

“When the Holy Spirit Comes, Everything Changes”

Acts 2:1-21

Today we celebrate the Feast of Pentecost. The disciples are all in one place (possibly the upper room, but we aren't told), waiting, just like Jesus instructed them to do. And the Holy Spirit comes and everything changes. Up until this point, the disciples were more than a little confused in regard to what they were supposed to be doing.

If you remember back to the time immediately before and after Easter, the disciples were a lot confused. Peter was telling Jesus that there is no way that Jesus can be handed over to the chief priests and be crucified – “May this never be, Lord.” And Jesus says, “Get behind Me Satan.” And when the soldiers come to the Garden of Gethsemane, the disciples scatter and hide, and Peter, three times, denies even knowing Him. They don't even show up to help bury Him. Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea take care of that.

The morning of the resurrection, the disciples “refuse to believe” the words of the women who came from the empty tomb. Peter and John go into the empty tomb and still don't know what to think. Thomas absolutely will not believe until he, not only can see it with his own eyes, but until he can put his finger into the marks of the nails and his hand into His side, “I will never believe,” he says.

After that, the disciples still don't know what to do next. A group of them go fishing. This is what they knew before Jesus called them to be "fishers of men." Jesus meets them on the shore of the Sea of Galilee (a place that we are going to be spending all this next week with Vacation Bible School), and He eats with them, and Jesus restores Peter – three times saying, "Do you love Me? Then feed my sheep."

Then, 40 days after Easter, Jesus ascends into heaven, but first He tells His disciples to wait in Jerusalem because the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, is coming. And He comes and there is a sound like a mighty rushing wind and these fearful, hiding, denying, doubting disciples suddenly become bold preachers in all the languages of the people. Everything changes when the Holy Spirit comes.

This is what we confess in Luther's Small Catechism. "I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ my Lord, or come to Him. But the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith."

For you and me, everything changed when the Holy Spirit came. This doesn't mean that we were able to speak in a multitude of languages on the day of our Baptism. In fact, I couldn't speak any language on the day of my Baptism. The ability to "speak miraculously" was unique to the days of the apostles. St. Paul says that the gift of tongues will cease [1 Cor. 13:8].

And through their preaching and the power of the Holy Spirit, as He is the One "who calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth," (again, from Luther's Catechism), the Holy Spirit brings 3000 people to faith that day and they are baptized by the apostles.

And from there, the apostles go throughout Judea, and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (Thomas went all the way to India and was killed there because of his faith). The work of the Holy Spirit was evident. It does beg the question, “What about the Old Testament people?” Did they not have the Holy Spirit? Yes, they did.

God is and always has been Triune – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (and we will especially focus on that point next week as we celebrate the Sunday of the Holy Trinity). The Holy Spirit, with the Father and the Son, is eternal and has always been working in the world. Even at creation, He was “hovering over the waters.”

One of the clear testaments of the presence of the Holy Spirit is what I mentioned two weeks and we will sing as our Offertory after the sermon. David’s words from Ps. 51 following the whole Bathsheba and Uriah the Hittite incident, “Create in me a clean heart O God and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from Your presence and take not Your Holy Spirit from me.”

David had been brought low by the words of the prophet Nathan who showed him his sin. David was not feeling very “full of the Spirit,” yet David knew the truth that God has not taken His Holy Spirit from him. David’s sin, as high-handed and in-your-face as it was to God, his sin did not exclude him from the grace of God. David wrongfully took another man’s wife and then killed her husband to cover up his sin, but God did not “take His Holy Spirit from him.”

The Holy Spirit changes everything. Why? Because the Holy Spirit works through means – we call them the Means of Grace. The Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel; enlightened me with His gifts – we confess in

the catechism. Very few people have received direct revelation from the Spirit of God like Eldad and Medad in our Old Testament reading.

Even for King David, the Spirit worked through means. He was circumcised on the 8th day of his life into the covenant with Abraham (a foreshadowing of our adoption by God in the waters of Baptism). God prescribed that atonement would be made for His people through the cutting open of the flesh and the pouring out of the blood of animals offered as a sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins (a foreshadowing of the blood of Christ – the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world).

His flesh and His blood now come to you by means of bread and wine. This is the work of the Holy Spirit. He has “enlightened you with His gifts” which includes washing you with the Word of God joined with the water. And don’t forget about the Word of God which comes to you through your ears or your eyes. The Holy Spirit uses those means also – the spoken and written Word.

When the Holy Spirit comes, He changes everything. Look to your own life. When the Holy Spirit comes to you and washes you and you are baptized into the name of God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit teaches you with the very Word of God which bears His name, and He feeds you with the flesh and blood of Jesus Christ which is the name that is above every name – and every knee shall bow and every tongue confess the name of Jesus Christ to the glory of God the Father.

When the Holy Spirit comes, He changes everything, because, as Peter proclaimed in his great sermon on Pentecost, “everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.” Amen.