

Rev. Luke C. Werre
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Festival of Holy Pentecost
Acts 2:1-47

Devotion 1 – Acts 2:1-21
JESUS KEEPS HIS PROMISES

Jesus keeps His promises.

That's the first take away on the Festival of Holy Pentecost. Does it strike us as unusual to hear about the magnificent signs that accompanied the Holy Spirit's presence on that day: the sound of a mighty rushing wind, tongues of fire that rested on each of them, the sudden ability to communicate in other languages?

But why should we be surprised? Jesus promised He would send the Holy Spirit more than once. He promised it in the upper room the night before His death. He promised it again when He ascended into heaven. Luke indicates Jesus spoke about it many times in between as He was continually teaching His disciples. Now ten days after His ascension His promise was fulfilled. Jesus keeps His promises.

But why would Jesus need to make such an announcement and why all the special signs? Hadn't the Holy Spirit ever come and worked in people's hearts before? Most certainly He did. The only way there could have been believers is if the Holy Spirit had worked faith in them.

But on the day of Pentecost Jesus sent the Holy Spirit, shall we say, "with a splash" as if to make a bold, clear statement that from now on, this is how it's going to work. This is how it is going to be for the Church and for the way God works salvation in people.

You see, prior to this day, the ministry of the Word was pretty much owned exclusively by Israelite prophets and priests. But today, the ministry of the Word belongs to all believers from the cradle to the grave. Though it is true that no one can serve in the public ministry on behalf of all the others unless they are properly called, nevertheless every believer owns the gospel message and may express it to anyone they encounter. Acts 2 was written to assure us that whenever we communicate the Gospel personally in any situation, or whenever we hear it together or celebrate the Sacrament, the Holy Spirit is truly, powerfully present working faith and salvation. The Holy Spirit is truly present here, right now among us.

We might ask, "But why doesn't God give us any special signs as He did back then?" The answer is, He does. He gives us the signs of bread and wine, of water, and of words on a page. "That's not what I mean," we might reply. "I mean miraculous signs like the tongues of fire – stuff like that." The fact of the matter is, even if God did give us signs like that every time we gathered around His Word and Sacraments, we'd become bored with them soon enough. We'd cease to be impressed. Think of the Israelites and how every morning God miraculously covered with desert floor with manna, the bread from heaven. In no time at all, it became normal to them, they ceased to be impressed and they were complaining that they wanted something else.

The purpose of those first signs on the Day of Pentecost are to announce to you, loud and clear, that the Spirit of God is not limited. He comes to all of us through His Gospel and is to be communicated by all of us regardless of our station in life. That's why Peter quoted the prophet Joel: *In the last days, God says, I will pour out my spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams.*

When Jesus made the promise to send the Spirit, it wasn't just for that day with the Twelve in Jerusalem. It was for always until the Last Day of this world. If you are looking for a sign, then just consider yourself – a person

who only by the power of the Spirit professes to be a Christian – along with the countless souls down through the ages who have also acknowledged the same faith for themselves and have even been willing to die for it.

Jesus keeps His promises. He sends the Spirit through His Gospel – even today. Let us not be surprised by that. Let us believe it and rejoice in it.

Devotion 2 – Acts 2:22-41 IT'S ALL ABOUT JESUS

It is the grand Day of Pentecost. Peter preaches an amazing sermon. It would not be a stretch to say that sermon was verbally inspired by the Holy Spirit. For not only were the apostles filled with the Spirit at that moment, but how else could he have come up with such a profound sermon on the spur of the moment?

Peter preaches this amazing sermon on the Day of Pentecost, and who is the main focus of his sermon? Jesus! Wait a minute. Jesus? I thought Pentecost was all about the Holy Spirit. Wouldn't Peter have more appropriately preached all about the Holy Spirit?

But, you see, the work of the Holy Spirit is to bring Jesus to us. It's all about Jesus. Jesus had even told His disciples: *When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me. Jesus had also told them: The Spirit of truth will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you.*

The Spirit of God presents Jesus to us through His Word and Sacrament. Peter, on the Day of Pentecost, presented Jesus to his audience through the words of his sermon and then he directed them to Baptism. In Baptism they would receive the main benefit of Christ's death on the cross – the forgiveness of all their sins. It was all Jesus, all about Jesus. Through Baptism they would also receive the Holy Spirit to give them faith in Jesus' forgiveness. For it is when we believe that we receive.

What Peter did is what true Lutheran preachers endeavor to do still today. He accused them of sin and then presented to them Jesus with His forgiveness. Unfortunately, we are often desiring something else. We become bored with Jesus and hanker more for something packaged as Christianized self-help or godly-ish pop psychology. To learn about Christian living on the basis of God's Word is good and necessary. But there can be no true worship of God nor any true Christian life without first being reconciled to God on the basis of Jesus' death and resurrection. God will have nothing to do with us apart from Jesus and the redemptive events of Jesus' life on our behalf. The Holy Spirit makes our reconciliation with God happen when He works faith in Jesus in our hearts. When we have faith in Jesus, then our whole lives become pleasing to God and our relationship with Him is entirely healed.

Thus Jesus must never cease to be our main concern and focus, our number one love and delight. The whole purpose for which Jesus promises to send the Holy Spirit is to bring us to Himself. The whole work of the Holy Spirit is to give us Jesus. As we observe the Day of Pentecost, let us remember, it's all about Jesus.

Devotion 3 – Acts 2:42-47 PENTECOST IS STILL HAPPENING

Let us not think of Pentecost as a day only. Pentecost is the New Testament era until Jesus returns. In other words, Pentecost is still happening.

This last small portion of Acts chapter two seems to describe the early Christians, after all the excitement of that first Pentecost Day, settling into a more routine congregational life. They ate together. They worshiped and attended Bible studies together with the apostles as their instructors. They celebrated the Sacrament together.

They provided for each other's needs. They visited each other's homes. Church life sounds tranquil compared to that wonderful, but convulsive, event when Peter preached and the whole city was in an uproar.

At the same time we are told that the church continued to grow: *The Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.*

We see in this reading two ways Pentecost is still happening in Christ's Church. First, the ascended Christ by His Spirit in a very real way still shepherds His Church, with His Word and Sacrament, by the leadership of public ministers, by the influence of Christian parents on their children, or by the believers on each other.

Secondly, Christ, through His Church, is still very actively reaching out and calling His elect, extending the Gospel invitation to all, and gathering in those whom He has from eternity chosen to save.

Both things have been taking place to this day: the internal growth of the Church in spiritual maturity, understanding and living of God's truth, and the external growth of the Church as people continue to be brought to faith in Jesus as their Savior.

There are those who study statistics and raise the alarm about the future of the Church. They say be all appearances the Church is shrinking. Even within our own circles some will say that the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod is shrinking. I don't know what the future holds for the WELS.

But let this be our final take away from Acts chapter 2 today: Pentecost is still happening. The Holy Spirit is still powerful and active among us through His Word and Sacrament: as a believing mom helps her high school daughter negotiate a sticky situation between friends, as a Christian dad hears his son's confession and calmly assures him of Christ's forgiveness, as a pastor teaches a Bible class or counsels a struggling soul, as a Sunday School teacher presents to wide-eyed children the wonders of Jesus' miracles, as a college student opens her Bible to read one chapter before she goes to her shift at the McDonalds drive-thru, as believers joyfully gather together and join voices with one creed, as a church council reaches a decision on a course of action guided by principles set forth in Scripture. The Holy Spirit is acting to preserve us in the faith, to increase our faith, to enlighten us in His truth, to sanctify us for lives of holy service. Do not doubt His activity or His power.

Neither should we doubt His real and true power whenever we express or explain the message of Jesus to those who don't know Him or are confused about Him. Perhaps one of the reasons we are reluctant to speak God's truth to people is the fear that nothing will come of it and we'll only feel embarrassed and awkward. But Acts 2 was written to encourage us that the Holy Spirit is truly present and powerful even today whenever Jesus is communicated through us.

In other words, Pentecost is still happening. That is an article of faith.