

Its The Stuff Inside That Gives Us That Glow

Acts 2:1-21

Recently I was reading about lightning bugs or some of you may call them fireflies. They are a fond memory many of us have from warm summer evenings during our childhood. Their bright glow caught our attention as we chased them around the yard and maybe caught a few to put in a jar. Lightning bugs were one of the signs of summertime.

It seems like we don't see as much of them anymore because according to the article, I was reading, experts think that fireflies are dwindling, perhaps by as much as 70% in recent years.

The writer said there's probably no single factor to blame, but likely causes include urban sprawl and industrial pollution that obliterate the insect's habitat. Another probable cause, and this one surprised me, is the spread of artificial light. The lightning bugs we do see are the males of the species who use their flashing lights to attract the females. The females spend most of their time on the ground and don't flash. Researchers suspect that so much artificial light around is interfering with the mating ritual, and they're not reproducing as much.

I hope fireflies will be around for future generations to enjoy just as I hope future generations will be filled with the fire of the Holy Spirit.

Today is Pentecost, the anniversary of that first century day when the Holy

Spirit came in a mighty way upon the disciples of Jesus hunkered down in an upper room in Jerusalem. First, they heard it coming when “suddenly from heaven there came a sound like a rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting.”

Then, they saw it coming when “divided tongues as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them.” Ever since then, fire, a source of light, has been a symbol of the Holy Spirit. That symbol of flames lighting us up connects us to Jesus who said, “I am the light of the world.” We, too, are the light of the world when we radiate the light of God, when we glow with the good news, when we smile with the love of God, when we seek to understand and do the will of God in sacrificial acts of love for our neighbor, for our family, for our community.

We can hear the Spirit blowing around us and see the light of the Holy Spirit coming from people around us. Whether it be a luminous Mother Teresa taking care of dying people she plucked off the streets or hearing the thundering preaching voice of Bishop Steve as the Holy Spirit inspires his words. We can hear the Spirit blowing and see the light of the Holy Spirit coming from people around us.

But most of us who follow Jesus today, may not be as conscious of that light within us, especially when we confront the darkness in our lives. We may not

always hear the wind of the Spirit blowing through our lives or our light may not be that apparent to others, let alone to ourselves.

Then to make it even tougher, just as fireflies are finding their inner lights overpowered by bright and artificial lighting, so too, do we sometimes find the light of Christ within growing dim or being over-powered by other lights in our world.

In my life and now in my oldest son's life, the biggest challenge to the light of Christ is the light of education. My spiritual light was growing inside me until I went off to Kentucky to college. In college, especially as a political science major, we encounter not only new information, but also new ways of thinking about it, which often pushes us away from Christ – all emanating from the lamp of scholasticism. Education is a good lamp even though for some of us, the scholastic lamp seemed, at least for a time, to overpower our inner light of the Spirit.

Another light in our world that I've watched sometimes overpower the light of Christ is the light of psychology. When we're struggling with personal baggage from the past and prayer and worship don't seem to be helping, we seek, as we should, professional counseling that gives us relief, a new perspective, and sets us free from the old bondage. The counseling becomes a good light in our darkness but it is not the light of Christ on Easter morning that makes us right with God and

gives us eternal life.

The lights of our culture can sometimes overpower the light of Christ in our lives – whether it be the light of medicine, the light of technology, and many other lights that help illumine our way through this life. And it's good to have many lights illuminating our way, but one of those lights, the most powerful of those lights emanates from the fire of the Spirit. That's because while the lights of education, psychology, medicine, technology , and others helps illuminate our daily existence – our lives are always much more than our daily existence. The light of the Spirit is a light not only for daily living, but also for eternity. We make a mistake to let the Spirit's light get washed out by the seemingly brighter lights of human discovery and intellectualism.

So today we celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost lighting the fire of the church. We celebrate that God's Spirit comes to us in baptism, making Jacob and Megan his own children through the cleansing water, God's Word spoken, and the faith of all of us gathered to give thanks for the light of the Holy Spirit.

God's Spirit will always be the main source of light for our children and our children's children. Individually and as a church, the Spirit shines brightly in our faces, in our actions, in our loving and serving one another, so the next generation of Christians can shine even more brightly with the glow of the Holy Spirit.

In that same article about lightning bugs was this story about a little boy.

One June evening, just past dusk, a little boy was playing outside his home when he noticed some fireflies. He was fascinated by their brightness, and so he ran inside the house and excitedly asked his dad, “Daddy what makes the fireflies glow?”

His dad, not sure how to answer, said to his son, “I really don’t know son. Why don’t you ask your teacher at school?”

The boy was not discouraged by his father’s non-answer but simply ran outside to admire the fascinating creatures some more.

He tried to catch one. Several times he swatted at them with his hands but missed; but then his hands clapped together on both sides of one’s flight and it squished between his palms.

Making a face as he felt the mashed insect’s body between his hands, he slowly opened them to see the wasted creature. To his surprise the dead firefly was still glowing in the palms of his hands.

Excitedly, he ran back into the house, yelling, “Daddy, daddy, I found out what it is that makes the fireflies glow!”

His dad, pleased that his son had figured out the answer to his own question, asked, “What is it, son?”

“It’s the stuff inside!” he replied proudly, showing him the palm of his hand.

When I read that story, I thought that it's the same thing for us as followers of Jesus Christ. What is it that makes us the light of the world when we radiate the love of God, that makes us glow with good news; what is it that makes us smile with God's love when we seek to understand and do the will of God in sacrificial acts of love for our family, our neighbor, and our community? What is it that brings light into the darkness of our lives.

The father asked, "What is it, son?" He replied proudly, "It's the stuff inside." What is it that gives us that glow? It's the stuff inside.

It's the Holy Spirit gifted to us in baptism that defeats the darkness of our world with the light of Jesus Christ. It's the stuff inside.

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