

A PROMISE FOR ALL

Acts 2:1-24, 36-41

The Day of Pentecost (Series A)

May 31, 2020

Trinity Free Lutheran Church, Grand Forks, ND

The scripture reading for The Day of Pentecost comes from *The Acts of the Apostles*, chapter 2, verses 1 through 24 and verses 36 through 41.

The lectionary would actually have us stop at verse 21. I've never really liked stopping there. It leaves the account incomplete. The problem with stopping at verse 21 is that the name Jesus isn't even mentioned in the first 21 verses. But if we read past verse 21, we quickly discover that Jesus is really a big deal at Pentecost. So we're going to read a little extra

Please stand as you are able for the reading of God's holy Word. From Acts 2, beginning at verse 1, we read in Jesus' name.

¹ When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. ² And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. ³ And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. ⁴ And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.

⁵ Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. ⁶ And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. ⁷ And they were amazed and astonished, saying, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?" ⁸ And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? ⁹ Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰ Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, ¹¹ both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians—we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God." ¹² And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" ¹³ But others mocking said, "They are filled with new wine."

¹⁴ 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.

¹⁵ For these people are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day. ¹⁶ But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel:

¹⁷ " '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;

¹⁸ even on my male servants and female servants
in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy.

¹⁹ And I will show wonders in the heavens above
and signs on the earth below,
blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke;

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²⁰ the sun shall be turned to darkness
and the moon to blood,
before the day of the Lord comes, the great and magnificent day.
²¹ And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.’

²² “Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know—²³ this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. ²⁴ God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it.”

³⁶ Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.”

³⁷ Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” ³⁸ And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹ For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.”

⁴⁰ And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, “Save yourselves from this crooked generation.” ⁴¹ So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.

Father, these are your words. Sanctify us in the truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

You may be seated.

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

Let’s play a little word association game. That’s where I say a word, and you say the first thing that pops into your head. Now, remember, this is being live streamed, and the archive will remain on YouTube for however long those things stay on YouTube. So if you scream out your answer, there are literally tens of people on the internet who will hear you. So there’s your fair warning. If you’d like, you can just whisper your answer to the person next to you, or you can even just whisper it to yourself. I’m not grading this.

Ready? Word association. Here we go. Here’s the word: *Pentecost*.

Now what’s the first thing that popped into your head?

I’m going to guess that many of you, if you’re familiar with biblical history, or at least the book of Acts, said, “Holy Spirit.” Or maybe you said, “Tongues.” We read about those things. If you’re interested the Old Testament feasts, you might have said, “Feast of weeks.” My word—and I’ll admit this is a little unfair because I picked this game and thought about it for a couple *weeks*, while I only gave you a few *seconds*—my word is “Gentiles.” The word “Jesus” would also be a good answer. But the most common answer among Christians would almost certainly be, “Holy Spirit.”

Sometimes when I’m wondering what the popular opinion of something is, I google it to see what other people are saying. So I googled, “What is Pentecost?”

The most common answer I found is that it was the day the Holy Spirit was given to the Church. There were also a few articles about the Old Testament Feast of Weeks, because that

was going on for about 1,400 years before the miraculous event we read about in Acts 2. But most of the answers were about the Holy Spirit coming upon the Church.

There was one answer that really caught my attention. According to Dummies.com, “Pentecost is a Christian holy day that celebrates the coming of the Holy Spirit 40 days after Easter” (<https://www.dummies.com/religion/christianity/what-is-pentecost/>). I would recommend that you not get your theology from Dummies.com.

For one thing, Pentecost was *fifty* days after Easter, not forty. Jesus’ ascension was forty days after Easter. Then it was ten more days to Pentecost.

The other thing is that the Holy Spirit wasn’t really given on Pentecost. It was on Easter, fifty days before Pentecost, when Jesus breathed the Holy Spirit upon his disciples. You can read about that in John 20 (v. 19-23). He didn’t make them wait. Once he had atoned for their sins, he breathed the Holy Spirit upon them the first time he saw them. The one thing that needed to be accomplished in order for Jesus to give the Holy Spirit was his sacrifice for sins.

We read about this in the gospel lesson from John 7. Sometime before his crucifixion, Jesus was teaching about “*rivers of living water*” (John 7:38). John added this comment: “Now this he said about the Holy Spirit, whom those who believed in him were about to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified” (John 7:39). The key here is that the giving of the Holy Spirit is attached to Jesus’ glorification. And one of the beautiful features of *The Gospel of John* is that Jesus’ glory is the cross. The other gospels touch on this too, but it’s especially prominent in John. Pay attention to this the next time you read through John. Whenever Jesus is talking about his glory or being lifted up from the earth, he’s talking about his crucifixion (e.g., John 3:14; 12:27-34). This might strike us as strange, because the mere appearance of the cross is anything but glorious. It’s ugly. It’s horrifying. It’s tragic. It’s death. But when we understand what Jesus was doing there to save us, it quickly becomes the height of his glory. That’s how it is with saviors and the sacrifices they make.

Most of us probably don’t know very much about Officer Cody Holte. But we know that he died coming to the rescue of his fellow officers. He made the choice to show up to a gunfight that was already in progress. In our eyes, then, that is the most glorious moment of his life. That’s how it is with saviors and the sacrifices they make. That’s how it is with Jesus.

Jesus’ glory is the cross, and that’s what John was talking about when he said, “As yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.” And so it was on Easter, the first time Jesus saw his disciples after his crucifixion, that he gave them the Holy Spirit, not Pentecost.

But the Holy Spirit is still a prominent figure at Pentecost, obviously. Pentecost is the first time we see the Holy Spirit manifest himself powerfully in the Church. There was a mighty rushing wind. There were tongues of fire. And the Holy Spirit gave the believers utterance to speak in other languages. Those were his obvious miracles, but his most important miracle comes at the end. We’ll get to that later.

The thing about the Holy Spirit is that, despite his greatness and power—I mean, he is God, after all—but the thing about the Holy Spirit is that he’s really not interested in drawing much attention to himself. He would rather talk about Jesus.

Have you ever noticed this about Pentecost: the Holy Spirit works some powerful signs, but Peter, when he stands up to give a sermon, doesn’t say that much about the Holy Spirit? He starts speaking about the Holy Spirit, but solely for the purpose of pivoting to talk about Jesus. That’s

what Peter wants to talk about, and this is the work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit's work is to draw attention to Jesus.

So there's an interesting comparison—or maybe it's a contrast; I'm not sure—between Jesus and the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit wants to talk about Jesus. And Jesus, from what we see in his earthly ministry, also wants to talk about Jesus. Jesus spends most of his ministry talking about Jesus, and so does the Spirit. Now, it's not like the Holy Spirit is really humble while Jesus is really arrogant. They both talk about Jesus, because Jesus is the Savior, and they want people to be saved. So this is what we see the Holy Spirit doing at Pentecost.

Pentecost is really about Jesus. And, specifically, it focuses on the point that Jesus' salvation is for the entire world, all nations, "everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself." That's why my keyword for Pentecost is "Gentiles."

The word "Gentiles" literally means "nations." From the perspective of the Jews, Gentiles were all those people who weren't Jewish. The point of Pentecost is that Jesus' salvation is for all nations, both Jews and Gentiles.

The first indication of this is the speaking in other tongues (2:4-11). These were not unknown spiritual languages, like some Christians today imagine the gift of tongues to be. But in Acts 2 they are clearly earthly languages. People from all over the world heard these Galilean Jews speaking in their own native languages.

Now these people gathered for the Feast of Pentecost were not necessarily Gentiles. At least most of them were, in some sense, Jewish. Some were natural-born Jews. Others were proselytes (2:11). That means they converted to Judaism. They submitted to circumcision and all the ceremonial regulations of the Old Testament. At least most of them were, in some sense, Jewish, but many had grown up in other nations. They learned different languages when they were children. And now they are hearing the mighty works of God in those languages.

One of the keys to understanding the significance of this is that the Holy Spirit didn't need to use all these languages in order to communicate with them. He could have covered everyone with just three: Aramaic, Greek, and Latin. Aramaic was the language commonly spoken in Israel, while Greek and Latin were the common trade languages across the Roman Empire. Everyone would have known at least one of these languages. But the Holy Spirit wanted to reveal that Jesus' salvation is for *all* nations, so he proclaims the mighty works of God in all the languages of the Gentiles.

This got everyone's attention so that Peter could preach a sermon. The sermon was about Jesus, how he is the Christ, and how he was crucified, and how God raised him on the third day. At the end of this sermon, the Holy Spirit had one more miracle to work.

The overlooked miracle at Pentecost is the contrition in the hearts of the people. Peter accused them of a horrible sin, the worst sin you could possibly imagine. He accused them of murdering God. Peter spends most of his sermon building the case that Jesus is "both Lord and Christ" (2:36). He does this by quoting Scripture from the Old Testament, and by testifying of the "mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through [Jesus]" (2:22). He spends most of the sermon building the case that Jesus is "both Lord and Christ." And then he accuses them of murdering Jesus. He says, "Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified" (2:36).

That's a really sharp accusation. Most likely, a few of these people were in the mob that shouted, "Crucify! Crucify!" on Good Friday (Luke 23:21), but certainly not all of them. I

suppose the ones who were there could have said, “But we didn’t know he was the Son of God! You can’t hold that against us!” And the ones who weren’t there could say, “I wasn’t even there! I had nothing to do with it!” The natural human tendency is to defend or justify ourselves, but that’s not what they did. “When they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Brothers, what shall we do?’ ” (2:37).

So I want you to think about this, and try to think about it honestly. What do you do when you are confronted with sin? Do you react humbly? Or do you defend yourself? I suppose this happens most often to children, because their parents or teachers are usually there to discipline them and even force them to apologize. Children are used to being called out for their sins. But, even so, what do kids do when they are confronted with their sins? Do they say, “Yes mom, yes dad, I was wrong to put Billy’s action figures in the toilet. I will apologize, and then I will sanitize Spider Man.”? Maybe sometimes they react that way. More often, though, the first word out of their mouths is, “But,” followed by some lame excuse about how Billy glared at her or stepped on her Cabbage Patch Kid.

Now remember, children are used to being called out for their sins; they have the most practice in this matter, and they still react badly. Adults often behave worse, I suppose, because we’re out of practice. You become an adult, you get out from under mom and dad’s thumb, and no one can tell you what to do anymore. We can justify ourselves all we want.

Now why do we do this? Why do we resist? I think there are two reasons. First, we just don’t want to admit that we’re wrong. It hurts our pride. And, second, we might be afraid that we won’t be forgiven. Forgiveness is not part of the natural order of this world. Justice is part of the natural order, but forgiveness is not. We see this on several levels. In the animal kingdom, if a monkey does something rude to a tiger, the monkey is going to pay for it. The tiger does not forgive. And if a mosquito bites you, you do not forgive the mosquito; you kill it. We see it in the interactions between children. Just as one child has to be forced to apologize, the other child usually has to be forced to forgive. And we see it in the operations of the state, in the criminal justice system. If you commit a crime, and then you apologize to the state, the state does not forgive you. In the natural order of the universe, there is no place where we see forgiveness occur naturally. Sometimes people look the other way, but that’s not forgiveness. Law and justice are natural to the world. Forgiveness is not. That’s what makes confessing our sin so intimidating. What if the other person says, “No!” and insists on justice? What if God squashes us like a bug? What if we actually get what we deserve when we confess our sin? Forgiveness is not natural, so we seek to justify ourselves instead of repenting.

So we should really see it as a miracle of the Holy Spirit when, after Peter accuses these people of murdering Jesus, “They were cut to the heart” and asked, “Brothers, what shall we do?” Peter accused them of the worst sin imaginable, and their hearts were softened. This is the work of the Holy Spirit.

Then Peter replies with some of the most significant words in the entire Bible. I feel like I say that about a lot of passages, but it’s really true. Peter says, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.” (2:38-39).

There’s a lot here to explain. Most of it will be brief.

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Peter says, “Repent.” Repentance is not us turning our lives around and making up for what we did wrong. That would make forgiveness unnecessary. Repentance consists simply of contrition and faith. It means that we confess our sins and we trust in Jesus. That’s repentance.

This is also a very significant passage regarding Baptism. It proves three things: First, that Baptism forgives sins, second, that Baptism gives the Holy Spirit, and, third, that Baptism is for adults *and* children. Peter says, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children.”

Finally, and this is especially significant regarding the point of Pentecost, Peter says this promise is also “for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.”

Pentecost is about Jesus, and specifically, the aspect of Jesus’ salvation that it is for all people—Jews and Gentiles, black people and white people, murderers and heroes, saints and sinners, and every other category of person you can think of.

I think that we as Christians kind of gloss over this thing about the inclusion of the Gentiles, because we usually think of ourselves, ethnically, as Gentiles who have been grafted in. So the inclusion of Gentiles doesn’t seem very novel to us. But the concept remains very applicable today.

A good way to think of Gentiles in our modern context is as outsiders. And the New Testament often uses the term “Gentile” this way to refer to those who are outside the Christian Church. The promise of forgiveness in Jesus Christ and the gift of the Holy Spirit is for all people. That includes insiders and outsiders—“everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.” You might think of yourself as an “insider” to the Church. The promise is for you. Or you might consider yourself an “outsider.” The promise is for you. You might even think of yourself as an “outsider” masquerading as an “insider.” The promise is for you. It really has nothing to do with who you are or what you’ve done. It has everything to do with Jesus and what he has done.

He is both Christ and Lord. He was crucified for your sins. God raised him from the dead. The promise is for you. The promise is for all. Amen.

Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:7). Amen.