

May 28, 2023
The Day of Pentecost
St. Timothy Lutheran Church – Huber Heights, OH
Pastor Joel Sutton

Acts 2:1-21

OUTPOURING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
Amen.

The devil used to be content to hide in the shadows, but now he's strutting out in broad daylight, tempting people to abandon their faith. A recent survey found that nearly a quarter of Americans say they switched from one religious tradition or denomination to a different one because they no longer believed in the religion's teachings. (cf: <https://www.axios.com/2023/05/16/rising-number-americans-switch-religions>) Thirty percent of those cited that it was the religious teachings about sex and gender issues or the treatment of those who lived contrary to God's created order, that drove them away. In short, they denied the authority of God's Word.

The devil is in the details – but:

“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.” (Hebrews 13:8)

“The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever.” (Isaiah 40:8)

Last week I said that Holy Scripture teaches that there are only two spiritual kingdoms in the world: the Kingdom of God, and the kingdom of the devil, meaning that there are only two kinds of people: ***sons of God*** who through faith are members of God's Kingdom, (cf: Galatians 3:26–27) and ***sons of disobedience*** who are living out the passions of the world and the flesh. (cf: Ephesians 2:1–3) When John the Baptist preached in the wilderness, preparing the way of the Lord, he proclaimed:

“I baptize you with water for repentance... He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. ¹² His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.” (Matthew 3:11–12)

John was calling people to repentance because God doesn't take pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather they turn from their evil ways and live. (cf: Ezekiel 18:23) We are living in the Last Days. (cf: Acts 2:17; Hebrews 1:1–2) Scripture teaches that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. (cf: Matthew 24:43) The last verse of our second reading this morning St Peter proclaims the words uttered through the prophet Joel:

“And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.” (Acts 2:21)

But what about the sons of disobedience and all who deny the truth of God's Word? How can they call upon the Name of the Lord when they haven't heard the Good News of forgiveness of sins and eternal salvation in Christ Jesus? Dear Christian, in these dark and later days, you and I are to encourage one another and build one another up in preparation as we wait. (1 Thessalonians 5:1–11) You and I are to proclaim the excellencies of our Lord God, who called

you out of darkness into His marvelous light. (1 Peter 2:9) While God has not called everyone to be a preacher or teacher – He has called all believers to be salt and light in this unsavory and darkened world. (cf: Matthew 5:13–16) True believers cannot keep quiet. They share the Gospel. They simply must speak out in word and deed. Are you up to the task? Probably not. Can you accomplish this on your own? Of course not. That’s why God sent the Holy Spirit to fill you so He might work through you to achieve His own objectives.

In our second reading this morning, the apostles and other disciples of Jesus’ were gathered celebrating the day of Pentecost. The word Pentecost derived from the Greek word meaning “*fiftieth*,” which back in the Bible days marked the Jewish harvest festival originally called *the Feast of Weeks*, celebrated on the 50th day after Passover. It was one of three Old Testament pilgrimage festivals when Jews from all countries traveled to Jerusalem to appear before the Lord, offering the first fruits of their wheat harvest. (Exodus 23:14–17; Deuteronomy 16:16) The point of the feast was to remind the people that the Lord God always does all the work, providing both labor and the fruit of the harvest. And while perhaps the Jews were tempted to view only the physical blessings on Pentecost, God sent the Holy Spirit to focus us on His desire to save people’s souls as well. An Old Testament harvest festival of wheat would now become a New Testament festival of God harvesting souls.

Just prior to the Day of Pentecost, St Luke places the number of believers at 120. (cf: Acts 1:15) As they gathered, the sound of a mighty rushing wind filled the entire building. Then, tongues resembling fire appeared and rested on each of them. And then, they each began speaking in tongues, in languages that they had never spoken before. Within earshot was a multitude of confused God-fearing Jews in Jerusalem wondering how all these Galileans were speaking in their native language.

A good Lutheran question is: “*What does this mean?*” It means that Christ Jesus, who had ten days earlier ascended to the right hand of the Father, together with the Father, sends the Holy Spirit, ushering in the New Testament era and outpouring of the Holy Spirit on all people. John the Baptist baptized with water, but Christ Jesus baptizes with the Spirit in the washing of the water and the Word for eternal salvation for all who believe. And He also baptizes with eternal fire and judgement for all who don’t believe. (cf: Gibbs, Matthew 1:1–11:1, Concordia Commentary, 157)

This “*Baptism in the Holy Spirit*” is the impartation and mystical union of the Holy Spirit and of the entire Holy Trinity in the believer when people are converted to faith in Christ, either through the preached Word (Acts 10:44-45; Romans 10:17) or through Baptism. (cf: Acts 2:38-39; Pieper, Christian Dogmatics, vol. 2, 409)

Now, before I go any further, I need to point out *what this does not mean*. Some Christian denominations use the Pentecost story as proof text for a so called, “*fuller baptism of the Holy Spirit*.” They say that speaking in tongues is evidence of this fuller baptism. Of course, God can do anything He wants. Giving the gift of speaking in tongues is His prerogative whenever and wherever He wills – if He wills. But the tongues spoken by the disciples on the Day of Pentecost were recognizable languages, clearly understood by the hearers. Not the gibberish tongues of enthusiasts or secret prayer languages that fellow worshipers don’t understand. In our text, the speaking of tongues was not for the benefit of the speakers. They already received the message. The Holy Spirit filled them with His presence and much more. They were proclaiming the mighty works of God to unbelievers.

When Jesus promised the coming of the Holy Spirit, He said:

“... 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.” (John 15:26)

In the same conversation, Jesus also said:

“¹³ When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth... ¹⁴ He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you.” (John 16:13–14)

So it is instructive to notice what happened at the coming of the Holy Spirit.

- **First**, no one was afraid. The presence of the Spirit was evident: the sound of wind, the tongues resembling fire, and the speaking in tongues, but no one was afraid.
- **Secondly**, Peter got up to preach. This is the same Peter who denied Jesus three times just fifty-three days earlier out of fear for His own life. (cf: John 13:38) Now, not by his own bravery, but being filled with the Holy Spirit who gives him the words, he preaches to some of the very people who demanded that Jesus be crucified.
- **Thirdly**, Peter doesn't preach about the Holy Spirit by whom was evidenced by the wind, and tongues of fire, and speaking in tongues. No He preached about the fulfillment of prophesy, that the Holy Spirit would be poured out on all flesh: on men and women, young and old, even on the lowest person in society, the slaves. (cf: (Acts 2:17–18)

The prophecy has been fulfilled in two ways. First, it was fulfilled through the **visible** outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the apostles and other believers granting some of them special gifts for that early time in the life of the Church. (1 Corinthians 12: 10, 28) Once the Christian Church took hold, the prophecy was and is still fulfilled every day through the **invisible** outpouring of the Holy Spirit through God's Word and Christ's Holy Sacraments. (cf: Romans 8:15; Galatians 4:6)

The Holy Spirit is sort of like the electrician in charge of lighting on a movie set or television stage. He always keeps the spotlight focused on the star, in this case, Jesus. When the Spirit is at work, Jesus is the star of the show and the object of faith. Through this invisible outpouring today, believers receive the gifts needed to understand the mysteries of God's divine Word and to explain these mysteries to others through the sharing of Scripture, each according to their station and calling. (1 Corinthians 14:29)

That's what it means when God says through His prophet Joel, that those who received the Holy Spirit would **prophesy**. (cf: Acts 2:17-18) It's prophesy in the wide sense. (cf: Nass, Joel, Concordia Commentary, 426-427) Prophesy in the narrow sense is the prophesy of Moses and Elijah and Isaiah and Joel proclaiming the words God gave them to say. But in the wide sense, you and all who believe are prophets to proclaim the excellencies of our Lord God who so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son for the life of the world. Share the truth of God's Word: His wrath against sin and His forgiveness and redeeming love in Christ Jesus.

The Holy Spirit continues to convert to faith people of all nations and continues to preserve people in the faith, just the way He did in the first century, with both Jews and Gentiles, males and females, slaves and free. Before His ascension Jesus told His disciples:

“... you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” (Acts 1:8)

Everyone of you here this morning are the evidence of the work of the Holy Spirit done by the voices of those faithful Christians. Somehow the Gospel reached your ears and hearts. You heard what brought those first few believers together: Christ and Him crucified – and Him risen from the grave, defeating sin, death, and the power of the devil. That’s the reason you now know Christ as your Savior. God’s desire to save mankind started from the beginning of time, and He’s still at work. The Holy Spirit is continually strengthening your faith through the Word and Sacraments – God’s authoritative Word so that you are not ashamed of the Gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes. (cf: Romans 1:16) That same Holy Spirit then energizes and empowers you to be the people of Pentecost. As Paul says:

“... we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.” (2 Corinthians 4:7)

God uses people like you and me, sinful and weak people to speak the Gospel to others. How can you do this? God does all the work. It’s the Holy Spirit living in you who creates faith in stone cold unbelieving hearts. He alone enables you to proclaim His Gospel. When you look out at the unbelieving world in all their decadence and corruption, remember that you too deserve eternal damnation because of your own sinfulness. Repent of your sins and cling to the promises God made you in Baptism, that you died to sin and have been given new life. (cf: Titus 3:5) Consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus who sacrificed Himself on the cross for you. (cf: Romans 6:6–11) He conquered death by rising from the dead. By His conquering power given to you by the Holy Spirit, God will accomplish His will through you, the same way those lowly Galileans became the proclaimers of the mighty works of God on Pentecost. This will be the mission of the Church until that other day the prophet Joel foresaw, that Peter preached about on Pentecost:

“The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the day of the Lord comes, the great and magnificent day.” (Acts 2:20)

Jesus is coming back again. Our Lord Christ Jesus will come back to judge the living and the dead. Because of His sacrifice and forgiveness, proclaimed at Pentecost, proclaimed by us since Pentecost, we and countless others will welcome that Last Day with praises of Christ that will never end.

Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understand, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus,
Amen.