

Sermon for the Day of Pentecost June 8, 2025 jj
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Where was the Holy Spirit before the first Christian Pentecost? His presence in that Jerusalem house as recorded for us in Acts chapter 2 was shown in three unmistakable signs: the sound of a mighty, rushing wind, the tongues of fire above the heads of those men speaking, and what those men were speaking were words of God, uttered by means of a miracle in other, recognizable, human languages. What other languages? The specific languages spoken by the visitors who were in Jerusalem, attending the Hebrew feast. But instead of doing what they were planning to do that day, that is, offering their gifts to God of the first crops they reaped, God the Holy Spirit showed up to give them gifts that would enable them to reap an even greater harvest. A harvest of souls, including their own, souls who would believe in Jesus for everlasting life, this new kind of harvest would replace the harvest of grain that would only feed the body with bread for a single day.

But this extraordinary appearance of the Holy Spirit shouldn't make you think that He wasn't there before the Day of Pentecost, ten days after Jesus' Ascension into heaven. Remember, Jesus breathed on His chosen Apostles on Easter evening and said, Receive the Holy Spirit. He did NOT say, soon there will be a day when you will receive the Holy Spirit—No, here He is right here in My breath that I breathe out upon you. The Spirit of Truth, the Comforter, the coming of the Kingdom that you pray for in the Lord's Prayer—here He is! And He's all yours. He makes you strong in faithfulness to Me. He will give you the Words to say when you're called upon to give your testimony before rulers and judges who will try to persecute you. Where was the big wind sound at that time? Where were the tongues of fire? Why couldn't the former fishermen speak languages they never studied fifty days prior at Easter?

The wind blows where it wishes, and the Holy Spirit works where and when it pleases God the Holy Trinity. Easter evening was the right time for the frightened disciples to receive comfort and encouragement from the Holy Spirit, so Jesus breathed Him upon them. But the other special effects, you may call them, needed to wait until the appropriate moment. Wait until Pentecost. That's what we talked about last week. When you receive your good things from the Lord your God, there are times when you have to wait patiently for Him to work in His perfect time.

Jesus had the Holy Spirit as His constant companion—He was there right from our Lord's human conception in the womb of the Virgin Mary. He landed upon Jesus in the form of a dove when He was baptized by John in the Jordan River. Through all of Jesus' temptations, miracles, teaching, healing and raising people from the dead, the Holy Spirit was always there too. Our Lord even exhaled the Spirit back to the Father when He breathed His last on the cross.

So naturally, when we hear Jesus promise that He will be with us always, even to the end of the age, we should also expect that the Holy Spirit will also be with us always, exhorting, comforting, training us in repentance, convicting us through words of Law and Gospel and assuring us of our baptism inheritance, our identity that will never change: You are a child of God, dear believer! The Holy Spirit makes the guarantee, the seal of God's irrevocable promise placed right into your heart. You won't see it fully until the end, but your eternal life with God is fully yours, locked in with the full and free forgiveness of your sins. That's what you need to hear first.

Now here's the problem: where is the Holy Spirit for me, for you, for our church right here, today? If the third Person of the Holy Trinity can't always be seen or felt by mere human flesh, what must we do to be assured that He is with us? Where is my assurance that God will always be with me? That whatever I suffer, whatever I go through, whatever challenge life's journey puts in my way, that I have the Spirit's power to overcome and win the final victory? Do I need to ask the Holy Spirit personally to do His work in me, to crucify my sinful flesh inside me and resurrect me as a new creature that is fully acceptable in God's sight? Many Christians over several centuries have tried to answer those questions with something we must do: everything from the food you eat, to the day you meet for worship, to the commitment you make to really try harder this time to do what you think God wants you to do. You must feel on fire to get God's Work done, and if you don't feel that way right now, something must be wrong with you. It can get quite exhausting—where is the Holy Spirit?

Listen to Jesus as He speaks soothingly, peacefully reaching out His hand and lifting up your drooping head to behold His smiling face: Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you, not as the world gives, do I give unto you. Find my perfect gift to you first—find the Holy Spirit Himself as your very own, receive Him free of cost or obligation, receive Him in the Word of forgiveness you hear spoken over you from those who saw Jesus, those who really walked with Him and talked with Him. Don't search for Him inside your heart, or survey your latest experiences as any proof of the Holy Spirit's presence or lack of same.

Trust God's Word that you hear and read and study and pray every day—that's where you know you have the Holy Spirit speaking to you, comforting you, encouraging you, rebuking you where you need it, and pushing you to keep looking to Jesus who is your constant source of life and love for God and your neighbors. And

if you haven't been regularly connected to Jesus in His Word, pick up your Bible and read. Pick up a catechism if you want a hint on where to look in the Bible, what to pray for out of all that God has promised you. It won't take much for you to do at all, and the Holy Spirit will take over from there.

Follow Jesus' advice to look away from the false comfort and peace that the world offers, but never fully delivers. There's always one more hurdle to cross, always one more gotcha that threatens to put you back two steps for every one you move forward. Set your sights ever higher: believe in God, believe also in me; in My Father's house are many mansions, I go (that is, He goes to the cross) to prepare a place for you. And when Jesus prepared the place for you with His death that reconciled you to God, that's when He breathed His Holy Spirit on you, the Spirit that washed you in your Baptism, that feeds you in the Body and Blood of Jesus you eat and drink.

He's the Spirit that strengthens you, not in giving you a personal resolve to do better for yourself, but in your forgiveness that sets you free finally to look away from yourself and find what your neighbors need from you in the bonds of love you share with them. You will be surprised at yourself in how God can give you boldness to speak about Him to others, even in the midst of ridicule and worse, like the apostles themselves. And the Holy Spirit will use you to bring others to Jesus, to connect with Him in forgiveness and true peace that is not of this world. Your calm in the face of the storms of life will make an impact on others, and they will ask, maybe even pester you, why this is so? Because Jesus is with me. That's the special comfort of being a Lutheran, by the way. You can say, His Spirit has rested on me as He said. I have His assurance and that's all I need. Yes, they're going to think you're weird.

You may not see it, but those same tongues of fire rest upon your heads even now. You belong

to the church founded upon the Apostles who received the same Holy Spirit on Pentecost. You may not hear it, the wind sound you hear may just be the wind that blows outside. You are, though, hearing God's Word in your language, and for that you thank the Holy Spirit for working His work through the human translators of many centuries that studied and eventually made the Greek and Hebrew Scriptures speak with an English tongue. So the signs of the Holy Spirit here with you are not as impressive-looking as we read about on the first Christian Pentecost in Acts 2, but He's with you all the same as you pray today and every day: Come Holy Spirit, give us the peace Jesus paid for on the cross, and lead us and all believers in Him to the Father in heaven.

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