

In the Path of Lightening
A Sermon for Pentecost Sunday
From the Bible: Acts 2

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Just over a week ago Shodie and I were privileged to be at Madison Square Garden for our daughter-in-law's graduation from law school. The morning was filled with the obligatory speeches and all the appropriate pomp and circumstance befitting a graduation of that stature. And, in the midst of all of the words spoken that morning and all of the speeches made that day there was this one sentence that captured my attention. A grandmother's advice to her granddaughter...

"Put yourself in the path of lightening."

I heard the line not as encouragement for everyone to run outside and recreate Benjamin Franklin's experiment of flying a kite with a key on the string during a thunder storm, but as a grandmother's wisdom, looking back on life, reminding her granddaughter of what life is about; doing her best to point her granddaughter in the direction of that which gives life purpose and meaning. *Put yourself in the path of lightening.*

- Be courageous. Do your best. Be strong.
- Speak up when others tell you to be silent.
- Speak the truth when what others want from you is platitudes.
- Do what is right even if it means you rock the boat.

Put yourself in the path of lightening.

And, if there was ever a one sentence description of what Pentecost is about, this may be it.

Remember the story we heard just a few minutes ago.

In case you forgot or in case the words from the Bible just washed over you because they weren't always clear, here is the Paul Alcorn version of the story...

Following the crucifixion and the experience of resurrection, the Bible says that the followers of Jesus gathered together.

Maybe the same upper room where they had shared the Last Supper with Jesus.

Maybe the same room where they had hid in fear following the crucifixion.

Wherever it was...

Wherever they were...

They were just marking time.

In limbo between what had been and what was to be.

Waiting for whatever it was that was going to happen next.

Waiting for Jesus to do whatever Jesus was going to do next.

But whether they knew it or not, they had put themselves in the path of lightening.

Suddenly a wind whips through the room shaking the dishes and rattling the walls and scattering whatever was not nailed down. And the disciples, startled to attention, look up to see tongues of fire dancing above the heads of everyone else in the room. And, after the split second that it took for them to take it all in and when there is no other sound but the sound of the wind, they all begin to talk at once. Each one asking another if the other sees what they see and if a tongue of fire is above their heads as well.

And, in that instant they realized it was no longer about Jesus.

It was now about them.

Right smack dab in the path of lightening.
And, they were left to decide.

Now the grandmother's wisdom...
And the challenge of Pentecost...

Is that putting yourself in the path of lightening and living with tongues of fire above your head goes against our natural inclination to play it safe.

To leave it to another.

To wait until someone else goes first.

To bite your tongue.

To bide your time.

To not risk upsetting...whoever or whatever.

That is why it was so much easier for the disciples to want to leave it to Jesus rather than do it themselves. And, why when it fell in their laps and danced above their heads they were left to make a decision.

Hold on tight until the wind died down?

Snuff out the flames before anyone else saw?

Or...

Open the door and step into the city?

Open their mouths and speak the words?

Don't be fooled by the easy progression of the story.

It is not as easy as the Bible makes it sound.

Putting yourself in the path of lightening...

Putting yourself in the path of God is always...always...risky business.

So, where does that leave you and me?

For, if I am right and the Bible is never just about them and way back when...

But also is about you and me...

And about what happens in our lives and in the world right now...

- Do tongues of fire still wait to dance above our heads?
- Does God still wait for us to "put ourselves in the path of lightening" so that our lives become charged up and we become empowered enough to leave our pews and to leave our prayers and to step outside into the streets of the city?

Does God still wait for something like that?

Does the world still need Christians to do or to be something like that?

Pentecost!

Put yourself in the path of lightening.

Now to switch gears...

Somewhat, at least. **[Wait for children to come back in.]**

But with those questions still ringing in our ears... **[Everyone take a balloon.]**

Let me ask this question:

What hovers now right now above your head?

- Questions? Uncertainty?
- Charlie Brown's raincloud? Pigpen's debris?

What?

And what might you need to remind you that God's tongues of fire also wait to dance above your head? **[On three every let their balloon go!]**

Look up...look around and remember!

Pentecost.