

The Day of Pentecost

May 23, 2021

P: In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

C: Amen.

Scripture Readings

1 Kings 22:5-28

And Jehoshaphat said to the king of Israel, "Inquire first for the word of the Lord." Then the king of Israel gathered the prophets together, about four hundred men, and said to them, "Shall I go to battle against Ramoth-gilead, or shall I refrain?" And they said, "Go up, for the Lord will give it into the hand of the king." But Jehoshaphat said, "Is there not here another prophet of the Lord of whom we may inquire?" And the king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, "There is yet one man by whom we may inquire of the Lord, Micaiah the son of Imlah, but I hate him, for he never prophesies good concerning me, but evil." And Jehoshaphat said, "Let not the king say so." Then the king of Israel summoned an officer and said, "Bring quickly Micaiah the son of Imlah." Now the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat the king of Judah were sitting on their thrones, arrayed in their robes, at the threshing floor at the entrance of the gate of Samaria, and all the prophets were prophesying before them. And Zedekiah the son of Chenaanah made for himself horns of iron and said, "Thus says the Lord, 'With these you shall push the Syrians until they are destroyed.'" And all the prophets prophesied so and said, "Go up to Ramoth-gilead and triumph; the Lord will give it into the hand of the king."

And the messenger who went to summon Micaiah said to him, "Behold, the words of the prophets with one accord are favorable to the king. Let your word be like the word of one of them, and speak favorably." But Micaiah said, "As the Lord lives, what the Lord says to me, that I will speak." And when he had come to the king, the king said to him, "Micaiah, shall we go to Ramoth-gilead to battle, or shall we refrain?" And he answered him, "Go up and triumph; the Lord will give it into the hand of the king." But the king said to him, "How many times shall I make you swear that you speak to me nothing but the truth in the name of the Lord?" And he said, "I saw all Israel scattered on the mountains, as sheep that have no shepherd. And the Lord said, 'These have no master; let each return to his home in peace.'" And the king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, "Did I not tell you that he would not prophesy good concerning me, but evil?" And Micaiah said, "Therefore hear the word of the Lord: I saw the Lord sitting on his throne, and all the host of heaven standing beside him on his right hand and on his left; and the Lord said, 'Who will entice Ahab, that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead?' And one said one thing, and another said another. Then a spirit came forward and stood before the Lord, saying, 'I will entice him.' And the Lord said to him, 'By what means?' And he said, 'I will go out, and will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets.' And he said, 'You are to entice him, and you shall succeed; go out and do so.' Now therefore behold, the Lord has put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these your prophets; the Lord has declared disaster for you."

Then Zedekiah the son of Chenaanah came near and struck Micaiah on the cheek and said, "How did the Spirit of the Lord go from me to speak to you?" And Micaiah said, "Behold, you shall see on that day when you go into an inner chamber to hide yourself." And the king of Israel said, "Seize Micaiah, and take him back to Amon the governor of the city and to Joash the king's son, and say, 'Thus says the king, "Put this fellow in prison and feed him meager rations of bread and water, until I come in peace."'"" And Micaiah said, "If you return in peace, the Lord has not spoken by me." And he said, "Hear, all you peoples!"

Acts 2:1-21

When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.

Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. And they were amazed and astonished, saying, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians—we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God." And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" But others mocking said, "They are filled with new wine."

But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them: "Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words. For these people are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day. But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel:

"And in the last days it shall be, God declares,
that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh,
and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
and your young men shall see visions,
and your old men shall dream dreams;
even on my male servants and female servants
in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy.
And I will show wonders in the heavens above
and signs on the earth below,
blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke;
the sun shall be turned to darkness
and the moon to blood,
before the day of the Lord comes, the great and magnificent day.
And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.'

John 15:26-27, 16:4b-15

"But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me. And you also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning. I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you. But now I am going to him who sent me, and none of you asks me, 'Where are you going?' But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart. Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you. And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer; concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.

“I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

Hymn: *LSB 496, Holy Spirit, Light Divine*



1 Ho - ly Spir - it, light di - vine, Shine up - on this heart of mine;
2 Let me see my Sav - ior's face, Let me all His beau - ties trace;
3 Ho - ly Spir - it, pow'r di - vine, Cleanse this guilt - y heart of mine;
4 Ho - ly Spir - it, joy di - vine, Cheer this sad - dened heart of mine;
5 Ho - ly Spir - it, all di - vine, Dwell with - in this heart of mine;



Chase the shades of night a - way, Turn the dark - ness in - to day.
Show those glo - rious truths to me Which are on - ly known to Thee.
In Thy mer - cy pit - y me, From sin's bond - age set me free.
Yield a sa - cred, set - tled peace, Let it grow and still in - crease.
Cast down ev - 'ry i - dol throne, Reign su - preme, and reign a - lone.

Sermon

When a person starts to think about the Bible, often one of the first things that jumps to mind are the stories about miracles. However, the word “miracle” is not used that often in the Bible, either the Old or the New Testament. It does occur, but much more often these supernatural events we call a miracle are referred to as “signs and wonders” or just “a sign” from God. Part of today’s reading from Acts, quoting the Old Testament prophet Joel who we just heard from last week, says “And I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below.”

What’s the purpose of a sign? To call attention to something. To communicate some information that somebody, somewhere thought that you should know about. A billboard beside the highway says “pay attention to the product or service I’m advertising!” A big neon orange warning sign says “pay attention, the right lane is ending in half a mile!” The sign next to each enclosure at a zoo or each tank at an aquarium says “pay attention to these special facts about this particular animal!”

A sign calls our attention to something, and the signs and wonders in the Bible, the wonderful, supernatural acts of God throughout history, call our attention to things as well. The miracles of Jesus weren’t just neat magic tricks to impress people; they had a purpose, and that purpose was to back up his words: when he says that he’s God and that he has the authority to forgive your sins, you should believe him, because look at this demonstration of divine power. They were his credentials, helping back up what he said.

In this sense, Pentecost is most certainly a sign. There are miraculous things happening: the visible tongues of flame, the speaking in tongues, even converting three thousand people in one fell swoop is pretty amazing. These signs are like a great announcement, a trumpet fanfare that declares something really important is happening. In the traditions of the Church, we have our own sign here that draws attention to that fact: these bright, beautiful, striking red paraments at the front of the church. There’s only a very few occasions we use this red color: for Reformation Day in October, for less common things like certain saints’ days or the ordination or installation of a pastor, and of course today for Pentecost, the color red symbolizing the tongues of fire.

What is Pentecost announcing, then? What is this sign pointing out to us? It is the announcement that what Jesus accomplished in his death and resurrection is for you. The benefits of the cross and the empty tomb -- forgiveness of sins, redemption, salvation, reconciliation with God, eternal life -- these benefits are now being given to you and to people from every nation, every place, every time. It's the beginning of the Holy Spirit's work that continues today and every day, to take people who are dead in sin and bring them back to life, connecting them with the benefits of Christ. It is the work of the Holy Spirit to take everything that Christ accomplished and personally apply it, to make it for me, for you.

All the nations of the earth (represented here by these many names and regions) are included in God's covenant; those who were outside are being welcomed in. It goes back to the early part of Genesis and the tower of Babel. There, because of their disobedience to God, the languages of the earth were mixed and confused; here in the Church, here by the unity of faith in Christ, though they speak many languages there is one common understanding in the Spirit. Where disobedience and sin divide humanity, nation against nation, bringing confusion and conflict, now the Christian Church transcends it and the Spirit brings us together into God's kingdom that is far bigger and more important than any earthly one. At Babel, they were separated and dispersed; at Pentecost, they are gathered together and united.

It points us to the whole aspect of salvation as restoration, putting things back how they were before, in Eden. Pentecost is a sign of the way that God is restoring us -- not just restoring us as individuals, but restoring the whole human race, re-humanizing us and repairing the damage of the Fall and of sin. Even beyond that, it is the event which jolts the world into taking note that something entirely new is taking place. God is coming to live in our midst through the indwelling Spirit of God gifted through the Word of Christ because we have been reconciled by the blood of Christ. There is good news for all the world on Pentecost: the exile is over, for Jews and Gentiles alike.

Pentecost is the reversal of the exile and scattering of Babel. It puts an end to the deafness and ignorance of those outside of the faith, those who had no solid, sure knowledge of God, by preaching the Gospel of God's grace, God's welcome to all the world. If God was going to save the entire world, then the exiling, the confusion, the ignorance, and scattering had to be ended. Pentecost signals this dramatic reversal in a spectacular way.

But this gathering together by the Spirit also means a separation. All those that day, and all of us today who received God's Spirit, are now made holy; because we belong to the holy God, because we are washed with the holy blood of Christ, we are also made holy and different and separate from this sinful present reality. We are gathered back to God, which means leaving behind Babel -- Scripture uses Babylon (from Babel) to represent all the powers and ways of human society in all of its sinfulness and violence and rebellion. In many ways, we could say Babel and Babylon are human civilization, in stark contrast with the Kingdom of God.

In our Old Testament reading from 1 Kings, we see this, along with another example of the Spirit at work: there's this prophet named Micaiah, and this is the only time we ever meet him in Scripture. In this case, the kings of Judah and Israel are coming together as allies and planning a military offensive against another neighboring kingdom. They want to set out with the best information, so they consult God: they call all these prophets together to see if God is for or against their expedition. And these four hundred prophets all say what the kings want to hear, "Go and triumph!" Go and be victorious!

All the prophets except Micaiah, that is. The others claim to speak by the Holy Spirit, but they tell the kings what they want to hear, not what God has actually said. There are plenty of churches and people today who claim to represent God and His Spirit, to speak with some kind of spiritual authority... But their message is conformed to humanity and not to Scripture -- and yes, I see this on the Left and on the Right alike, both within the circles of the Democrats and the Republicans. Worldly

ideologies may have some things right, but none of them entirely hold up to the standard of Scripture. We are citizens of heaven first and of this world second. The voice we trust comes from the Word of God, not Fox News or MSNBC.

Too often, there are voices who claim to speak truth, who even claim to speak for God, and yet they do not; as Paul warns Timothy, they are scratching the itching ears of their listeners. Too often, we are tempted to fit God's Word into our policies or culture or personal desires, just as these false prophets do in telling the powers-that-be what they want to hear -- instead of fitting ourselves into God's Word and letting it teach and form us. May the Holy Spirit preserve us all from this same temptation!

I've said it before, but it bears repeating: if you don't like something I say, ask me where it is in the Bible. If I can't show you or give a satisfactory explanation, then perhaps I have become like these false prophets, speaking where God has not spoken. But if I can show you from Scripture, then it doesn't really matter whether you like what I said or not. I pray for the Spirit to give me the strength to give the same response Micaiah had: "What the Lord says to me, that I will speak." God didn't ask me or you if we like what He says. And as sinful people, there's a very good chance that we won't like it at some points!

He just gives us His Word and His Spirit. But in that is a wonderful strength and freedom. There is a lot of darkness in this world, but the appearance of the Holy Spirit in flame and fire points us to what John chapter 1 says: Jesus is the light of the world, shining into the darkness. It's a beautiful and a fitting symbol for the Spirit's work in the Church - Christ is the light of the world, the great light for all mankind, and as Christians we're called to be "little Christs," a little reflection into the world. If Christ is the sun, through our faith in him we still at least have a little candle flame within us. It's better to light a candle than to curse the darkness, the saying goes, and the Spirit in each of us is a little candle in this dark world.

And so, we pray as we sang in our sermon hymn, "Come, holy Light, guide divine, now cause the Word of life to shine. Teach us to know our God aright and call Him Father with delight. From every error keep us free; let none but Christ our master be that we in living faith abide." May the Spirit continue to strengthen your faith in Christ, pointing you to him and the salvation you have, and motivating and guiding you each and every day to walk in his ways, to the glory of God.

Lord's Prayer

**Our Father who art in heaven,
hallowed be Thy name,
Thy kingdom come,
Thy will be done on earth
as it is in heaven;
give us this day our daily bread;
and forgive us our trespasses
as we forgive those
who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For Thine is the kingdom
and the power and the glory
forever and ever. Amen.**

P: O God, on this day You once taught the hearts of Your faithful people by sending them the light of Your Holy Spirit. Grant us in our day by the same Spirit to have a right understanding in all things and evermore to rejoice in His holy consolation; through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

C: **Amen.**

All: I thank You, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Your dear Son, that You have kept me this night from all harm and danger; and I pray that You would keep me this day also from sin and every evil, that all my doings and life may please You. For into Your hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Your holy angel be with me, that the evil foe may have no power over me. Amen.

P: Let us bless the Lord!

C: **Thanks be to God!**

P: The almighty and merciful Lord, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, bless and preserve you.

C: **Amen.**