

It's Pentecost Sunday! You can tell that from all the bright red up here. On the day of Pentecost, we remember how God the Holy Spirit was poured out on the disciples in a miraculous way. Here again is the scene as our reading from Acts describes it: Jesus' closest followers were together when the sound of a mighty, rushing wind came down from heaven. There were what seemed to be tongues of fire that appeared and rested on each one of them. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in languages they had never learned before.

Soon, a crowd gathered. People from all over the known world were in the city of Jerusalem for the big, religious harvest festival of Pentecost. And that crowd listened intently to the Apostle Peter as he stood up and boldly addressed them all. He gave a powerful sermon that God the Holy Spirit inspired him to preach, a sermon that converted 3000 souls in one day. By the power of the Holy Spirit, the New Testament Christian Church was born! What an exciting day! A great day for us to remember when the Holy Spirit was remarkably and powerfully at work!

As fascinating and as worthwhile as it would be for us to just spend some time looking at how the Holy Spirit was miraculously given to God's people on that first Pentecost, it is even more fascinating and much more relevant for us to focus on how the Holy Spirit is no less miraculously poured out on us, God's people today! This morning we're especially going to focus on two miracles that the Holy Spirit delivers, both back then and today, and they are courage and conversion.

The Bible says that everyone in the crowd on that Pentecost was utterly amazed when these uneducated fishermen from Galilee, which was basically seen as the middle of nowhere, were suddenly doing this: "We hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues. Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, 'What does this mean?'"

Now some made fun of the disciples and said they had been drinking, and that's when Peter stood up and spoke to the crowd. And here we see one of the greatest miracles of Pentecost - the miracle of *courage* - this same Peter who had been too afraid to identify himself as a disciple of Jesus not long ago - remember how he denied Jesus three

times? - there he was, speaking boldly to total strangers, in the same city where Jesus had been crucified. He quoted the Old Testament prophet Joel and told the crowd that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord would be saved. **Courage** - here we see it in the Apostle Peter - a gift from the Holy Spirit.

The other miracle was **conversion**. Just think of the people who were in that crowd. They had not believed in Jesus as their Savior. Many of them had been part of the crowd that had called for Jesus to be crucified. Later in his sermon to them Peter even said to them, "You, with the help of wicked men put Jesus to death by nailing him to the cross." Can you imagine standing in front of a crowd and saying that? Those were **extremely** courageous words from Peter.

And then another miracle happened in that crowd of people. Instead of defending their sins or making excuses for their sins, they were sorry for their sins. "They were cut to the heart" the Bible says. And not only were they sorry for their sins - they believed Peter when he told 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." And they believed! They didn't shake their heads or turn their noses up at the idea of Jesus taking their sins away. They didn't say, "Well, Jesus could never have risen from the dead - that goes against science." No. They believed! The miracle of conversion - here we see it. 3000 people came to faith and were baptized in one day.

We need the Holy Spirit to perform the same blessings of courage and conversion in our world today. Just think of yourself. Are you ever tempted today to shrink back and stop living and sharing your Christian faith? As our culture becomes more and more secular, redefining marriage, promoting abortion, teaching evolution and atheism, aren't you tempted to shrink back. "I don't want people to know that I'm a Christian. What if they harass me? What if they make fun of me? And what if they ask me what I believe, and I tell them, and they ridicule me? It's safer just to hide my faith," we might be tempted to think.

This is sin born out of fear. Have you ever been intimidated by the world, afraid of openly living and sharing your faith? Peter did that when

he denied Jesus 3 times. Jesus forgave him, and today Jesus forgives you and me as well. Do you believe that Jesus has paid for all of your sins, even those sins of fear that keep you from openly living your faith? Do you believe that Jesus forgives you, that He rose from the dead to prove to you that He loves you and forgives you? If you believe that, then God the Holy Spirit is in you. And He not only gives you faith. He gives you courage, the same courage that enabled Peter to stand up in front of a huge crowd of people and share his faith.

Four weeks ago, after years of careful instruction in God's Word and the Small Catechism, 13 confirmands stood up here and publicly confessed their faith in Christ as Lord. That took God-given courage!

Last Sunday was the last day of children's Sunday school until September and this week marks the end of classes at our Lutheran Day School. On Wednesday evening our eighth graders from First Lutheran School will come up front here to receive their diplomas. In all these ways we are especially reminded this time of the year of the importance of Christian education and God's Word in our lives because that's how the

Holy Spirit blesses us with courage today. In two weeks our high school and post-secondary graduates are invited to come forward, be recognized and receive God's blessing as they move forward to the next exciting phase of their lives.

Whenever any of our young Christians come forward to sing or share other talents in glory to God, it is a testament to their faith in Christ and to the courage that the Holy Spirit gives them through His Word. It's a miracle, especially when you consider what most children and young adults are doing on a typical Sunday morning. I just heard a stat the other day - maybe it's true - some say that the most dangerous time to be a Christian is the age of 16, give or take a year. More people fall away from the Christian church during those years than any other time, some people say. Perhaps it is true. Why haven't these young people, who have come and will come forward in two weeks, fallen away? Why haven't **you** fallen away? It's because God the Holy Spirit has been working in your life through His Word and Sacraments.

He works through His Word here at church. He works through His Word at Day School, preschool, and Sunday School. He works every time you open your Bible and read it on your own. He has converted you; He has changed you, and He promises to continue to bless you.

What does the world need more than anything else? Some might say that the world needs peace - the violence in our country, especially in the big cities, and around the world, particularly in the Middle East, needs to stop. Some say the world needs governments that more closely reflect God's will, and not the decaying standards of the world. But there's is something that the world needs even more than those things. Do you know what it is? The world needs *conversion*. The world needs to be cut to the heart, just as it says later on in Acts chapter 2 after people heard the Apostle Peter's message. The world today needs to believe in Jesus and be baptized. Who will do the work that needs to be done? It's believers in Christ like you and me. If God can work through Peter, God can work through you and me. He can bless us with the miracle of courage, and through you bring about the miracle of conversion.

I mentioned at the beginning how you can tell it is Pentecost because of all the red. Do you know **why** red is the color of the festival of Pentecost? Red reminds us of Jesus' blood shed on the cross and ed reminds us of the tongues of fire resting on those disciples' heads. But red **also** reminds us of the invisible fire of faith and courage that's burning inside of all of us. If you were to give the Holy Spirit a color, I believe the best color to describe Him would be red, that color of fire. May God the Holy Spirit continue to carry out His miracles of courage and conversion in our lives and in our world today. Amen.