

Pentecost-May 28, 2023

Baltic and East Nidaros Lutheran Parish

Acts 2:1-21 and John 20:19-23

"Receive the Holy Spirit" Sermon by Pastor Randall J. Questad

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

*Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. This is how Peter ended his Pentecost Day sermon. What does Peter's "then" refer to? Was Peter talking about a particular time or was he speaking about an event when he said, "then"? It certainly was confusing for the apostles who were likely still stunned from the loud rushing wind that filled the entire house where they were gathered. They still may have been trying to make some sense of the tongues of fire that they saw resting on the tops of each of their heads. These apostles were still bewildered by hearing more than a dozen different languages being spoken while at the same time understanding what everyone was saying. There were plenty of reasons for people on this Pentecost Sunday to be amazed and perplexed. But then through all the chaos came the question that a good Lutheran would ask to find clarity. "What does this mean?" And this is when Peter goes to the pulpit and preaches to the confused crowd and declares what it means to "Receive the Holy Spirit."*

*The confusion for this day of Pentecost was not because these people had never experienced a Pentecost before. The confusion around this day was that this Pentecost was completely different from Pentecost's in the past. This Pentecost was new, and Peter declared that to be saved, they were to call on the name of the Lord. Pentecost had been observed by God's chosen people several hundreds of years prior to this Pentecost. The word Pentecost simply refers to a period of 50 days. The Pentecost that these apostles anticipated had arrived once again. 50 days had passed since the Passover and now it was the festival of weeks when God's chosen people gave thanks to God for the harvest they had received. It later also became the day that God's people celebrated the giving of the law of God to Moses which was handed down to God's chosen people to instruct them in the way they should live. During this time of Pentecost people were expected to read through the first five books of the bible at least 7 times and if they accomplished that, they might dive into the reading of the book of Ruth which describes the picking of grain that might have been missed after the first harvesters passed through the fields. The Pentecost that these first apostles expected was nothing like the excitement and confusion that came about on this new Pentecost day when they received the Holy Spirit.*

*On this Pentecost, it was too windy, noisy, and distracting to be doing any reading. On this Pentecost the apostles were no longer on the doing or giving side of any equation. The apostles were on the receiving end, but they were still trying to make heads or tails of what they had just witnessed before Peter began to preach. The wind that filled the house was violent and loud. It was just over a year ago when most of us witnessed a wind outside our homes. The difference in the derecho from last year and the wind that filled the house was that the derecho last year was violently destructive in so many places. However, there is no mention of any destruction from the wind on this Pentecost day. Also, the tongues of fire that rested over the heads of the apostles might have reminded the apostles of the story they had heard when God spoke to Moses through the burning bush, but the burning bush was never consumed by the fire. These apostles had understood fire to be a sign of judgment and purification, but this fire simply rested on the heads of these people without causing any harm. Something different was happening on this Pentecost day that they had never seen before.*

*This Pentecost shouldn't have been a surprise. It had been predicted by the prophet Joel. Joel declared that on this day there wouldn't be any penalties delivered to those who had not kept the law. Instead, preachers of all kinds, men and yes Joel predicted that women would be preaching. There would be young preachers and preachers who were old enough to get senior discounts for their meals and for the movie tickets. On this Pentecost, you wouldn't be able to predict who would receive the Holy Spirit. Men and women of all ages would not only be preaching, but also would receive the Holy Spirit. This Pentecost would later be called the birth of the church. This is not because God had never spoken to his people before, but because after this day, everyone would see the work of the Holy Spirit by sending preachers of all kinds into the world to preach to all kinds of people.*

*The "then" that now marked how everyone could call on the name of the Lord depended on where the Holy Spirit determined to send a preacher and open the ears of people gathered. Martin Luther understood the importance of the Holy Spirit and taught us the same thing that Paul declared in the second reading for today when he said, "No one can say "Jesus is Lord" except by the Holy Spirit. Peter quoted Joel who said you must call on the name of the Lord to be saved and now Paul said that you can't call on the Lord's name without receiving the Holy Spirit.*

*We will use the third article and its meaning from Luther's Small Catechism today when we confess our faith today. Luther teaches us that we believe that we cannot believe on our own. It is only through the work of the Holy Spirit that you have come here today and have come to believe. The Holy Spirit not only calls, gathers, and enlightens the Baltic East Nidaros Parish, but calls, gathers and enlightens the whole Christian Church throughout the world and keeps us in true faith, that is faith in Jesus Christ alone.*

*Lutherans are often criticized for not understanding or having the Holy Spirit. Most often people feel you really don't have the Holy Spirit unless you are showing some kind of enthusiastic behavior. Other than a few of you whispering a barely audible Amen at the end of some sermons or singing your favorite hymns with a little more gusto than usual, we don't I measure how much of the Holy Spirit that we have within us by our actions. It was not the excitement that happened by speaking in different languages that demonstrated the arrival of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. It was that there was only one message that was heard by everyone that day. It was the good news, the gospel word, that the forgiveness of sins was the one message that should be carried to the ends of the earth by those being sent out.*

*Receiving the Holy Spirit is as much out of your control as is an unplanned violent wind event such as a derecho. You might see on the horizon that it looks like it is heading your way, but you have no power within you to receive it or reject it. The power rests in the Holy Spirit who has chosen to rest on each child of God in the waters of baptism. Once the Holy Spirit has landed on you, it takes up a permanent residence within you. I suspect none of you have read the first five books of the Old Testament this week to prepare for this Pentecost Sunday, let alone reading through these books 7 times. But thanks be to God that this Pentecost is not like the Old Pentecost. Your judgment and penalty have been paid and not one hair on your head will be consumed by the tongues of fire of God's judgment that now rests over you. Jesus Christ has filled you with the Holy Spirit and now you will leave this house spilling out this good news of salvation wherever you go. Amen*