

THE SPIRIT OF TRUTH

Acts 2:1-21

The Day of Pentecost (Series B)

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Trinity Free Lutheran Church, Grand Forks, ND

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The Scripture reading is from the book of *Acts*, chapter 2, verses 1 through 21. Please stand as you are able for 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;

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.'

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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.

The sermon today is based both on the text we just read and the gospel lesson from John 15 and 16. So we'll spend some time in both passages.

Most Sundays, the gospel lesson is the big reading that sets the theme for the whole service. But Pentecost is one of those rare days when it's something else. In this case, since we are observing Pentecost, it's this account of the first Christian Pentecost.

Before this first Christian Pentecost, Pentecost was a Hebrew holy day. God instituted it way back during the time of the Exodus. He commanded it to be observed approximately seven weeks, or fifty days after the Passover (Ex. 23:16; Lev. 23:15-22). The way the dating of it worked out, the Pentecost recorded in Acts occurred exactly seven weeks after the resurrection of Jesus.

In the Old Testament Pentecost was called the Feast of Weeks or the Feast of Ingathering. It was a harvest festival. Israel had an earlier wheat harvest than we do. So this was kind of a thanksgiving observance. It's different from our thanksgiving. We give thanks by stuffing our faces. They gave thanks by making a grain offering to the LORD. The harvest theme is how the Old Testament festival ties in to the first Christian Pentecost and really looks forward to it. The first Christian Pentecost was a harvest of souls.

We just read the first half of the Pentecost account; we'll read the second half next Sunday. At the end of Peter's sermon, about three thousand souls were baptized and added to the Church. Before Pentecost, there were only about 120 disciples (Acts 1:15). So this was a huge explosion for them. And this harvest of souls continues through the book of Acts, and it continues today. We are living in the time of harvest.

We can think of the history of the world like this: the Old Testament is the story of the seed before it emerges. God promised that something was coming, but we didn't see it yet. Then Christ comes. He's the first seed. And the work of Christ, especially in his death, resurrection, and ascension is when the seed ripens and blooms. He is the firstfruits, and that seed is now spread all over the world through the preaching of the Gospel. So now the Holy Spirit is harvesting souls from all over the world. Pentecost is the beginning of this great harvest.

We typically think of Pentecost as being about the Holy Spirit. And that's not quite right. It's certainly not wrong, but it's not quite right. We might think, *Well, every other Sunday of the year is about Jesus. So we should have some Sunday that's about the Holy Spirit.* But Pentecost is also about Jesus, because the work of the Holy Spirit is to testify of Christ.

But we do, on Pentecost, reflect more on the work of the Holy Spirit than we normally would. Jesus had already given the Holy Spirit to his disciples. He did that on the day of his resurrection (John 20:19-23). But this miracle at Pentecost was the first powerful manifestation of the Holy Spirit. And when we look at the miracle and what it means, we will see that the meaning of Pentecost is that "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved" (2:21; Joel 2:32). That especially means people from every nation under heaven (2:5).

The Jews had an expectation that they were the only ones who would be saved. And it's true that the God of the Old Testament, Yahweh, is the only true God, but their national identity got tied into it. They believed they were God's favored nation. To be fair to them, most other nations

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thought the same about their gods. But at Pentecost, God begins to show that he is not just the God of the Hebrews, but of the whole world. This was a revolutionary idea.

At the Feast of Pentecost, there were Jews from all over the world. Verse 9 lists all the places they were from. So their homes were in these different nations, but they came to Jerusalem for Pentecost. And probably not just Pentecost, but if they came for Passover and stayed seven weeks, they could get Passover and Pentecost. Since travel was so much more difficult back then, people would make fewer trips, but when they did, they made it a long stay. So these foreign Jews had probably been in Jerusalem since Passover, when Jesus was crucified.

The miracle begins with a strong rushing wind. All of the disciples, about 120 of them, were gathered together. Tongues of fire appeared and rested on them, they were all filled with the Holy Spirit. And they began to speak in other tongues. That is, they spoke in languages that they did not know, but the Holy Spirit gave them the ability.

The sound of the wind was so strong, that a multitude came together to see what it was. And then they heard these Christians declaring the mighty works of God in their own languages. They were amazed, because these disciples were Galileans. That's the part of Israel Jesus and his disciples were from. But all these foreign Jews heard them preaching in whatever languages they spoke in Parthia, Media, and various other nations.

This is significant because all of those Jews, even if they lived somewhere else, also spoke Aramaic. That's the form of Hebrew that was common in Israel at the time. So speaking in all these different languages was totally unnecessary. When Peter got up to preach, he spoke in only one language, and they all could understand. But the Holy Spirit used this miracle of tongues to teach something: Salvation was not just for the Jews. Jesus had come for these souls, not just as Jews, but as Parthians, Medes, Elamites, Mesopotamians, etc. They heard the Gospel in their mother tongues, and it didn't matter if their mother was Jewish or something else. Salvation is for the whole world.

This was a surprise to many of the Jews, but it should not have been. The salvation of all nations is spoken of in many places in the Old Testament. One of those places is in Joel 2, which Peter quotes at the start of his sermon. Joel prophesied that God would pour out his Holy Spirit on all flesh (Joel 2:28; Acts 2:17). And that promise was fulfilled at Pentecost. It doesn't matter who you are: Jewish, Egyptian, Roman, a free person, or a slave. God is for you. Salvation is for all nations. So the quotation from Joel ends with the gracious invitation, "Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved (Joel 2:32; Acts 2:21). Yahweh is not the God of the Jews only. Jesus is not the Christ of the Jews only, but of the entire world.

So there is a universality to salvation, but also a specificity. Salvation is universal in the sense that it is for everyone. Forgiveness of sins, resurrection from the dead, and eternal life is for every man, woman, and child in the world. But it is specific in the sense that this salvation comes only through Jesus. There is salvation in no other name than Jesus Christ (Acts 4:12). But "everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." That, really, is the big theme of Pentecost.

The tongues are proof of this. And this theme continues throughout the book of Acts. Including Pentecost, there are three occasions of people speaking in tongues in Acts (2:1-13; 10:44-47; 19:1-7). And in every instance, it is a sign that God has accepted Gentiles, that is, people of the nations, and he has bestowed his Holy Spirit upon them.

So there are two things we learn about speaking in tongues. First, it was a miracle of speaking in known languages. It wasn't gibberish. It was not a heavenly language unknown to man. It was speaking in real, known languages that the hearer could understand. And, second, it

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was always an indication that God was accepting the people of the nations. That's just the nature of the thing. When God causes his gospel to be proclaimed in all the tongues of the world, it shows that he is accepting the nations that speak those languages.

But not everyone who was there acknowledged this miracle. When those first Christians, all 120 of them, started speaking in tongues, some mocked them and accused them of being drunk. This is so irrational. They're speaking in foreign languages, and the speakers of those languages understand them. That's not the way intoxication works. It usually has the opposite effect. It inhibits your ability to speak your own language. So it certainly does not give you the ability to speak someone else's. This is so weird, but it demonstrates our natural, unbelieving hearts. The mockers witness a miracle. And the meaning of the miracle is gracious, but they don't want to believe it. It's the nature of unbelief, and we all have this weakness. The nature of this weakness is that we don't even know how foolish unbelief is. I suppose the mockers thought they were being rational. It's not possible to speak in a language you don't know, so they insist that can't be what's happening. They're so naturalistic that they don't believe it, even when they see and hear the evidence of it.

This mindset persists today. It's probably stronger than ever. The evidence of God is all around us. The entire creation is evidence of God. Everyone knows that nothing comes from nothing. But the natural mind assumes it's impossible for God to be creator. So they can look at an orderly world, and instead of seeing it as evidence for God, which it is, they think it's evidence of his non-existence, and they choose to believe that everything came from nothing. They think they're being rational, but it's pure foolishness.

And the skeptics reject the resurrection of Christ. There were hundreds of eyewitnesses to Jesus' resurrection, probably even more who witnessed his other miracles. And the meaning of Jesus' resurrection is purely gracious. It means that God has forgiven our sins and swallowed up death. But the natural mind just doesn't want to believe it.

There's an arrogant delusion to skepticism. Any time that you can be skeptical of something others are buying into, you feel like you're intellectually superior to those supposed fools. Ironically, it's even stronger if there's real evidence for something. You can look at it and think, *Others might be foolish enough to fall for that, but I'm smart enough to know there must be some other explanation.* So the skeptic feels like they are the wise one, and they feel good about themselves, when they are really the ones who are foolishly rejecting the evidence. It's an arrogant delusion. It's really sad, that our world is filled with fools who think they are wise. But it's the nature of all of us.

So it is the work of the Holy Spirit to break through this delusion. In the Pentecost story, we see that the work of the Holy Spirit is to testify of Jesus Christ, so that people might call upon his Name and be saved. Whether he uses a miracle like tongues or ordinary means, the Holy Spirit draws hearts and minds to Jesus. It is always a miracle. That is, it's impossible for us to come to Christ by our own power, because our hearts are predisposed to foolishness, darkness, unbelief, and hatred toward God. But the Holy Spirit is able to bring our hearts to acknowledge and trust Jesus as Lord.

In the Gospel lesson, from John 15 and 16, Jesus speaks of the work of the Holy Spirit. This might be the most important passage in the entire Bible about the Holy Spirit. Jesus describes exactly what the Holy Spirit will do. Jesus says that the Holy Spirit will testify of him (15:26). This is the most basic thing to understand about the Holy Spirit. He doesn't draw attention to

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himself, because it is not the Name of the Holy Spirit by which we are saved, but the name of Jesus. So the first mark of a Spirit-filled church or a Spirit-filled Christian is not one that talks about the Holy Spirit all the time, but one that speaks constantly of Jesus. That obviously doesn't mean we hush up about the Holy Spirit; that would be wrong. But we follow the Spirit's leading when we speak of Christ.

And Jesus says, specifically, that the Holy Spirit will convict the world of three things: sin, righteousness, and judgment (16:8).

First, the Holy Spirit convicts hearts of sin. This is the work of the Law. It's painful, but it's good. The Holy Spirit causes us to despair of our own righteousness, so that we will not trust in ourselves, but trust in Jesus.

Second, Jesus says the Holy Spirit will convict, or we could say, "convince" the world of righteousness. This is the part that probably needs the most explanation. Jesus says, "**Because I go to the Father**" (16:10). What does that mean? Throughout chapters 13 through 17 of John, Jesus speaks of going to the Father. And all this is on the evening before his crucifixion, so he's not talking so much about the ascension. It includes the ascension, but the big thing is that Jesus goes to the Father by way of the cross to present his blood as the propitiation for sins. Because Jesus goes to the Father through the cross, he forgives our sins and gives us his righteousness. This is the Gospel. And it is the Holy Spirit's work to convince our hearts that we are righteous before God because of what Jesus did for us.

Third, and finally, Jesus says the Holy Spirit will convince the world of judgment, "**Because the ruler of this world is judged**" (16:11). He's talking about the Last Day and the hope that we have for that day. The devil is the "prince of darkness" and seems, at least, to be the ruler of this dark world. It might discourage us to look at this world and still see so much evil. We see the hand of the devil in so many things. But Jesus declares that he is judged already. So it is the work of the Holy Spirit to convince our hearts that right will win out in the end. When the Judgment Day comes, we who are in Christ will not be judged for our sins, but our accuser has already been judged, and he will receive the just punishment for his resistance to our Lord. In the end, right will win the day. Evil will end. And God will set his saints at rest to live in his new creation forever.

These messages of sin, righteousness, and judgment are things that we either don't want to believe, or are incapable of believing because of our fallen minds. But it is the work of the Holy Spirit to convince us of these things.

So this is the work of the Holy Spirit: to take everything Christ has won for you, and deliver it to you through the Word of God, so that you might know and trust that everything Jesus accomplished is for you. Rejoice and give thanks that your Father in heaven and your Lord Jesus Christ have sent to you the Holy Spirit. May he make you faithful in love and service. And may he guard and preserve you in the true faith unto eternal life. Peace be with you. Amen.

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