

Rev. Dan Welch Pentecost 5-19-24 Text: Acts 2:1-21 "The Outpouring of the Holy Spirit"

In the name of the Holy Spirit, our Comforter. Amen. Today, we celebrate the pouring out of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. Before He ascended into heaven, Jesus promised His believers that another **Counselor** would come (Jn 14:16). God kept His oath by sending the Holy Spirit among the believers.

On the screen is a depiction of the scene on that day. I think we've all seen similar pictures of this incredible day. The Holy Spirit is God, and He **is** a spirit, which means He doesn't have a physical body. But He appeared like the form of **fire** to the people gathered to celebrate Pentecost. Why did the Holy Spirit do this? For the sake of people, He became "visible." He wanted people to see the **evidence** of His presence and take comfort. God is powerful, and whenever He would interact with His creation, especially with the **crown** of His creation, humans, something *extraordinary* happens.

Acts 2 gives that long list of people gathered in Jerusalem from all over the Roman world. (Our lector today, Mr. Roger Schmidt, did a nice job of getting through all those tongue-twisting words for us!) So, what were all these people doing in Jerusalem in the first place? Pentecost was actually one of the major feasts of the **Old** Testament, and people of the Jewish faith from all over the known world would converge on Jerusalem to worship God *during* this feast. Many of these people were the descendants of the Jews who had been dispersed to lots of different locations when they were driven out of their land centuries before Christ came.

It's interesting to note that Pentecost was the occasion to thank God for the **harvest** of crops, especially wheat. The point of the Pentecost feast was to emphasize that the Lord was the one who gives the ability to work (Deut 8:18). What's more, the Jews reminded themselves that it was God who made crops to grow and yield the harvest, that the Lord was responsible for everything. Maybe the Jews were tempted to view only the **physical** blessings on Pentecost, but God sent the Holy Spirit to focus on His desire to save the **souls** of people as well. "God wants all people to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim 2:4). The fantastic twist is that a festival of harvest would **now** become a festival of God harvesting **souls!**

So, to His small band of believers, God, the Holy Spirit gave special abilities to speak in different languages. What an amazing miracle! These men of Galilee with little or no formal education were able to speak their messages not only in the Greek language, which all those visitors to Jerusalem could already understand, but also in the local "heart"-languages of these people from all the various regions of the Roman world and beyond. Yes, this was an astounding

miracle! How sweet for all those listeners! It's the part of the Pentecost story many remember best.

The crowds—you heard the list (Parthians and Medes and Elamites, from Phrygia and Pamphylia and so on)—they all had homes somewhere else. And yet, to God's faithful people in those days, Jerusalem was always to be like coming home. That's how it felt. It's kind of like joining the military or going off to college, maybe on the other side of the country, then getting a job there and staying. It's your address; it's where you have your things and pay your taxes. But it's oh so sweet to get back to Mom and Dad's . . . and hear the old-familiar down-home phrases, for Pete's sake! You betcha! Maybe even fall back into your old accent again and say words like bag instead of bog and hotdish instead of casserole.

Faithful visitors to Jerusalem hadn't been able to do things like that, because their "heart languages" were the languages of all those distant countries. When they came to Jerusalem, they could get along just fine with Greek; it was the *lingua franca* of that day. That is, the adopted language that could bridge the gap between all those peoples. Sure, Jews living in different parts of the world **knew** Greek, but it was impersonal to them, for business, not for intimate conversations among friends and family. It would have been so delightful to hear God's good news, the Gospel, in their native, "heart" languages. Then Jerusalem would be like coming home—even hundreds of miles from where they lived.

And **that's** what happened at Pentecost. Suddenly they could hear the breathtaking works of God, Jesus' death and resurrection for their salvation, as the sweet words of Mom and Dad, the way those words meant the most. The Bible doesn't say, but maybe, just maybe, the people who heard the disciples speaking exclaimed, "Hey! It's **not** Greek to me, anymore!"

What we **do** know from the Bible is that the believers who had gathered on Pentecost were proclaiming the "wonders" of the Lord (v 11). Yet, as I mentioned in the children's message, the text gives no details on exactly **what** these first messages were all about. But they were certainly connected to how the promises given to the Old Testament people were fulfilled in Jesus, just the way that our Lord explained to the two disciples on the way to Emmaus (Lk 24:27).

After hearing these languages, how **did** people react? Some were amazed. But some started to mock that these Galileans were drunk. Peter, a disciple who had denied Christ three times to save his skin, now stood up courageously and defended these brothers by reminding all those gathered of the words spoken

by the prophet Joel. God made the promise to pour out His Spirit on all people. Pentecost is the time when His promise was *fulfilled*. The Old Testament believers trusted that the Lord would follow through on what He said.

So, how is the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy relevant to *us*? 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. These faithful people of God then carried out the "Great Commission" themselves; they truly became the witnesses of Christ's love, and the Gospel of Christ was proclaimed in many places.

We are the evidence of the Holy Spirit's work done by the voices of those faithful Christians. Somehow the Gospel has reached our ears and hearts. We've heard what brought these first few believers together: Jesus—His death on the cross, His rising from the grave, that has taken away our sins. Ever since then, the Holy Spirit has been announcing Christ crucified. *That's* the reason *we* now know Christ as our Savior. God's desire to save started from the beginning of time, and He's still at work. The Holy Spirit is strengthening our faith through the Gospel and Sacraments. The Word of God *is* the power of God for salvation to all who believe (Rom 1:16).

That same assurance then energizes us to be the people of Pentecost. As Paul says in 2 Cor. 4:7, "We are the jars of clay bearing the treasure". The Lord uses people like us, sinful and weak, to speak the Gospel to others. How can we do this? It's the Holy Spirit living in us who is saving people, and He alone is enabling us to proclaim His Gospel.

Whenever we're disappointed at our frailties and sins, we remember our gracious God, who sacrificed Himself for us on the cross. He didn't stay dead and buried in the grave but kept His promise by defeating death. By His conquering power, given to us by the Holy Spirit, our God *will* accomplish His will through us, just the way those lowly Galileans became the proclaimers of the almighty 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 Jesus Christ will come back to judge the living and the dead. Because of His sacrifice and forgiveness, proclaimed to us at Pentecost, proclaimed *by us since* Pentecost, we and countless others will welcome that Last Day with praises of Christ that will never end. Amen.