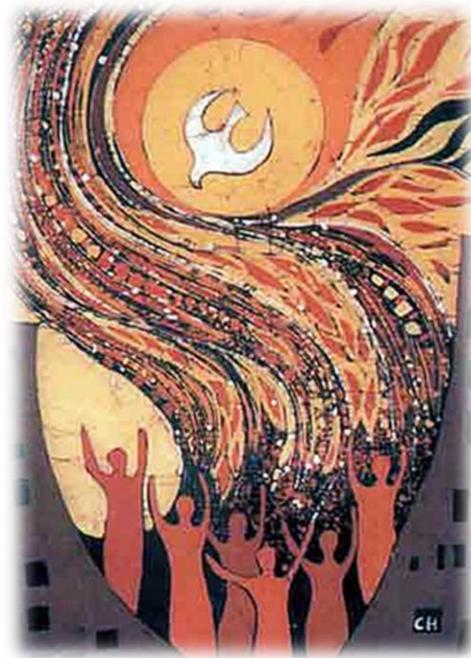
kingdom of Israel?” An interesting question, but one that was clearly limited in its scope and vision. It was, you see, a question that was all about them and their provincial interest in restoring the Kingdom of Israel to its former days of glory and might.

The vision of Jesus, however, was so much broader than merely the Kingdom of Israel. His focus was on the Kingdom of God that was large enough to obliterate the borders that separated nations. It was expansive enough to include the wide diversity of people and languages and cultures and customs.

The multi-cultural experience of Pentecost was, in effect, Jesus’ answer to this parochial question about the Kingdom of Israel. The Spirit made it possible for all of these people from all over the world to hear the good news of the gospel in a language that was familiar to them.

Those who are tempted to lapse back into their own parochial views, their own limited understanding of God's intention in our world ought to sit up and take notice. The Gospel can never be limited to the province of this group or that, but is intended to be the force that tears down the barriers, obliterates the borders and creates unity in the midst of great diversity.

One of the dangers of the experience of Pentecost, you see, is that we can define too narrowly, too personally, too individually. We may conclude that its essential meaning has to do with "my" experience of a faith that is personal and passionate. But, in reality, the meaning of Pentecost as detailed in the second chapter of Acts, can only be discovered in the context of community. It is precisely in the energy that is shared by the community of diverse peoples that the synergy of a passionate and powerful witness is experienced and expressed.



“Pentecost: Not a “me and my,” but an “us and our” experience”

Pentecost can never be limited to “me and my” faith experience. It must always include the “us and our” experience of faith. It is not something that can be isolated or kept to oneself. By its nature, it is intended to be shared with the greater community of the greater Kingdom of God. As Bill Eassum has said, “Good news comes to us on its way to someone else.”

So, what I would like to know this morning is, “Are you “feelin’ it?” Have you caught a glimpse of the potential of Pentecost? Can you feel the energy and power and passion that comes to us as a gift from the Holy Spirit? Can you see and sense the difference that it makes when we share this experience in community?”

Jesus came, he said, so that we might have life and have it abundantly. The Holy Spirit is the Advocate that he offers as a means of ensuring that we experience this life—not just in theory, but in practice...not just with our heads, but with our hearts as well. My prayer for you and for me and indeed, for our life together, is that we might be open to the gift of God's Spirit...so that our hearts might be strangely warmed and our lives powerfully transformed.

Can you imagine how exciting that would be?! Why, it would make Klay Thompson's 37 points in one quarter seem dull in comparison! Put your crash helmets on! Your life vests too!

Come, Holy Spirit, come!

Light a fire within us!

Refresh us with the wind of your love!

Energize us with your vision for us and for our world. Amen!

