

Sermon for Christ & Grace Church Petersburg, VA
Pentecost Sunday, Year A, June 4, 2017
The Rev. Bill Queen
“Activate The Holy Spirit Within You”
Acts 2:1-21

the Industrial Revolution started in the 18th century with a series of discoveries about how to use machines to do the work that people had formerly done by hand; it really shifted into high gear when people perfected the harnessing of steam power to run those machines; this is a fairly straightforward process; you heat water and use the pressure built up by the steam to power things such as steamboats, locomotives, and factory machinery; it’s something we still use today: all of our electricity production (unless it comes from the sun or wind) burns coal or natural gas, or uses nuclear energy to boil water to produce steam to drive the turbines which generate the electricity

you may have done something like this yourself this morning if you turned on an electric kettle, or put a kettle on your stove, or used a coffee-maker; each of those heated water to make steam; I’d like us this morning to think through the parallels that this process of producing steam power has with the day of Pentecost, since Pentecost was the start of something as world-changing as the Industrial Revolution—call it the Pentecostal Revolution, when God gave us the power to do God’s work; and I’d like us to think about what this has to do with Baptism, since we’ll be celebrating a Baptism today (10:00) and renewing our Baptismal vows

when we think of Baptism, we probably think almost exclusively about the water of Baptism; most churches have prominent fonts, like we do; water is what we most easily see and hear during a Baptism; and the symbolism of water is easy to recognize: we wash our hands and bathe in water for cleansing—likewise the water of Baptism washes away sins; water quenches thirst, and without it we would die—likewise the water of Baptism sustains life; if we go underwater where we cannot breathe, we die—likewise the water of Baptism is a reminder of death; a death to this life, and a rising to a new life; but water, all by itself, isn’t enough for Baptism

the other thing which we need for Baptism is the Holy Spirit; and we might not even notice that as part of the service; we see it symbolized by the marking of the sign of the cross on the candidate’s forehead with consecrated oil; in the Hebrew

scriptures oil was poured over the head of a new king as a symbol of God's Holy Spirit coming upon him to strengthen him and guide his leadership over the nation (recall the 23rd Psalm's "thou anointest my head with oil, my cup runneth over", this is partly a coronation psalm); the Bible more frequently describes the Holy Spirit in a way that is more visible than the quiet symbol of holy oil: God's Holy Spirit speaks to Moses out of a Burning Bush which flames up without being consumed (Exodus 3:2); Jesus, we are told by John the Baptist, will Baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire (Matthew 3:11); and in our Pentecost story today, God's Holy Spirit comes as tongues of fire resting upon each of the disciples (Acts 2:3); in each of these the Holy Spirit is seen as a kind of fire, along with the heat that is generated by that fire; so, in Baptism, we receive the effects both water and the Holy Spirit; this is what any person who is Baptized receives

going back to the image of something that boils water, what pieces have to be in place in order to make the steam, and how do they relate directly to our situation as Baptized persons?; first you have to have water—that's obviously like the water used in your Baptism; next you have a source of heat—that's like the Holy Spirit you received in your Baptism; but those two things alone will not boil the water; that only gives you the potential for producing steam; you also have to have something to activate the heat: turn on the stove or flip the switch on the kettle—that's like our fully tapping into the power of the Holy Spirit working in us and through us; and you need a container that collects and directs the potential power of that steam: the boiler or the kettle—those are the ministries into which we direct our efforts; only with all four of those things in place—the water and Holy Spirit from baptism, the desire to use the Holy Spirit, and a ministry in which to direct your efforts—do we fully live into the power of our Baptism; from what I can tell, many of you have these four things in place to help you carry out your ministries, here at Christ and Grace, and in other places too

but if you have not already done so, how can you turn on the heat in your life?; there is a sequence of activities you can follow to do this; first, be aware that, by virtue of your Baptism, the Holy Spirit is available to you and be aware that God desires you to avail yourself of what the Holy Spirit has to offer you; next, match God's desire by your own desire of wanting the Holy Spirit to be at work within you; next, pray an invitation for the Holy Spirit to become active within you; next, ask for the discernment to know how the Holy Spirit is equipping you for ministry, and ask how the Holy Spirit might be guiding you to a particular ministry; finally, allow the Holy Spirit's power to work through you in carrying out whatever ministries you feel called to do

this process is not a one-time event, but an ongoing one of spiritual discernment, one that may need to be revisited at any point in our life if we feel that the heat is missing, or set too low to produce enough steam to get us moving in whatever is our current ministry

a person can be Baptized and yet let that combination of water and Holy Spirit lay dormant, possibly for years, without generating any steam, without carrying out the work the Holy Spirit desires to do through them; so make sure that you take advantage of this great gift that God has given each of us through our Baptism; as we renew our Baptismal Covenant this morning, recognize that each of us has an important role to play in the furthering of the Holy Spirit's Pentecostal Revolution; each of us can be a powerful player in the important work of ministry which God desires us to do, and which our Baptism has prepared us to do