

Day of Pentecost-May 23, 2021
Baltic and East Nidaros Lutheran Parish
John 15:26-27;16:4b-15

“The Promise of Pentecost”

Sermon by Pastor Randall J. Questad



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

There were some amazing sights that were seen and sounds that were heard on the first Pentecost. Witnesses of that day recorded a mighty rushing wind that filled the entire house where the apostles had gathered. South Dakotans have a pretty good understanding of the sounds that strong winds can make. But the sound that the Holy Spirit made that day filled the inside of the house, it was not blowing through the trees outside. As these apostles looked around at each other, they saw what appeared to be tongues of fire that had rested on them, but apparently these fires were not causing harm to the people they were resting on. These tongues of fire must have been like when Moses heard the Lord speak through the burning bush that wasn't consumed. Then we learn that these apostles began to speak in other languages. It was these sights and sounds that attracted crowds of people as they witnessed the outpouring of the Holy Spirit as the church was born on the first Pentecost.

It was confusing for the witnesses to hear so many languages being spoken all at one time. However, these people were not speaking in tongues so few could understand, but they were speaking in many native languages so everyone could understand. Those who were listening heard about God's deeds of power. But others dismissed what was being said as gibberish and confused being filled with the Holy Spirit with simply being filled with liquid spirits.

It was quite a spectacle for the witnesses of the first Pentecost day. I apologize if you are disappointed by coming here today and the only thing you notice different from other Sundays is seeing the red paraments on the altar, pulpit, and lectern and maybe a few people who also wore something red to remember this important day in the church year. The only thing I have seen similar and caused so much excitement as seeing these tongues of fire on people was when we were going through the food line at a wedding reception, and we witnessed a woman who was ahead of us lean towards the serving table and the heavy coating of hairspray burst into flames when she got too close to the candles that decorated the serving table. Fortunately, she wasn't hurt badly, but she said some things that I don't think were inspired by the Holy Spirit. I suppose I could have found someone to read one of the lessons in a different language like Norwegian so you could hear a different, but native language today. But the purpose of Pentecost is not so that you don't understand what is being said. It is to make sure that you hear the promise from Jesus of what the Holy Spirit will do for you when Jesus ascends to his Father in heaven.

For that, we turn from the story in the first lesson of the first Pentecost to the gospel for today where Jesus does all the speaking. Jesus said that when the Advocate comes, he will testify on his behalf.

Jesus said the Holy Spirit will be your Advocate who was sent from the Father and will declare what was passed from the Father to him and the Holy Spirit will give these same words and declare them to you. To emphasize this work of the Holy Spirit, at the end of the gospel for today Jesus repeats at least three times how the Holy Spirit doesn't make up his own words to say. The words proceed from the Father to the Son and then to the Holy Spirit who declares these words to you to give you faith. We will confess this progression of words coming down to us when we confess our faith today using the words of the Nicene Creed where it speaks about the Holy Spirit who proceeds from the Father to the Son, With the Father and the Son he is worshiped and glorified and He is spoken through the prophets. Jesus is spoken through prophets or preachers who have heard these words of promise and now declare them to others who are waiting to hear.

Jesus tells us that it is to our advantage that he goes away so that the Holy Spirit will come. People had to find Jesus as he traveled from town to town so that he could cure their diseases and forgive their sins. But after the Holy Spirit arrived on the first Pentecost, Jesus was spread far and wide through the work of the Holy Spirit and was on the loose finding believers who were once looking for him. It sounds contradictory, but Jesus became more accessible for more people after went away to his Father in heaven. This made people sad to hear that Jesus was going away, but they didn't understand the advantage of having the Advocate working for you all of the time.

The Holy Spirit creates some contradictions of his own to what the world teaches. Jesus said that the Holy Spirit will prove the world wrong about sin, righteousness, and judgement. The world believes that sin is breaking the law of God. And with the right kind of motivation, you can overcome sin on your own. Which leads to proving the world wrong that you can achieve righteousness by doing good all on your own. The world then believes If you can become righteous on your own, then your judgement is in your control. This is what the world teaches, but the Holy Spirit will prove the world wrong.

The Holy Spirit will instead reveal that you are a sinner, and this is not a condition that you can remedy on your own. This doesn't mean you don't believe in Jesus. In fact, it convicts of your sin so that you must believe in Jesus. Then by turning to Jesus instead of inward toward yourself, Jesus delivers his righteousness to you in exchange for your sin. Then when the final day of judgment arrives, the Father has no recollection of your sin because his son has taken your sin to the cross and your judgment has nothing to do with what you have done, but what Jesus has done for you. The ruler of the world, the devil, who attempts to tell you that you are not good enough now becomes the one who is condemned.

Today, we are reminded of the amazing and perplexing sounds and sights that occurred on the first Pentecost, but more importantly, we are reminded on this Pentecost Sunday of the promises that have been handed down to us from God to his Son and to his Holy Spirit. The good news for you is that these promises do not stop with the Holy Spirit. Jesus has sent his Holy Spirit to deliver to you the good news of how you are saved. Salvation is yours simply by calling on the name of the Lord. And when you call on the name of the Lord, you will not say as the world says, "Look at me and all that I have done." Instead, Jesus will look at you no longer seeing what you have done or failed to do, but remember his promise given to you in your baptism when He claimed you as his child and said, "This one is mine." Amen.

