

It Only Takes A Spark

This has been a week like few others. On Monday, we saw the horrifying video of a Minneapolis police officer kneeling on and ultimately killing George Floyd. On Wednesday, we heard the news of a shooting in Grand Forks, which resulted in a local police officer, Cody Holte, being shot and killed.

This morning, I am grieving for these two families, one farther away in a city I love, Minneapolis, the family of George Floyd. And one right here in this city I love, Grand Forks, the family of Cody Holte. I pray for the Lord to console their families, and to place in their hearts the wonderful hope of heaven.

Unfortunately, the backdrop of these two men losing their lives, and the backdrop of your and my grief, are burning and looted American cities. Minneapolis, New York, Washington DC, Los Angeles, Seattle, Chicago, and many more. Last night, I watched violence and looting come even to Fargo, North Dakota, as well.

Healthy, legal, necessary, American protests have been usurped by licentiousness. Some say it's necessary for change. I don't know. I just know my son had to leave his apartment in St. Paul, and my nephew is very anxious about his business in downtown Fargo, because of the events of these days.

Our opening hymn started with the words – It only takes a spark to get a fire going. Maybe because of fires in cities like Minneapolis, this may seem to be in poor taste. However, in light of this day, the Day of Pentecost, the song is perfect. You see, the spark and fire in this song is the Holy Spirit and the love of God.

You heard Sandy read the story. The followers of Jesus were together in one place, when a mighty wind filled the room and little tongues, little sparks of fire, rested on each one of them. Only

these sparks did not start the room on fire. No, these sparks ignited the followers of Jesus to tell his amazing story.

They told the story of Jesus, his life, his love for all people, his suffering, his death on the cross to save all people, and his resurrection. They told the story of Jesus in such a way, people who spoke different languages heard them, understand what they were saying, and believed in Jesus and his love.

Make no mistake about it, the followers of Jesus attracted huge crowds. Thousands came together, and the only fire was inspired disciples, telling people about the love of Jesus, calling people to faith in Jesus. The crowds heard Peter say things like, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved."

You see, the spark in this Pentecost story is the Holy Spirit, and it is the Holy Spirit which ignites the fire which is the love of God. As the song says – it only takes a spark to get a fire going. But as I see it, this spark, this Holy Spirit, this fire never seeks to damage, never seeks to injure, and never seeks to destroy.

Instead, the Holy Spirit sparks a fire of passion; a fire of faith; a fire of love; and a fire that brings people together, calls people to faith in Jesus, and teaches people to love one another, just like Jesus loved us. After all, God so loved the world that he sent us Jesus, his only Son, to love us, and to save us in every way.

I remember Mrs. Legrid, ignited by Holy Spirit, teaching us a new song, a beautiful song, in Sunday School. I can almost hear her now singing, "Jesus loves the little children, all the children of the world. Red, brown, yellow, black and white, each are precious in his sight. Jesus loves the little children of the world."

Mrs. Legrid taught us that Jesus doesn't ask us to pick and choose who we love. He never tells us to love only our families, or only

people who live like us or worship God like us, or only people have the same skin color as us. No, Jesus commands us to love one another, which for Jesus means, as Peter said, everyone.

To this end, Jesus said this to his first followers, and now to every one of us too, in John 13:34-35: "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

So, Christian people, while the spark in your life is the Holy Spirit, this Spirit ignites in your hearts a "fire", which is the love of God. And now, God's love calls you to love one another, to love your neighbors as yourself, to forgive people as you have been forgiven, and to serve any needy person who you meet this day.

I will admit, watching the fires in the Twin Cities was hard. I have been to a number of those places. Yet, I will not be distracted by those fires or the hands that set them. The truth is, they are no match for the fire the Holy Spirit is setting in my heart, which calls me to love all people, and to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

To this end, I encourage you to believe the same. That resting on you right now, is a tongue, a spark of fire, that is the Holy Spirit. May this fire stir your faith in the Lord. May this fire ignite in your heart a passion and love for all people. May this fire give you the courage you need tell other people about Jesus and his love.

To the families of George Floyd and Cody Holte, I offer you my prayers and love. I am deeply sad for the tragedy of your loved one's deaths, and that you are left trying to understand why. Still, I pass on to you today, the love of God. This is the God who holds you in your great grief, and holds George and Cody in heaven.

Amen.