

Trinity Lutheran Church, Gillette, WY
May 11, 2008

The Gift of Pentecost

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, amen. The text for the sermon comes from the Epistle, which was read to you earlier.

In just a matter of months, Americans will come together on a day that marks us as a nation: the 4th of July, Independence Day. Why is the 4th of July so important? Independence Day commemorates the adoption of the Declaration of Independence on July 4, 1776, declaring independence from the Kingdom of Great Britain. On this day, more than any other, we identify ourselves with the nation of the United States of America.

The Old Testament Feast of Pentecost was one of the three annual harvest celebrations of the ancient Israelites. Grain in Israel is harvested in the spring, and on Pentecost the Israelites were expected to bring to the Lord the *“firstfruits of the wheat harvest.”* Pentecost was also one of the three great festivals for which every Israelite was to assemble in Jerusalem. It was a day like this that the Jews truly identified themselves as Jewish.

What did happen on that first Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came to the Church in a very special way? In the tradition of the day, Pentecost was a kind of memorial day. Everybody got the day off from work. They gathered to celebrate the spring harvest and to remember the time in history when Moses received the Ten Commandments on Mt. Sinai. Pentecost was a day to celebrate God's direction and the purpose given to His

people in His law and sustained in the fruitful harvest. This was the Jewish Festival of Pentecost, fifty days after the Passover feast.

The importance of this day is not about how many people were gathered. It's not about people hearing others in their own language. The importance of the event is the coming of the Holy Spirit.

What is so important regarding the coming of the Holy Spirit? It has been said that “from that moment the Holy Spirit became the dominant reality in the life of the early Church.” Jesus prepared His disciples for the coming of the Spirit with the promise of Pentecost. He promised that His followers would be “baptized in the Holy Spirit.” But Acts emphasizes especially one aspect of the Spirit’s work, namely, inspiring believers to speak God’s message. Every reference to the coming of the Spirit and the work He is sent to do connects Him to the Word of Christ.

The Spirit works through God's saving Word. It is a Word intended for all people, not just a select and gifted few. Every person in the house was filled with the Holy Spirit. The list of nations represented in Jerusalem signifies that the gift of God's Word is to all nations and all peoples. It was a message that was understood in every language.

That is the purpose of the Word. It is the message of the saving work of Jesus Christ for all peoples. The day of Pentecost was the giving of that message to the ends of the earth. The Holy Spirit came to spread the Word of God to the apostles, allowing them to spread that Word as pastors to the churches around them: Paul was sent to Corinth, Galatia, Ephesus, Philippi, Colossae, Thessalonica. Timothy was sent to the church at Ephesus to preach and teach. These were faithful pastors who received the gift of the

Holy Spirit, though not necessarily on the day of Pentecost.

The Holy Spirit continues to be given to pastors today, to preach and teach the Word of God. They follow the tradition set forth for them by the apostles of old. Their work: to spread the Gospel message of Jesus Christ to all the world. They preach the Law and the Gospel. Through the Law, God works to convict those who mock the apostles and those who ridicule Christians today. For those present there at the day of Pentecost, they mocked the apostles, saying *“They are filled with new wine.”* They refused to believe that what was taking place was the work of the Holy Spirit. It was too easy to dismiss the events as drunkenness rather than acknowledge that this was the work of Holy the Spirit. His Word convicts sinners who continue to look for extraordinary means rather than the ordinary means of God's Word. Through the Gospel, God saves *“everyone who calls on the name of the Lord.”* This is done through the preaching of the Word of the cross, through Baptism and through the Lord's Supper.

God's mighty work comes to us through His simple Word and Sacraments. It is the Holy Spirit working through that Word and Sacraments who assures us of salvation and empowers us to confess that faith in our daily lives.

The miracle of Pentecost is when the Word suddenly reaches us. When we speak of the miracle of the Holy Spirit, we are confessing that something has come to us which we didn't comprehend before. God gives us His Spirit so that we may have fellowship with Him and be led to do His will, that is, to be children of God.

God's saving Word works even when it is delivered quite ordinarily. It worked through the apostles and it works through pastors today. Both are sinful, ordinary men

whom God calls to do extraordinary work. We have ordinary means, such as water, bread, and wine; yet when combined with God's Word, become something extraordinary – they become the means by which God delivers forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation.

So what do we have today from the day of Pentecost? We have the Word of God - we have the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Good News that He has died to take away our sins. We don't have any living apostles, but we do have their apostolic teachings in the New Testament. It was this same message that St. Peter proclaimed to the crowds that day; the same message that saved 3,000 that day is the one that is proclaimed here at Trinity.

That same Holy Spirit rests even on us very ordinary people. The Holy Spirit was given to us at our Baptism. It was in that moment that the Holy Spirit worked in us saving faith in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit is given to all believers, not on account of what we do, but what was done for us.

There is much that the Holy Spirit gives to us, though we do not recognize it. Through the Holy Spirit, we are given the opportunity to confess the faith of the Christian Church. It is not a testimony of the believer, but of the works of God and all that He does on behalf of His children. The Holy Spirit allows us believers to speak God's saving Word in ordinary ways that people understand. The Holy Spirit causes God's Word of salvation to be understood when it is confessed by believers. The message of salvation doesn't have to be complex. The message of salvation is simple: Jesus Christ came into the world on behalf of your sins. Because of that, all believers will have everlasting life.

It's ordinary human nature to be attracted to the extraordinary things of the world.

However, the God who gives us His Spirit directs our hearts to only one place. It is the Word of Christ, who came to save those of every nation, tribe, people and language through the forgiveness He won in His suffering, death, and resurrection. In Jesus name, amen. Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, amen.