

## **“Lessons from Pentecost”**

*June 9, 2019 – Pentecost – Our Redeemer Lutheran (Series C Readings)—Pastor Mike Fiebert*

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

### **I.**

Today is the Feast of Pentecost. Such a big deal in our church year we break out the bright red to set it apart. Red, that celebrates Reformation Sunday. Red that represents the blood of the martyrs on Sundays we recognize various saints of the church, and red that represents the tongues of fire that came on Pentecost. It's a big deal. It's the church's birthday. It's a day to remind ourselves about the Holy Spirit given as God's gift to the church.

There are several themes we could focus on at Pentecost in a sermon, and each of our three readings provides an opportunity to highlight some unique aspect of this important celebration. Rather than focus on a single theme, I'd like to take a look at what each of our Pentecost readings today teaches us about ourselves, about the importance of the Holy Spirit, and, ultimately about the purpose of it all.

### **II.**

First, let's consider what these readings teach us about ourselves as sinful human beings. Appropriately, on the day we celebrate the gift of speaking in tongues that happened on Pentecost, when all gathered in Jerusalem that day heard Peter's preaching in their own language, we reflect back on the reasons why they all spoke different languages in the first place. It was, as we heard read earlier, because of the events that happened in the building of the Tower of Babel. God's people had determined to built themselves a tower to heaven to make a name for themselves. God saw this, and He realized, that as long as the men of the earth could communicate without hindrance, there would be no limit to the evil they could accomplish. So, to protect them from their own sinful selves, God confused their languages. What does this teach us about ourselves? It teaches us that, if left to our own devices, our pride will always get the best of us, and we'll try to act as if we are gods of our lives. Not good.

Next, let's look at the Second reading from Acts, the account of Pentecost itself. When people see the disciples, full of the Holy Spirit, speaking in tongues, they immediately draw a conclusion. "These guys must be drunk!" They exclaim! Their fallen eyes were not able to comprehend what was truly going on spiritually that day. It took Peter's further preaching to set them straight. But this incident once again teaches us something about our reality as a sinful people. We often, and usually, misunderstand what God is doing in our world and how exactly He is at work in our world. We process everything with our fallen minds, but God's ways are so much bigger, and so different from anything we might expect.

And then there's the Gospel reading. Jesus is talking to the disciples about the necessity of loving Him and showing that through the keeping of His words. And there's just the rub. We don't keep His words very well, and, the reality is, that shows that we do not love Him, at least not with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength as He bid us to do. Yes, each reading today shows us the reality of our depravity. The theological term is "total depravity." We are totally depraved creatures, turning in on ourselves, scheming for the worst, misunderstanding our God, and disobeying Him.

### **III.**

So those are at least a few things we might learn about ourselves from Pentecost, but now it's time to learn more about the importance of the Holy Spirit. The Third Person of the Trinity, after all, is the occasion for our celebration this day. Well, again, the Tower of Babel reading is specifically paired with the Pentecost account of the speaking in tongues to help us see the connection and contrast between these two events. They are connected, because they both involve language, Babel the confusion of language, Pentecost, a gift given by God to help overcome that confusion. And the contrast: man, by himself, will in pride bring his own destruction. But, man, empowered by the Holy Spirit, is enabled to do the greatest of good. The Spirit given at Pentecost is oh so important because it empowers us to do that which we could not do without Him.

And, first and foremost, the Spirit gives us understanding. The Spirit gives us the ability to discern God's will and work in our world. The Bible says the man without the Spirit cannot understand the things of God, because they are spiritually discerned. No wonder the nations gathered in Jerusalem that day didn't understand what was going on. But, with the power of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit at work through Peter's preaching, their eyes were opened to see. Paul once puts it this way, when He prays that the "eyes of our hearts would be opened," to see the things of God. Jesus tells us in another passage from John that when the Holy Spirit comes, He will guide us into all truth. We need the Spirit not only to understand God's work in the world, but to trust in it for our salvation.

And again in the Gospel reading, Jesus describes the Spirit just this way, by calling Him the Helper, in Greek the *paraclete*, in other translations also called the Counselor, or the Comforter. You get the idea, He's the One we need, the One we cannot do without. The Spirit's presence in our lives is essential for faith and life. As Luther put it so succinctly in the meaning of the Third Article of the Creed, "I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ my Lord, or come to Him, but, the Holy Spirit..." Today we thank God for the Holy Spirit.

#### IV.

So this Pentecost, our lessons teach us much about ourselves, they teach us much about the importance of the Spirit, and finally, it would benefit us to take just a moment and reflect on the purpose of it all. What's the purpose of Pentecost? What's the point about the tongues, and the fire, and the Spirit, and the preaching? What's the point of the hearers gathered round? It might seem rather obvious once it's stated, but we should state it nonetheless. It would be a tragedy if it was somehow overlooked, if we missed the forest of Pentecost, for the trees, so to speak. Before we get too worried about what exactly tongues are, and whether they exist today, or how to best understand the Holy Spirit, or about the languages of the world, or anything else, let us not neglect what this is all about, and that's this: the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Pentecost is necessary, because the Gospel is to go out to the very ends of the earth. And all of this is for the sake of the Gospel. Tongues are given so that every tribe, people, and nation can hear and understand the Gospel, that Jesus Christ is crucified and risen and reigning. And not only that people might hear the Gospel in their own language, but that through the power of the Holy Spirit they might understand the meaning of it all. This Gospel means nothing less than the forgiveness of sins and salvation of the world. This Holy Spirit given at Pentecost works faith in the hearts of men to trust in that promise. "No one can say Jesus is Lord except by the power of the Holy Spirit," the apostle writes. (1 Cor. 12:3). And finally, then, the Helper, the Spirit, empowers us to live in accordance with the Gospel. "If anyone loves Me, He will keep My Word," Jesus taught the disciples (John 14:23). But we need help. We need the power. As a fallen sinful people we do not have it. And our lives of sin do great damage to the Gospel we proclaim to profess. One of the top reasons people stay away from church is that they say it's full of hypocrites. But when God pours His love into our hearts by the promised Holy Spirit, Jesus tells us, it is to our advantage. The Spirit compels us to walk not in the ways of the world, but rather to offer our very lives as living sacrifices, as a witness, a pleasant aroma to our Lord.

#### IV.

"I am going away," Jesus says, "and I will come to you" (John 14:8). And He comes to you this day. Not in flesh and blood in human form. No, that will happen someday soon, when He returns to make all things new. But, He comes today by the power of His Holy Spirit. The Spirit of Pentecost is at work as His Word is read, and heard, and proclaimed. The Spirit of Pentecost is at work as Jesus comes to us veiled in the mystery of bread and wine in the holy meal we will soon receive. The Spirit of Pentecost has made Jesus present for us once again this day, and He will continue to do so until that day when we see Him face to face. Go in His peace. Amen.

And now may the peace of God which transcends our understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.