

May 23, 2021

The Day of Pentecost

Bethlehem Lutheran Church, Milan, WI
St. John Ev. Lutheran Church, Edgar, WI

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

In the Name of the Father and the ✠ Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

What is it about mankind that makes us so fickle? Nothing is ever good enough for us. If we have chicken, we want steak. If we have a good paying job, we want a better one with more benefits or more favorable hours. Even winning the lottery isn't enough for some people: They keep playing, again and again, always trying to get more, more, more. And then there is our culture of serial marriages, couples always on the brink of divorce, always on the prowl for a better husband, a better wife, ready to trade up at a moment's notice. We are never satisfied with what we have, no matter how good it is.

Take today, for instance. Today is the Day of Pentecost, when we celebrate the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the followers of Christ, the beginning of the Christian Church. It is not simply a remembrance of a past event: The Holy Spirit didn't just appear one day and then leave. He is with us every day and is active in our lives. You, individually, have the Holy Spirit bestowed upon you. You have the third person of the Trinity in you, with you, day after day! Isn't that miraculous? Not only did Christ Jesus die on the cross for you – thus showing your worth in the eyes of God – but then, to add icing to this cake of God's blessings, He gave you a piece of Himself: The Ruakh YHWH, the Spirit of God. That is nothing short of a miracle.

Yawn! But that's such a boring miracle, pastor! We want a *cool* miracle. We want a miracle like in Acts chapter 2, where the Holy Spirit comes down like tongues of fire and we are given the gift of foreign languages. Now *that's* cool. That's the kind of miracle that I could post on Facebook and brag about to my friends. But the version where the Holy Spirit comes to me all quiet like? That seems rather dull. Besides... how do I know I have the Holy Spirit? I don't feel holy.

What is holiness? We tend to think of it as actions, of living a certain way, behaving a certain way. To paraphrase Forest Gump, "Holy is and holy does!" That is what the world thinks, but then the world knows nothing of the true and living God. Holiness does not come from better living, or to put it in a more Lutheran way, good works do not precede faith. They flow from it. So it would be better to say, "Holy is as holly believes." Now *that* is something that Scripture actually supports. Okay... but, what does holy believe?

Jesus told His disciples, **“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”** (v.26). The Paraclete, or Helper, is none other than the Holy Spirit. The Paraclete bears witness about Jesus, about who He is and what He accomplished for us. Jesus was preparing His disciples for the Day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit would be poured out for all, both Jew and Gentile, and would bind them into a new creation, a holy building that was not a building, a holy place that was not a place, a holy communion between God and man: The Christian Church. That is what Pentecost is really about. The creation of an ongoing miracle, where heaven comes to earth, where God gives of Himself to us sinners to strengthen us and guide us. Where we, who are beset by sin and weak of faith, nonetheless confess with our mouths the truth revealed not by flesh and blood, but from above: That Jesus is the Christ.

But pastor... everybody knows that already. How can that be special? How can that be miraculous? But knowing of a thing and knowing a thing... those are two vastly different experiences. I know of childbirth, but I don't know childbirth and never will. Everyone knows about car accidents, but not everyone has been in one. The noise of two cars colliding, the shattered glass everyone, the smell of antifreeze and smoke. Just because people have heard of Jesus Christ, it doesn't mean they believe that Jesus is the Christ, the very Son of God enfleshed for mankind. Many people just think that “Christ” is Jesus' last name, as if He got mail delivered to “Mr. Christ, General Delivery, Nazareth.” They know... but they don't know. Some don't want to know out of rebellion and hardness of heart, other desperately need to know, but don't because no one has shared the Good News with them. That is why the Holy Spirit came to us: To open our hearts to God's truth, to convict our hearts of sin and then plant in our hearts the Gospel.

The role of the Holy Spirit is to create and sustain faith, to “help” us, as Jesus said. And we need all the help we can get. But how does the Paraclete do this, exactly? First, He kills you. No, seriously. You can't believe that Jesus is the Christ until you are born from above, born again by the power of the Holy Spirit. So, out of love for you, the Holy Spirit drowns you in Baptism, puts you to death along with all your sin, and makes you alive again. Every Baptism is both a funeral and a resurrection party and the gifts bestowed are forgiveness, everlasting life and the Holy Spirit, who remains with you, a part of you, to help you in this new existence. As Jesus said, **“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.”** (v.13-14) He gives you faith. Faith that believes that Jesus is the Christ.

Second, the Holy Spirit gives you the ability to speak this truth to others. Now, some churches believe that the only proofs of the Holy Spirit are suddenly knowing angel tongues, which is very new idea in the history of the church, only a century old. It came from California... enough said. But the gift of foreign languages on that day long ago was not a parlor trick. It was simply God spreading the Gospel to far off lands, through those who were enlivened by the

Holy Spirit. They were given what they needed to know to get the job done. You already have the tools you need know to share the Gospel. You know the language that all of your neighbors speak, your coworkers, your friends. The very people who need to hear that Jesus is the Christ. The very people who do not have faith, who have not heard the life-changing Gospel. So the Paraclete will use you, just as He used those disciples in Jerusalem, to tell people that Jesus died for them while they were still sinners, taking upon Himself our shame, our punishment, and reconciling them to God. He will open your mouth and give you the words you need because from your mouth comes the holiest of words: Our sins are forgiven in Jesus. There is nothing sweeter, no phrase more precious in all the world.

We don't need a special made-to-order gift from God. We already have one. Yours is just like mine and yet it is also personalized just for you. Your particular sins are forgiven, even the ugliest of them, and you have been made a child of God. You have died with Christ and been made alive by the Holy Spirit. You receive Christ's Body and Blood here, each Lord's Day, for the forgiveness of sins and to strengthen you. How can we believe such miraculous things? Because the Holy Spirit writes that truth in our hearts, and then He underlines it with Jesus' blood. Holy is as holy believes.

In Jesus name, Amen.

Rev. Schopp