

PENTECOST, ZION LUTHERAN CHURCH, AKRON 2021

From Ascension Day a week ago last Thursday until today on Pentecost the disciples were in a holding pattern. Since the Ascension, they have been waiting. They had received their orders from Jesus to “**wait in Jerusalem until you are clothed with power from on high.**” So, they waited. They waited with anticipation. They knew that something powerful, something transformative, something life-changing, was going to happen to them. Their wait was finally over on Pentecost day.

The Holy Spirit came upon them and changed them. Fear would be turned into a martyr’s boldness. Fishermen would become the world’s teachers. Doubt would be replaced by mountain-moving faith. All because of Pentecost! All because of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

Sin separates. Sin divides. Sin destroys. Sin brings death to relationships. It destroys fellowship. Sin divides. God unites. God brings oneness and unity. On the day of Pentecost, God reversed the Babel process. With one language from heaven, He demonstrated that all in Him will be sharers of one divine ‘language’.

I’m not talking about the gift of tongues. The language that unites believers from every continent, every nation, every culture, and every tribe, is the language of love. It is the language of brotherhood in Christ. It is the language of the Spirit of God. A language that only those with the Spirit in them can comprehend.

Pentecost is the birthday of the New Testament Church. Pentecost is God giving His Holy Spirit to all believers. Not just a few. No longer was the Holy Spirit to dwell in a building. Nor in a Temple, like in the Old Testament. No longer was the Holy Spirit only to be given to people in positions of leadership, No longer would it be given for a certain task and then removed when the task was complete.

Because of Pentecost, all Christians have been brought into the Royal Priesthood. Each Christian is a temple of the Holy Spirit. Pentecost shows us that Christianity isn’t some human-created religion. If it were simply of human design, the disciples wouldn’t have needed to wait in Jerusalem for Pentecost. Why would they need to? There wouldn’t be anything to wait for if it were only of human intervention.

Jesus' disciples had lived with Him for several years. They had undergone a most-intense and personal training. They could've begun writing, teaching, and passing on what they had learned without a Pentecost. They had the knowledge. Jesus had fully trained them. Now it was time for them to start training others, right? That's how it is with other religions.

That's not how it is with Christianity. Christianity isn't just about ideas, moral guidance, or ethical norms. Christianity, of course, has these things, but that's not what the Christian faith is about. If it were, Christianity would be but another form of legalism. But that's not what Christianity is. It is not about a set of rules that needs to be kept. It is about a person. Jesus the Christ. The Son of the living God. It's about knowing Him and being known by Him. It is about the Holy Spirit calling someone through the Gospel. It's about enlightening them with His gifts. It's about sanctifying and keeping them in the true faith. There is no New Testament Christianity without Pentecost.

Pentecost is what Jesus promised when He said He would send another Helper. A Counselor. A Guide. A Comforter. God breathed into Adam and he became a living being. Just so Christ breathes the Holy Spirit of life into us and come alive. That's what Pentecost is all about. The Spirit giving us life giving breath. Filled with the Spirit, we as God's people become alive. Truly alive. Abundantly alive. We are unable to be silent. We confess the name of Christ and proclaim His Lordship.

Sadly, many Christians live as if they are stuck between Ascension and Pentecost. As if Pentecost never happened. Some live their lives as if the Christian faith were only a set of ideas. Some think they are Christian, or Lutheran, because they intellectually agree to certain facts in their heads. They understand what Christianity teaches. But they don't see the new thing that God is doing. They miss the importance of the coming and indwelling Holy Spirit.

They are like a toddler who receives a beautifully wrapped gift. They remove the ribbon and tear open the wrapping paper. Inside is a lovely box with a wonderful present inside. But then the toddler tosses aside the present. They turn and go back to the wrapping in which it came. "Wow! What a beautiful box! What wonderful ribbon! What gorgeous wrapping! And the gift is forgotten. We must not confuse the gift of the Spirit with the wrappings in which it came.

What if the Apostles had remained in that state of limbo? The state they were in between Ascension and Pentecost. Just waiting but never embracing the life-changing Holy Spirit of God.

They would've never brought the Gospel to the world. They would've never lived out the faith as they did. They would've never died for the faith as they did. And they certainly would have never preached as they did. Their faith-life was what it was because God the Holy Spirit was blowing, moving, and breathing within them. The poet William Blake wrote a poem about Pentecost.

Unless the eye catch fire,

God will not be seen.

Unless the ear catch fire

God will not be heard.

Unless the tongue catch fire

God will not be named.

Unless the heart catch fire,

God will not be loved.

Unless the mind catch fire,

God will not be known.

Sometimes we show little proof that we are living as post-Pentecost Christians. Our faith is weak but that's alright with us as long as a little bit of it is there. We somehow find that to be enough. Sin still controls our lives, and yet that's somehow acceptable. We have little Christian joy. Yet somehow have come to believe that is just the way it is.

Today, we are often more like the fearful and doubting disciples before Pentecost. But Christianity without Pentecost is but an empty form! If the Holy Spirit doesn't permeate our lives with His presence, then our faith-life is but empty motion! If God's Word does not have its way with us, then our Christian life is one without power!

The life of the Church depends on the Holy Spirit. Baptism saves us because we aren't born only of water, but of water and Spirit. Without the Holy Spirit, there would be no forgiveness in absolution. That's why our Lord gathered His Apostles together and breathed on them and said, **“Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain them, they are retained.”** John 20:23

Think of why the Church still ordains pastors. Jesus never commanded it. But ordination is a special giving of the Holy Spirit thru the laying on of hands for men to be pastors.

As the Apostle Paul told Timothy, **“Do not neglect the gift in you . . . by the laying on of hands.”** 1 Timothy 4:14

Paul also told him to **“fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands, for God has not given us [that is, Paul and Timothy] a Spirit of fearfulness, but one of power, love, and sound judgment”** 2 Tim.1:6-7

Now think of the Mystery of Mysteries. Think of the core of Christ's New Covenant with His people. Think of His Supper. The existence of Christ's body and blood in His Supper depends on the Holy Spirit working through the Word. It's the Holy Spirit working through the words the pastor speaks over the bread and wine, which makes the Lord's Supper the Lord's Supper.

Everything Christ has commanded His Church to do would be but an empty form without the Holy Spirit. That is true in all matters of faith and practice. There is no prayer without the Holy Spirit praying in us. Fasting is simply dieting if it is not done in a way to help curb the sinful flesh. It's no coincidence that our Lord went into the desert to fast for 40 days, "led by the Holy Spirit." We can't overcome sin in our life without the Holy Spirit. It is the Spirit of God who enables us to "put to death the deeds of the body." How do we experience this Pentecost Christianity? Ask yourself this: "Can God raise the dead? Can He breathe life into the lifeless? Can He revive, renew, and recreate His people, His saints on earth?" Of course, He can! Of course, He can, and He does, and He will by His Spirit, His breath, and His words.

The danger is that we try to recreate Pentecost for ourselves. We believe that through our own works and effort we can create within us what only God the Holy Spirit can do. This is one of the great sins of our age. We think we can by our own work and effort do what the Holy Spirit does through our own behavior.

But what would happen after a few months of trying to manufacture a Holy Spirit-like effect in your life? Your life would again become ordinary.

It would become mundane, and even boring. Nothing changed. Nothing different. Then you'd be looking for something new to replace the old. You can't create a Pentecost in your life - only God the Holy Spirit can do that!

But thanks be to God that Christ is living and breathing. He is seated at the right hand of God the Father. And He sends the Spirit like a fresh wind across the face of His people. Igniting Pentecost when and where He chooses. For the Holy Spirit produces faith when and where He wills, in those who hear the Gospel.

The danger about letting Pentecost enchant us for the wrong reasons is that we take our eyes off Jesus. That's where the Spirit wants us to look, to Jesus. For the Holy Spirit wants to bring glory to Jesus, not Himself. The Holy Spirit is like a spotlight shining on Christ. And as with all spotlights, you focus on where the beam is shining, not on the beam itself. So it is with the Spirit.

Our confidence in the Spirit's presence and working is not in the wind. It is not in the fire. It is not in the tongues. It's in the preaching of Jesus. It's in the hearing of His forgiveness. It's in holy baptism. It's in His body and blood. It's in the Word. That's where the Spirit is active. That's where Pentecost is happening today, here and now, for you. And that's where you go looking for it!

Your baptism is your Pentecost day. Every time you hear the Word of Christ coming to you in your own language, that's also your Pentecost. Whenever you eat of the bread that is Christ's body, whenever drink of the cup that is His blood, and whenever proclaim the Lord's death, that is Pentecost for you. Getting more Spirit into you is the Holy Spirit doing His work--and that work is done through Word and Sacrament. The continuing work and life of Pentecost is in the Word that brings repentance and faith in Jesus.

The true miracle of Pentecost was the 3,000 brought to faith that day. And there hasn't been a day since then when the Holy Spirit hasn't been doing His work.

Today, the Spirit of God still breathes life into His people. The Spirit of God puts breath into your lungs and words into your mouth and ears. The Spirit of God opens your lips, that your mouth may declare the praise of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. The Spirit of God continues to call you through the Gospel, enlightening you with His gifts, and sanctifying and keeping you in the true faith.

You are part of that great breath and wind of Pentecost. Because you believe in Jesus--and you can only do that by the Holy Spirit working in your life. That's why Jesus' death is yours. That's why His life is yours. That's why His Spirit is yours. And whenever that is true, you are living in Pentecost. Amen.