

Written Copy: Acts 2:1-6 “The Spirit That Draws Us Together”

Day of Pentecost

Sunday, May 22nd, 2021

Text: Acts 2:1-6

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.

The text's intent

Here Pentecost is described as the grand kickoff of the final chapter in God's plan of salvation which has been underway since the Garden and has been prophesied by the prophet Joel. While the Spirit had already been sent upon these followers of Jesus He comes in a power and manifestation like never before, centered on drawing together God-fearing men to hear the witness of Jesus Christ, through that witness be called to faith, and into the assembly of believers we call the Church. The Spirit who cannot be seen with the naked eye manifests His presence to Jesus' followers as fire, a holy and purifying symbol, and to all gathered in Jerusalem as a powerful wind, and the supernatural manifestation of the follower's ability to speak the native languages of those gathered in Jerusalem, so that all might know the Gospel the Church is to proclaim is for people of all nations. This is not something new but is the fulfillment of prophesy of old and is leading up to the complete fulfillment of the Last Day which will include supernatural signs and wonders in heaven and on earth. In providing this supernatural event the Spirit's purpose is to call these men to gather together in faith and baptize them into the body of Christ, His Church, to be the witnesses of the Gospel that the Jewish nation was supposed to be but failed to do.

Focus Statement:

The Spirit was given in fulfillment of Jesus' promise to the Church-His gathered followers. The Spirit came as they were gathered together in one place. The miraculous event worked to call God fearing men from all over Jerusalem to hear the manifested presence as the fulfillment of prophecy regarding the final chapter of God's salvation story. The Spirit comes to draw us together in the common faith concerning salvation in Jesus Christ, and together empower us to share that salvation with the world.

Function Statement:

Why it's important to know:

Other denominations have a self-centered view concerning the continuing result of the Day of Pentecost: my receiving of my allotment of the Spirit so I can manifest His presence through spiritual gifts that I manifest, overlooking the context of the assembled church where these gifts and manifested to gather believers together. Even Lutherans can adopt the view of worship being done with me and my Jesus apart from the assembly of believers that the Spirit calls us into.

What the hearer should do as a result:

Consider your place purpose in the mission of the Church based on the faith you share in Christ, how we gather to build one another up, and serve as an individual part of the whole.

Subject Sentence: Spirit manifests Himself to build up the Church.

Introduction: How the Church Views Celebration of Pentecost

Welcome to Pentecost Sunday, the Sunday we as Lutherans celebrate as the final Sunday of the liturgical season of Easter. For this Sunday we change the banners and paraments from the gold-colored ones that were up for Easter and replace them with these red banners and paraments. They echo the prophetic words from Joel concerning the manifestation of “fire and blood” as cited in our Epistle Reading from Acts today. The symbols on them recall the manifestation of fire that appeared over the assembled followers of Jesus, as well as the symbol of the dove that represents the Holy Spirit. The liturgical color of red for Pentecost reminds us of the blood shed by Christian martyrs over the centuries as a witness to their faith. For us Lutherans Pentecost is an important Sunday in the Church year and is seen as the birthday of the New Testament Church. But it’s not as important or grand a celebration as Easter, or Christmas. In the history of the church, it is a Sunday when baptisms were often done. It is also the Sunday that many Lutheran Church’s celebrate as Confirmation Sunday.

The way other denominations celebrate Pentecost runs the gamut. Those non-denominational churches that do not follow the liturgical year may not celebrate it as anything special at all. Other more “Pentecostal” denominations make it equal to Easter. They focus on the personal nature of the giving of the Holy Spirit as well as personal physical manifestations of the Spirit’s presence. Some tie these manifestations into a second Christian baptism, the first being the baptism of water, and the second the baptism of fire. This they believe gives testimony to one’s salvation, so that unless you manifest such supernatural signs like speaking in tongues, you are not really saved. They see speaking in tongues not as speaking in other established languages as the Bible does but is special angelic languages that must be translated by another “specially gifted person”. In all this there is a self-centeredness concerning how the Holy Spirit allegedly works in the individual Christian. The focus is upon the individual worshiper, and the gifts that he manifests, drawing attention to the person and away from the work Jesus tells us He sent the Spirit to do, which is reveal truth about our Savior, and granted faith in Him.

While Lutherans don’t see the Spirit working that way in believers, there has developed a different kind of self-centeredness among some. Many Lutheran Pastors are seeing as an after effect of the COVID-19 pandemic members continuing to worship at home by themselves. Now there are those of you remaining at home because of legitimate health concerns or inability to drive here. But there are others who choose to worship at home simply as a matter of convenience. Watching on the internet means they don’t have to get up, get dressed, and come to Church. When you are at home you can sing if you want to, or not, listen to the readings and sermon, or not, join in the prayers, or not. But that also means you could be here in fellowship with us, but you are not.

There is an underlying justification that makes this an OK thing to do. The thinking is this, “It doesn’t matter if I’m there with them or here at home, I’ve got my Jesus. My Jesus is with me, and so is the Holy Spirit. Through Him I’m connected spiritually with those I watch worshipping online. Therefore I don’t need to be there with them physically. And staying here at home means less of a sacrifice of my time on Sunday mornings.”

This view is not new. It was around before the Pandemic among those who grew up in the Church, were catechized and joined a Lutheran congregation, but then as they grew into adulthood stopped coming. They believe that they can effectively worship Jesus wherever they are. They’ve got their Jesus and its all good. They don’t need to gather with the Church body because they have all that they need within themselves. The problem with these views about personal worship and a personal Jesus is that it stands contrary to what God tells us worshipping Him is all about. It stands contrary to what our Epistle Reading says about the work the Holy Spirit came to do within the physically gathered Church.

What Pentecost Reveals About Spirit working in the Church

First of all, let’s look at the setting for this account of the Day of Pentecost. **Acts 2:1 When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place.** Now, we have to ask, who it is that makes up the “they” this verse refers to? Keeping in mind the Chapter designations we have in our Bible are not part of the original text, it is good to refer back to what had been written previously. **Acts 1:13 And when they had entered, they went up to the upper room, where they were staying, Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot and Judas the son of James.** Here we have named the 11 remaining original disciples following Judas Iscariot committing suicide. These are also the 11 who will “stand up” with Peter later in our account. But “they” in Acts 2:2 includes more than these 11. **Acts 1:14 All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.** Here we have the 11 Disciples plus Jesus’ mother and brothers. What are they gathered together doing? They are devoting themselves to prayer: they are worshipping. **Acts 1:15 In those days Peter stood up among the brothers (the company of persons was in all about 120).** When Acts 2:1 talks about “they were all together in one place”, this is who many Bible commentators feel Luke, the writer of Acts, is referring to: all 120 followers. They are probably meeting in one of the porticos that were a part of the temple in Jerusalem. The Lord could’ve arranged for the Spirit to come in any setting, they needn’t be all gathered in one place. But there is a reason for Him to choose this setting.

Acts 2:2-3 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.** In both the Greek Language which this account was written, and the Hebrew language which they spoke, “wind” and “spirit” are the same word. That sound of a ‘mighty rushing wind” was key to these believers understanding that what is happening is by the hand of the Holy Spirit., Then there is the physical manifestation of the Holy Spirit as fire, who otherwise is invisible. What is being described here is not 120 tongues of fire just appearing over each believer’s head. “Divided tongues “means what came to rest over their heads was divided off one main manifestation of fire. The Spirit first manifests Himself in one single flame of fire, which is then divided up into individual portions that are shared among all. Get the picture? Each individual believer is untied the One Spirit coming to rest on each of them.

Acts 2:4 **And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.** Lest you think that each one of the 120 received only a small portion of the Spirit, they were all filled with the Spirit. Filled to capacity. Because He is God, He can and does fill up an infinite number of those to whom He is sent by the Father and the Son, just as Jesus promised He would be. And each one of the 150 begin to contribute individually yet working together to accomplish the mission given the whole.

Acts 2:5-6 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.** While the manifestation of the tongues of fire was for these 120 alone, the sound of the mighty rushing wind was for all those others gathered in Jerusalem for the Feast of Pentecost, the a Jewish festival celebrating the barley harvest. The sound of the great wind was a sign that what is happening is the work of God Himself, just as was the supernatural gift of languages. Each one of the 120 is involved in speaking different languages. Now these are not some “heavenly angelic language, as some of the Pentecostal Churches define the “gift of tongues” to be. They were each speaking a definite human language that was not their own. And when you consider that the Greek word translated here as “language” can also be translated as dialect, meaning a regional variation of a common language, it is possible that what we have happening here is 120 people proclaiming the glorious gifts of the Lord in 120 different dialects that found the ears of every single Jew gathered from all over the Roman Empire and beyond!

Each member of the 120 is doing their part, which is all part of one supernatural event meant to draw a crowd that is bewildered and wondering what the heck is going on. And what is the purpose of all this? Is it for each of the 120 members to draw attention to themselves? Is it to verify for themselves and everyone else that they each have their own slice of Holy Spirit pie? Consider the following verses: **Acts 2:7-8** 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?** And **Acts 2:11-12** 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?"** The effect of this supernatural display is to cause this assembly Jewish worshipers from all over the Empire to be amazed, astonished, and perplexed. The reason for this was to bring them to the point of questioning "what does this mean?" The purpose was to afflict and conflict those who up until now were comfortable in what they believed.

What Jesus Came To Do Through the Church

Once the 120 had done their work, Peter stood up and by the power of the Holy Spirit began to tell them what was really going on. **Acts 2:14** **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.** Peter stands up and calls them to listen to what he has to say. He does so in a formal way, as any prophet or man of God would call the faithful to listen to a proclamation from the Lord. Because that is exactly what Peter is about to give them. And notice that while it is Peter that is speaking, it's not just Peter standing up by himself. The 11 disciples who were eyewitnesses to the testimony Peter is about to give are standing with him in support of all that he will say. They are standing together testifying as the One True Church.

Acts 2:16-17 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;** What is going on? It's really not something brand new. It's of old. It's fulfillment of prophecy. It's the Spirit announcing the final chapter of God's salvation plan that has been in the works ever since the beginning of time. That God would send the One who would be the perfect sacrifice that would restore His fallen creation back to Himself. That the descendant of Eve who would crush the serpent's head, who is the devil, who claims all mankind because we sin and disobey God, that descendant is Christ, and He has come and earned us a place once again in the Father's kingdom.

All these men gathered in Jerusalem were there to give a sacrifice that might make them worthy. Peter was about to declare to them that the final once and for all sacrifice had been given in the person of Jesus Christ, who suffered and died on the cross, He was the sacrifice to end all sacrifices. His death and resurrection were the testimony that everything that was needed to make mankind right with God had been accomplished. Therefore the Last Days are upon them, and upon us as well.

This supernatural event announced that this wonderful gift that was Jesus' death and resurrection was being given to all men through the coming of the Holy Spirit. He was being poured out to afflict those comfortable in their own personal salvation works, so that once afflicted and convicted of sin the Spirit could point them to Christ through the gift of faith. That gift enables and empowers you to give up trusting in yourself and instead cling to the Gospel message that Jesus has accomplished all that is necessary to make you right with God. His Spirit comes to you to grant you the power of faith by which you can entrust your life now, and eternal life to come upon all that the Gospel promises: forgiveness of sins, salvation, and eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ.

The Encouragement of Scripture to Gather Sacrificially

That's the message that the Spirit came on Pentecost to begin to proclaim. He came to call people to faith and give them the mission of proclaiming the Gospel. He does this through men and women like you and me, not as individuals working on own, instead the Spirit calls us to gather together as the Church. We are to worship together just as those 120 who were waiting in Jerusalem did. Just as those who heard Peter's inspired sermon and were baptized did. And they continued to gather together in worship where they studied the apostolic teaching which we have in the Scriptures, where they were in fellowship with one another just as we gather together in person to sing together and pray together. The Holy Spirit gathers us together to confess our sins together and hold fast together to the words of Absolution pronounced upon all of us. And while one may in some fashion or another be a part of worship remotely, being built up by watching others do worship, the problem is we here are not being built up when you are worshiping at home. Just as each of those 120 were important for the work of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, so are you who are worshipping at home. And there at home you cannot be empowered by the gift that is the Lord's Supper that we celebrate as the Church gathered in one place.

God's Old Testament Church gathered together in worship around the sacrificial altar. So too the New Testament Church is called to gather together. **Ephesians 5:18b-20** ^{18b}**be filled with the Spirit,** ¹⁹**addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart,** ²⁰**giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,** **Hebrews 10:24-25** ²⁴**And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works,** ²⁵**not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.** In our worshiping together we best build one another up so that when we go out, we go with the Spirit equipped to proclaim His Gospel in the language of the culture we find ourselves in.

Conclusion

So it is we gather together in celebration of Pentecost Sunday. We celebrate the gift of the Spirit that each of us has been given, not to make us a Church unto ourselves, but to unite us in faith toward our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We have been called into His family, each of us as a member with unique gifts and talents that are best realized when we function as many members of one connected body. The Church began with those united in worship, and it best continues on as those united in worship. I am encouraged by all of you who have returned from the COVID-19 exile to worship with us again here in this place. I am encouraged by those of you who tune in and worship over the internet as well. But I would ask you to meditate on this: are you there at home because of your inability to come due to health or transportation reasons? Or are you there as a matter of your own convenience. You can join with us at home through the Spirit whom we share. But we are missing you doing your part to build each of us here up in the faith. We are missing you gathered at the Lord's Table. And we are missing you as one whom the Spirit wants to use in conjunction with us to carry His Gospel out into the world. May the Lord grant you discernment and encouragement to join with us here for in person worship. Just know that we are waiting to welcome you with open arms. Amen.