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Pentecost Day
May 24, 2026
Text: Acts 2:1 – 21
Title: Cowardly Christians

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. He was all alone as he sat on the old tree stump, but that wasn't unusual. No one really wanted to be seen with someone like him. It was too embarrassing. "Why am I like this?" he asked himself for the hundredth time. "I'm strong. I'm powerful. I have everything that I need to confront people, but I just can't do it!" In short, he was miserable.

Suddenly he heard something out on the nearby road. Out of curiosity he got up to take a look. The bushes were thick, and he knew that no one would be able to see him if he didn't want to be seen. That was one thing that he was good at, hiding. He peeked out of the leaves and saw three people come around the bend in the road. It was a young girl with two companions. They seemed pretty nervous as they walked down the road, and they were repeating the same words over and over again. The trio kept peering into the bushes all around them, and now it was obvious that they were all really scared to be in this part of the forest. "What luck!" he thought to himself. "Three people who are already scared! I can spring out at them, and make them even more scared. That should help me build up some nerve and gain some confidence."

The little group approached his hiding spot, and he knew to wait for just the right moment. With the way that they were looking all around, it was just a matter of time before they weren't looking in his direction, and then he would pounce! They were still talking, but he was concentrating on their approach.

He sprang out of the bushes at just the right moment with his best growl. He landed perfectly right in front of the little group, and the girl even screamed at just the right time! "I did

it!” he said to himself as he watched the fear overtake them. “They’re actually afraid of *me!*” But that’s when everything went drastically wrong.

The young girl had been carrying a little dog in her arms, and it suddenly got loose. The stupid mutt came right at him! Suddenly the fear overtook him, and he just couldn’t help himself. He ran back up into the bushes. It didn’t do any good. The little dog followed him, growling and barking for all it was worth. It chased him back out onto the road, and before he knew what was going on he was standing in the middle of the travelers, holding his tail and sobbing like a little cub. Shamefully he confessed the awful truth to them. “I just don’t have any courage,” the Cowardly Lion said to Dorothy, the Tin Man and the Scarecrow.

So, what does the cowardly lion have to do with today’s celebration of Pentecost? As today’s second reading opens in Acts 2, we find similar creatures to the Cowardly Lion. Here we read about the Cowardly Christian. There is nothing new to that. The disciples have shown their complete lack of courage ever since that horrible night in the Garden of Gethsemane. They all deserted Jesus when they said they wouldn’t, and Peter even swore an oath denying that he knew Him. It’s safe to say that their courage was grossly lacking when the time came for them to stand up and be counted with the man that they had devoted the past three years of their life too. They come across as cowards, plain and simple.

After the empty tomb is discovered on the morning of Easter Sunday, we find them hiding behind locked doors because they are terrified that they will be the next ones to hang on a cross. When Jesus does appear to them inside that locked room, they are terrified because He is there. Well, okay, you can’t really blame them for being afraid on that one, they had seen Jesus die after all, and when you think you’re seeing a ghost, fear is a natural reaction.

But even now, after they have been with the risen Christ, after they have seen Him numerous times and watched Him ascend to His throne at the right hand of His Father in heaven,

here they sit by themselves in one room. Christ had told them to go and make disciples of all nations. He had said that they were to go out and fish for men, but here they are sitting in a room and most likely still afraid of what the consequences from the world around them will be. That's the disciples of Jesus the Christ, the first example of the Cowardly Christian.

And here, today, if we are honest with ourselves, all of us make up the modern day version of the Cowardly Christian. We have been given some of the same commands that Jesus gave to His disciples; "Go and make disciples of all nations," to be specific, and here we sit, making Sunday morning worship the extent of our Christian life, at least most of the time. We are very much like the disciples who sat by themselves in that room on Pentecost morning.

How many times do we fail to take advantage of the opportunities that we've been given to share our faith? Any time you might shut the door or not even answer it to the Mormon or Jehovah's Witness standing at your front step, you have been guilty of being a Cowardly Christian. How often have we failed to stand up for what was right in the face of sinful actions happening right in front of us? Participating in gossip or simply keeping quiet when faced with a blatant lie about someone else leaves you guilty of being a Cowardly Christian. How many neighbors outside of our own little world have we failed to show love for because they're not a part of our circle of friends? Christ said that anyone is your neighbor to love as yourself, and when you don't care what happens to people in another state or even another town or city because it isn't your problem, then you fail to love your neighbor and you show yourself to be a Cowardly Christian. You show yourself to be a sinner.

But God knows that even as a Christian you are weak, cowardly, and sinful. He knows that on your own you are helpless and hopeless. He knows that He must act in your life to get past the sin and fear that is there. He knows all of these things – and everything else of course – and so He sent His Son to the cross. Without Jesus' death and resurrection, there would be no forgiveness for

the sinful failings of all of us Cowardly Christians. Without Jesus' death and resurrection there would be no hope for our own resurrection to eternal life on the Last Day. And without Jesus' death and resurrection He would not have ascended back into heaven to send the Holy Spirit to this world of sin.

When the Holy Spirit arrived in the room that the disciples were sitting in, just look at the results. A sound like a mighty wind filled that house, and something that looked like tongues of fire rested on each of them. Suddenly all of them could speak fluently in different languages. This wasn't the unintelligible babbling that some churches today call "speaking in tongues," and we know this because the crowd gathered outside of the house could understand what was being said, each person in his own language heard the disciples speak of the mighty works of God. It was clear to each and every one of them, and no translator was required. On this day God reversed the curse that He placed on humanity at the Tower of Babel, at least for a little while.

And then it was Peter, the same Cowardly Christian who had blatantly and publicly swore an oath that he didn't even know who Jesus of Nazareth was, this same man stood up in front of the crowd that had gathered, and he was suddenly nothing close to a Cowardly Christian. Peter was a bold and faithful witness to Jesus the Christ on that very day as the Holy Spirit used him to proclaim the Gospel to that crowd. The Spirit's words coming out of Peter's mouth were one of the most incredible sermons of all time, and they spread the Holy Spirit to the crowd and that led to the instant conversion of about 3000 people that same day.

On that first Pentecost, the Holy Spirit arrived in force, and He did His primary work among God's people. He pointed them to Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. He removed the curse of Babel which today's world celebrates as diversity, and He temporarily destroyed the barrier of language. He used Peter to convict the crowd with the Law of God and to show them that they were sinners who deserved the same death that Christ suffered for them. Then He had Peter give them the

Gospel that declared forgiveness for each one of them, and they were baptized. The Holy Spirit used the common ordinary things of this world to accomplish extraordinary things through the grace of God.

That's how He continues to work among us today. Lutherans are often accused of not talking about the Holy Spirit, but that's because it's the way that the Holy Spirit wants things to be. The Holy Spirit works through the Word of God and His Sacraments to accomplish one primary goal, to lead you to Christ and His cross. He is present wherever and whenever the Word is preached and the Sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion are celebrated. It doesn't matter whether you feel Him there or not. God has promised that it is so, and it is.

But His work doesn't end there. The Holy Spirit continues to work through the Word whenever it is spoken or acted upon outside of these walls. He works within each one of us to give us the courage that we are sorely lacking. He speaks through us in the same way that He spoke through Peter, and He uses us to accomplish the same thing, the conversion of the lost and condemned sinner.

Just like the Father and Son never change throughout eternity, the Holy Spirit doesn't change either. He blows where and when He pleases, just like Jesus talked about in John 3, which is why we don't necessarily see the results of the Holy Spirit's work through us. He works conversion in the hearts of men through the proclamation of God's Word and the administering of the Lord's Sacraments. And He points everyone to the cross of Christ for the forgiveness of sins, the promise of the resurrection of the body, and the new world to come when Christ returns. Amen. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.