

Pentecost (May 30 – 31,2009)

Acts 2:1-21; John 14:23-27

“It's All About Jesus”

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. There are some who would say that we Lutherans don't pay enough attention to the Holy Spirit. We're always talking about Jesus and what He said and did, and the Holy Spirit barely gets a mention. *Shouldn't He get equal time? Shouldn't we be talking more about the power of the Spirit in our lives?* Well stop and think about that question. *What specifically is the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives?* Romans 1 answers that question when it says, **“I am not ashamed of the Gospel, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes.”** The power of the Holy Spirit is not just some generic force to make things happen or to make us better people. It is the Gospel of the forgiveness of sins in Christ the crucified. That's when the power of the Holy Spirit is being exercised, when that Gospel is being proclaimed, bringing people to faith in Christ and sustaining them in the faith. For where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also new life and salvation.

So the truth of the matter is that whenever Christ is being preached, you can be sure that the Holy Spirit is present doing His work. Jesus said in John 16, **“The Holy Spirit will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you.”** And in today's Gospel our Lord said, **“The Holy Spirit will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.”** So you see, the Holy Spirit's ministry is all about Jesus. The Spirit's job is not to be center stage Himself, but to bring glory to Christ. In fact, if you're hearing a lot of talk about the Holy Spirit just by Himself, or about healings and speaking in tongues and the Spirit's power in your life apart from Christ, that actually frustrates the work of the Holy Spirit. For He is the Spirit who proceeds from the Father and the Son and who is one with them in God's purpose of bringing life to the world.

The events of Pentecost serve to make this point. *For when all is said and done, what are the main things that happened on Pentecost Day?* Well if you read all the way through the 2nd chapter of Acts, you'll see that the Gospel of Christ was preached, people were baptized into Christ for the forgiveness of their sins, and the believers gathered together for the liturgy of the Lord's Supper, the breaking of the bread. There were other wonderful, miraculous things about Pentecost Day which God gave on this unique and special occasion. But the key thing about this day is that the Holy Spirit was poured out to deliver the gifts of Christ.

The first thing to notice about this event is that the believers were all gathered together in one place. It was the 3rd hour of the day, 9 a.m. on a Sunday morning. That's where the Spirit came, to that gathering, which is a reminder of the verse in Hebrews 10, **“Let us not forsake the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the [Last] Day approaching.”**

There were two signs which accompanied the coming of the Holy Spirit among this little band of Jesus' followers. The first was the sound of a rushing mighty wind. This wind was the

breath of God, breathing His Spirit and His life into His Church. It is reminiscent of how Adam was created. God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and Adam became a living being. In the same way the Holy Spirit is the breath of life and the soul of the body which is the Church. This rushing wind is also reminiscent of how God caused a wind to blow over the waters after the flood, drying the land and bringing about a new creation. In the same way, the Spirit blows across the waters of baptism to make us a new creation in Christ.

The second sign was the tongues of fire that came to rest upon the disciples. As in the burning bush where God spoke to Moses, as in the pillar of fire that led the children of Israel in the wilderness, so also here, the fire shows that the Spirit of God, the 3rd Person of the Holy Trinity, is present for and with His people to lead and guide them.

And, of course, there's a little play on words here: there were tongues of fire, and they were able to speak with other tongues. The fiery presence of the Holy Spirit made them able to talk in other languages which they had not learned before this. And please note that these were known languages in the world of that day. Sometimes, when so-called Pentecostals talk about speaking in tongues-like those in the Assembly of God-they're generally not talking about any language that would be understood today, just ecstatic babbling. And that's not what's going on here. The Holy Spirit gave the disciples the ability to speak in tongues so that the visitors who were there in the city from all over the world could hear the Word of Christ in their own native language. This gift was given for the sake of the Gospel! The people who heard this said, **“We hear them speaking in our own tongues the wonderful works of God.”** Through this miracle, the Holy Spirit was saying to the people, **“Jesus is for you. He is for all nations and languages. He died for everyone; He is your Savior from sin. You can be sure of it because you are hearing it in your heart language, your own mother tongue.”**

The same is true for us gathered here today. The word of forgiveness, won by a man who spoke Aramaic and Hebrew, preached by apostles who spoke Greek, confessed by much of the church in Latin, translated by Luther into German, has come to you in your own language, in the English tongue. That's God's gift to you. There's no more personal way of saying that Jesus is your Savior than to say it in your own language. The Gospel of Christ is for you. That's what it means to be truly Pentecostal.

Of course, the very fact that there are all these languages in the world is a reminder of why Jesus had to come and die in the first place. God caused the confusion of languages at Babel because of our self-exalting sin. In order to humble people like us, who want to make a name for ourselves, who aren't content with what we were created to be, God scatters us. The confusion of languages is an illustration of what our sin does. It separates us from others, and most of all, it separates us from God. The language barrier that exists-even among those of the same tongue, even in our own homes and relationships-that is a sign of the barrier that cuts us off from God and the life He created us to have.

However, you can surely see that Pentecost is the reversal of Babel. Whereas Babel caused the people to be scattered, at Pentecost all the people of various languages are brought together in Christ. Even as Jesus was crucified with the accusation above His head written in three different languages, so He redeemed all those of every nation and tribe and people and language,

releasing them from their sins by His precious blood. He has broken down the barrier of sin and pulverized it beneath His feet. He has put us right with God the Father by His holy death. And so He has also put us right again with one another. The walls of hurt and division which separate us are overcome by His mercy and forgiveness. The risen Jesus sends out His Spirit to draw us together and make us one in Himself. No tower, no human achievement can truly unite us and lift us up to the heavens. Only Jesus can do that. And the Holy Spirit has come to proclaim that to the world.

Now there were those on Pentecost who rejected the Holy Spirit, who mocked the disciples speaking in other tongues, and said, **“They are full of new wine.”** And yet those mockers were actually more correct than they realized. For Jesus had once said, **“No one puts new wine into old wineskins; or else the new wine bursts the wineskins . . . But new wine must be put into new wineskins.”** The wine of the old testament was poured from the old wineskins of the prophets. But now in these latter days of the new testament, the apostles are the new wineskins. For Christ Himself is the great grape cluster who was crushed in His suffering and passion, that He might bring forth the wine of the Spirit. Here indeed, then, the apostles are filled with this new wine of the Holy Spirit, that they might bring life and joy to the nations. It is written of the days of the Messiah that **“the mountains shall drip with new wine, and all the hills shall flow with it.”** Here we see the beginning of those days, days in which we still live.

Truly, the prophesy of Joel is still coming to pass, where God says, **“On My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days; and they shall prophesy.”** To prophesy here simply means to speak and confess the word of God. It is what we are doing here today in the liturgy, as we speak and sing and confess the words of God given us by the Holy Spirit. You are the Lord's menservants and maidservants, for God's Spirit was quite literally poured out on you in your baptism. You are the ones gathered by the Spirit around the altar as one body; for there you receive the true body of Christ. You are those who look for the coming of great and awesome day of the Lord, who call on the name of the Lord and shall be saved. For no one can say **“Jesus is Lord”** except by the Holy Spirit.

So then, keep and hold on to Jesus' Word. For it comes from the Father and is filled with the Holy Spirit. Through this Word the Holy Trinity comes to you and makes their home with you. By this Word you have peace that the world cannot give, the everlasting peace of Christ. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.