

Week 7: Start More Fires

Jesus prays for the unity of those who have received him. It is this unity that gives credibility to the movement that is our message and mission (John).

As the fire of the movement spreads (even unexpectedly), the church has to adapt its theology and practice to incorporate the new work of the Holy Spirit. Thus, Peter must explain to the Church in Jerusalem how it was that the gospel was given to the Gentiles. Pressure from without continues while from within missionaries are commissioned (Acts). The way is not easy, but we are reassured of God's support, strength and grace (1 Peter).



*Though we can't think alike,
may we not love alike?
May we not be of one heart,
though we are not of one opinion?
'Is thine heart right,
as my heart is with thy heart?'...
'if it be, give me thine hand.'*

John Wesley



Pray for guidance and discernment. If you wish, write that prayer here and use it for the next six days. Post it on our shared prayer wall if you feel so led.

Read John 17:1-11 slowly and prayerfully. What words or phrases stand out for you?

After Jesus had spoken these words, he looked up to heaven and said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, ²since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. ³And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. ⁴I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. ⁵So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed.

⁶"I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. ⁷Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; ⁸for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. ⁹I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. ¹⁰All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them.

¹¹And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one.

Reflect

What is the "hour" to which Jesus refers? How will He be glorified in this? How will this enable you to know the only true God?

Why is the unity of Jesus' followers so important? What is the source of that unity? What are its characteristics?

What is the relationship between unity and evangelism?



Respond

Share your ideas for how to create and show unity among one or more of the following:

- our circuit churches and faith communities;
- churches and faith communities of our district and Annual Conference;
- faith communities of other traditions and denominations

You may share this on the **Catch Fire in 50 Days** Facebook page

(www.facebook.com/catchfirein50) or directly with your pastor or circuit leader.

Pray for the unity of the church and our credibility in the world so that we might start more Holy Spirit fires without extinguishing each other's fire.



Begin with the prayer for guidance and discernment you wrote on Sunday.

Read Acts 11:1-18 slowly and prayerfully. What words or phrases stand out for you?

Now the apostles and the believers who were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also accepted the word of God. ²So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him, ³saying, “Why did you go to uncircumcised men and eat with them?” ⁴Then Peter began to explain it to them, step by step, saying, ⁵“I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision. There was something like a large sheet coming down from heaven, being lowered by its four corners; and it came close to me. ⁶As I looked at it closely I saw four-footed animals, beasts of prey, reptiles, and birds of the air. ⁷I also heard a voice saying to me, ‘Get up, Peter; kill and eat.’ ⁸But I replied, ‘By no means, Lord; for nothing profane or unclean has ever entered my mouth.’ ⁹But a second time the voice answered from heaven, ‘What God has made clean, you must not call profane.’ ¹⁰This happened three times; then everything was pulled up again to heaven. ¹¹At that very moment three men, sent to me from Caesarea, arrived at the house where we were. ¹²The Spirit told me to go with them and not to make a distinction between them and us. These six brothers also accompanied me, and we entered the man’s house. ¹³He told us how he had seen the angel standing in his house and saying, ‘Send to Joppa and bring Simon, who is called Peter; ¹⁴he will give you a message by which you and your entire household will be saved.’ ¹⁵And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them just as it had upon us at the beginning. ¹⁶And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said, ‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’ ¹⁷If then God gave them the same gift that he gave us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could hinder God?” ¹⁸When they heard this, they were silenced. And they praised God, saying, “Then God has given even to the Gentiles the repentance that leads to life.”

Reflect

Consider how extraordinary the inclusion of the Gentiles in the church was. How did it happen? Are there parallels in your context?

How might you be a more effectively witness to the new things the Holy Spirit might be doing in your midst?



Throughout this study we have been reading about the gospel spreading like wildfire. Yet all this happened without a strategic plan. It often happened unexpectedly, even when there was intense opposition from without and tension from within. How do you explain this? What can you apply from this reflection to your current context?

Respond

Identify a place or a people you God might be calling you to start a fire.

Pray for our Annual Conference Session that will begin in NINE days. That all who gather there will be filled with the Holy Spirit, “catch fire” and contribute to the movement of God’s mission in the world.



Begin with the prayer for guidance and discernment you wrote on Sunday.

Read Acts 11:19-30 slowly and prayerfully. What words or phrases stand out for you?

Now those who were scattered because of the persecution that took place over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, and they spoke the word to no one except Jews.²⁰ But among them were some men of Cyprus and Cyrene who, on coming to Antioch, spoke to the Hellenists also, proclaiming the Lord Jesus.²¹ The hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number became believers and turned to the Lord.²² News of this came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch.

²³When he came and saw the grace of God, he rejoiced, and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast devotion;²⁴ for he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were brought to the Lord.²⁵ Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul,²⁶ and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for an entire year they met with the church and taught a great many people, and it was in Antioch that the disciples were first called “Christians.”

²⁷At that time prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch.²⁸ One of them named Agabus stood up and predicted by the Spirit that there would be a severe famine over all the world; and this took place during the reign of Claudius.²⁹ The disciples determined that according to their ability, each would send relief to the believers living in Judea;³⁰ this they did, sending it to the elders by Barnabas and Saul.

Reflect

What made the church in Antioch so vital?

What was their connection to the church in Jerusalem?

Identify the various roles each person in this text played. (e.g., Barnabas, Agabus, disciples, Saul)
Looking at your circuit or district, are these wide variety of roles being played?

Respond

Consider how you might help meet a need of another faith community (other than your own) in your circuit. Share that with your pastor or circuit leader.



Pray for the vitality of all the churches and faith communities in your circuit so that fires might be started and rekindled that further the mission of God in the world.



Begin with the prayer for guidance and discernment you wrote on Sunday.

Read Acts 12:1-19 slowly and prayerfully. What words or phrases stand out for you?

⁵While Peter was kept in prison, the church prayed fervently to God for him. ⁶The very night before Herod was going to bring him out, Peter, bound with two chains, was sleeping between two soldiers, while guards in front of the door were keeping watch over the prison. ⁷Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared and a light shone in the cell. He tapped Peter on the side and woke him, saying, "Get up quickly." And the chains fell off his wrists. ⁸The angel said to him, "Fasten your belt and put on your sandals." He did so. Then he said to him, "Wrap your cloak around you and follow me." ⁹Peter went out and followed him; he did not realize that what was happening with the angel's help was real; he thought he was seeing a vision. ¹⁰After they had passed the first and the second guard, they came before the iron gate leading into the city. It opened for them of its own accord, and they went outside and walked along a lane, when suddenly the angel left him. ¹¹Then Peter came to himself and said, "Now I am sure that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from the hands of Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting." ¹²As soon as he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose other name was Mark, where many had gathered and were praying. ¹³When he knocked at the outer gate, a maid named Rhoda came to answer. ¹⁴On recognizing Peter's voice, she was so overjoyed that, instead of opening the gate, she ran in and announced that Peter was standing at the gate. ¹⁵They said to her, "You are out of your mind!" But she insisted that it was so. They said, "It is his angel." ¹⁶Meanwhile Peter continued knocking; and when they opened the gate, they saw him and were amazed. ¹⁷He motioned to them with his hand to be silent, and described for them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he added, "Tell this to James and to the believers." Then he left and went to another place. ¹⁸When morning came, there was no small commotion among the soldiers over what had become of Peter. ¹⁹When Herod had searched for him and could not find him, he examined the guards and ordered them to be put to death. Then Peter went down from Judea to Caesarea and stayed there.

Reflect

Do you too easily give in to worldly forces, assuming that the mission of Christ through our church is limited because of the times in which live? While we experience these forces often passively, the early church experienced them actively. Does this cause you to reassess our potential as a movement of Christ's mission?

Notice the role of prayer in this story. What is the state of prayer in your life and church?

This movement in scripture is unstoppable. What has stopped it in our context?



Respond

Gather with a few others and pray fervently to God for our deliverance from stagnation.

Pray for our Bishop that he might lead us boldly and courageously to get the leaders and faith communities in our Annual Conference to join in the movement of God's mission in the world; to once again catch on fire and spread it wildly.



Begin with the prayer for guidance and discernment you wrote on Sunday.

Read Acts 12:20-25 slowly and prayerfully. What words or phrases stand out for you?

Now Herod was angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon. So they came to him in a body; and after winning over Blastus, the king's chamberlain, they asked for a reconciliation, because their country depended on the king's country for food. ²¹On an appointed day Herod put on his royal robes, took his seat on the platform, and delivered a public address to them. ²²The people kept shouting, "The voice of a god, and not of a mortal!" ²³And immediately, because he had not given the glory to God, an angel of the Lord struck him down, and he was eaten by worms and died. ²⁴But the word of God continued to advance and gain adherents. ²⁵Then after completing their mission Barnabas and Saul returned to Jerusalem and brought with them John, whose other name was Mark.

Reflect

Ironically, the fate of King Herod and the word of God move in opposite directions. How do you understand power?

In verse 24 we have another reference to growth. Why does growth seem so important?

Is there one who you would consider to be your mission companion (a Paul to your Barnabas or a Barnabas to your Paul, etc)? If not, describe your ideal mission companion...the one who would complement your strengths.



Respond

If you have a ministry companion, call them today and determine what you will do together to advance the mission of God today.

If you do **not** have a ministry companion, ask God to reveal whom God has in mind.

Pray for your District Superintendent and the churches and faith communities in your district so that they might start and spread more Holy Spirit fires.



Begin with the prayer for guidance and discernment you wrote on Sunday.

Read Acts 13:1-3 slowly and prayerfully. What words or phrases stand out for you?

Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a member of the court of Herod the ruler, and Saul. ²While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."³Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.

Reflect

What is the work to which you have been called?

What is the benefit of adding fasting to praying?

Barnabas and Saul are sent off. Do you and your congregation think of yourselves as been sent into the world?

Respond

Set a reminder alarm to go off each hour. When the alarm rings, remind yourself that you have been sent by Christ into the particular situation you find yourself in.

Pray for the members of Annual Conference that they will experience and be responsive to a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit and a wildfire spread of God's reign.





Begin with the prayer for guidance and discernment you wrote on Sunday.

Read 1 Peter 4-5 slowly and prayerfully. What words or phrases stand out for you?

4 Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same intention (for whoever has suffered in the flesh has finished with sin),² so as to live for the rest of your earthly life no longer by human desires but by the will of God.³ You have already spent enough time in doing what the Gentiles like to do, living in licentiousness, passions, drunkenness, revels, carousing, and lawless idolatry.

⁴They are surprised that you no longer join them in the same excesses of dissipation, and so they blaspheme.⁵ But they will have to give an accounting to him who stands ready to judge the living and the dead.⁶ For this is the reason the gospel was proclaimed even to the dead, so that, though they had been judged in the flesh as everyone is judged, they might live in the spirit as God does.

⁷The end of all things is near; therefore be serious and discipline yourselves for the sake of your prayers.⁸ Above all, maintain constant love for one another, for love covers a multitude of sins.⁹ Be hospitable to one another without complaining.¹⁰ Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received.¹¹ Whoever speaks must do so as one speaking the very words of God; whoever serves must do so with the strength that God supplies, so that God may be glorified in all things through Jesus Christ. To him belong the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen.

¹²Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that is taking place among you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.¹³ But rejoice insofar as you are sharing Christ's sufferings, so that you may also be glad and shout for joy when his glory is revealed.¹⁴ If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the spirit of glory, which is the Spirit of God, is resting on you.¹⁵ But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, a criminal, or even as a mischief maker.¹⁶ Yet if any of you suffers as a Christian, do not consider it a disgrace, but glorify God because you bear this name.¹⁷ For the time has come for judgment to begin with the household of God; if it begins with us, what will be the end for those who do not obey the gospel of God?¹⁸ And "If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinners?"¹⁹ Therefore, let those suffering in accordance with God's will entrust themselves to a faithful Creator, while continuing to do good.

5 Now as an elder myself and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as one who shares in the glory to be revealed, I exhort the elders among you² to tend the flock of God that is in your charge, exercising the oversight, not under compulsion but willingly, as God would have you do it—not for sordid gain but eagerly.³ Do not lord it over those in your charge, but be examples to the flock.⁴ And when the chief shepherd appears, you will win the crown of glory that never fades away.

⁵In the same way, you who are younger must accept the authority of the elders. And all of you must clothe yourselves with humility in your dealings with one another, for "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble."⁶ Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you in due time.⁷ Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you.

⁸Discipline yourselves, keep alert. Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour. ⁹Resist him, steadfast in your faith, for you know that your brothers and sisters in all the world are undergoing the same kinds of suffering.

¹⁰And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, support, strengthen, and establish you. ¹¹To him be the power forever and ever. Amen. ¹²Through Silvanus, whom I consider a faithful brother, I have written this short letter to encourage you and to testify that this is the true grace of God. Stand fast in it. ¹³Your sister church in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you greetings; and so does my son Mark. ¹⁴Greet one another with a kiss of love. Peace to all of you who are in Christ.

Reflect

What gift have you received? Are you using it in service to Christ to the glory of God?

If you are in a position of spiritual leadership, are you exercising that role willingly and not under compulsion; eagerly and not for gain?

What are you going to take with you from 1 Peter to encourage you in the difficult times; times when you feel your flame start to flicker?

Respond

Cast all anxieties on the Lord. Notice the resulting peace, humility and energy.

Pray for spiritual leaders who are exhausted and for new spiritual leaders (lay and clergy) who are called help us start more fires.

