

Grace and peace to you from God our Father from God's only Son, Jesus Christ, and from the Holy Spirit who calls, gathers, and enlightens us, amen.

Please pray with me... Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in us the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and we shall be created. And You shall renew the face of the earth. O, God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit, instructs the hearts of the faithful, grant that by the same Holy Spirit we may be truly wise and ever enjoy His consolations, Through Christ Our Lord, Amen.

That prayer might sound familiar to you if you ever attended an Emmaus Walk or a Via de Cristo weekend. On these religious retreats this prayer is said before every talk or lesson, about 14 times give or take a few. Most of us who've been on a weekend knew that prayer by heart by the end of the 3 days... In that prayer we're asking God's Holy Spirit to come to us and kindle the fire within us so that by the power of God's Spirit we might participate in the renewal of the face of the entire earth. In other words, to allow us to be a part in bringing God's Kingdom to earth as it is in Heaven.

On Pentecost Sunday even Lutherans pray, preach, and talk about the Holy Spirit. Normally, we Lutheran's aren't much for talking about the Holy Spirit. We're much more comfortable talking about Jesus... We like to tell others about Jesus and his love... Stories about the outpouring of the Spirit on people in the

Bible and how they could speak in foreign languages or perform miracles or other supernatural, extra-ordinary feats make us a little nervous. At least they do me...

My experience of the Holy Spirit has never included speaking in tongues or being able to heal anyone's illness by laying on of hands. If only I could do a few miracles...

My experience of the Holy Spirit is more subtle. It's more like being called to become a part of this thing called Church, where I learned about Jesus and about the things Jesus taught, like loving our neighbors, but also loving our enemies. It has much more to do with what we call the gifts of the spirit or as St Paul calls them in our reading from Galatians, the fruits of the Spirit. Those gifts or fruits, in case you missed them are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. My goodness, if the Holy Spirit did come into the hearts of all the faithful and brought us these character traits, the face of the world would be such a different place...

In today's increasingly pluralistic culture, I often wonder if the Church can make a difference. I mean all we see and hear on the news is how divided we are. The emphasis is on how much separates us from one another. If it's not skin color, it's political ideology or your stance on abortion or sexual orientation. The media has found it to be very profitable to chop us up into little segregated groups. From there it's pretty easy to set one group against another so that pretty soon you have

non-stop riots in the streets. I'm not saying we don't have longstanding, difficult problems when it comes to these complicated issues. In these United States we've been trying to deal with the aftereffects of slavery for over 150 years. It's like an earthquake. First, you get the damage caused by the quake itself, but then as time goes on, you get the aftershocks that happen some time later. I believe that's what we're still experiencing today, the aftershocks that are still reverberating from that dark era of our country's past. The question is how do we, in the 21st century deal with those aftershocks...

I think it's time for all of God's people, even Holy Spirit averse Lutherans to be continuously asking for the Holy Spirit to come into our lives and ignite the fire of God's love within all of God's faithful people. If that happens, imagine how we would treat one another with love and kindness... Imagine diffusing riots with gentleness and self-control instead of using inciting words like so many Molotov cocktails to kindle the fires... Let's make this a little more personal. Imagine your life with a big dose of peace, patience, and most importantly joy... How would your life be different? What if everyone in our Congregation was on fire with these fruits of God's Holy Spirit? What could this little country church do? We'll never know unless we ask for that Spirit to first come into us and then to kindle our spark into a flame.

On Pentecost Sunday about 2000 years ago God fulfilled the promise of sending the Holy Spirit and some really amazing things happened. Our text says the believers were all gathered together and after the Holy Spirit came to them they began to speak in other languages. Most of the time we jump right to the other languages and the speaking in tongues part, but I think the truly amazing miracle that happened on that first Pentecost Sunday was the fact that they began to speak at all. They were transformed from being so afraid that they locked themselves in the upper room into being bold proclaimers of God's promise of forgiveness of sin and everlasting life through the righteousness of Jesus Christ whom God raised from the dead. In their proclaiming, they were risking their very lives... despite their fear, the coming of the Holy Spirit opened their mouths to speak of God's great and mighty acts, including raising Jesus from the dead and how God made Jesus Lord of all creation. The fact that other people could understand these preachers in their own languages came after the fact that first the Holy Spirit opened the mouths of the believers to speak about God and Jesus in the first place. That's what it means to kindle the fire of God's love within us. The Holy Spirit gives us the burning desire to tell of our faith and trust in this God of hope and love despite all the obstacles and objections. It gives us the voice to stand up against all the forces of evil and the devil, including, but not limited to racism and soft

bigotry. It gives us the desire for change, to make this a better world than what we started with.

I've always been a little afraid to ask for the Holy Spirit to come into me. I mean, we're talking about God's Spirit here and you never know what God might ask of you once God fills you with His fire and His love... I was asked to change the entire direction of my life and career. God's message isn't always well received and sometimes when we tell others about Jesus and his love we get rejected or laughed at or even threatened. Some of those teachings of Jesus can rub people the wrong way. In our culture today, people who talk about Jesus and his teachings can be overshadowed by the shouts of competing religions, and other issues that distract and deflect from us from mission of advancing God's Kingdom. It's been that way since the beginning and in our modern society it's beginning to look a lot more like it was back in the early Church. I mean, we're not being fed to the lions or beheaded in these United States, but there is still a certain risk you take on when you begin to open your mouth and tell others about Jesus. That's why we really need every one of those fruits of the Spirit.

May we all be open to the coming of God's Holy Spirit and invite that same Spirit to kindle in us the fire of God's love. May the same Spirit that opened the mouths of the faithful on that first Pentecost Sunday give us the courage to face the obstacles we have in front of us when it comes to sharing our faith with others.

May the fire of God's Holy Spirit grow into an unstoppable force for love, joy,
peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Amen.