

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Pentecost Sunday, May 19, 2024

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 224, 230, 226:1-5, 231, 644.

Lessons: Genesis 11:1-9, Acts 2:14-41, Mark 1:1-8.

Sermon Text: Acts 2:1-21

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehltrittter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Some of you have heard the history of Pentecost many times. That's the day there was a sound of a great wind and the appearance of what looked like tongues of fire resting on the disciples' heads. That's when the Holy Spirit gave them the ability for them to speak in foreign languages they had never known. The purpose of all these special gifts of the Holy Ghost was so that the followers of Jesus could preach the Gospel to foreigners.

This happened 50 days after the resurrection and ten days after the ascension of Jesus into heaven. Pentecost means "fiftieth" and is the Greek name for the important Jewish celebration of the Feast of Harvest, also called the Feast of Weeks. The book of Exodus commanded God's people to "*Celebrate the Feast of Harvest with the firstfruits of the crops you sow in your field.*" (Exodus 23:16) This was to celebrate the firstfruits of the grain harvest in the spring. This was a time when all the men of Israel were to appear before the Lord at Jerusalem. This Feast took place 50 days after the Passover Sabbath. Every pious Jew tried to be in Jerusalem for this Feast. Those who could not come to Jerusalem observed it in their synagogues throughout the world wherever they lived.

It is especially appropriate that the Christian festival of Pentecost occurred on the celebration of the Feast of Harvest because on this day God harvested 3000 souls unto eternal life, who were, in a sense, the firstfruits of the New Testament church.

Today we also celebrate

THE COMING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT ON PENTECOST

- 1. Many Jews were in Jerusalem from many different countries.**
- 2. God used special events to grab the attention of the people.**
- 3. The purpose of God's special gifts given on Pentecost was that people might learn about Jesus the Messiah.**

The Sunday of Pentecost came as it did every year, but God had special events in mind for this Pentecost festival. What Jesus had promised concerning the Holy Spirit would now take place. He had told his followers that "*the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.*" (John 14:26, NIV84)

"*Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven.*" They were there to celebrate this special Old Testament festival day. Fifteen nations are mentioned:

The disciples were to go into all the world to preach and teach about Jesus, but on this day people from much of the world were gathering around them in Jerusalem.

"*When the day of Pentecost came, [the believers] were all together in one place.*" This likely included the entire group mentioned a few verses earlier where we read: "*In those days Peter stood up among the believers (a group numbering about a hundred and twenty)*" (Acts 1:15)

We don't know exactly where in Jerusalem they were gathered, but they were most likely gathered for worship and prayer. Since they were sitting, they were also likely listening to one of them speak.

“Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting.” Can you think of a better way for God to get people’s attention without destroying anything? Remember how God got Elijah’s attention when wicked queen Jezebel was trying to kill him. **“The LORD said, ‘Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by.’ Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper.”** (1 Kings 19:11-12)

The attention-grabber on Pentecost wasn’t a great and powerful wind. It turned out to be the sound of wind, like the sound of words the Holy Spirit uses to bring people to faith and prepare them for eternal life.

This was the sound of wind, not the wind itself. The most important sound really came from the words from God. Scripture says it was like the blowing of a violent wind. We don’t hear the sound of wind without actual wind. So this in itself was a most unusual, miraculous event. But it had a very special purpose. God used the sound of wind here to announce the presence of his Holy Spirit.

Before he ascended into heaven, Jesus previously had breathed on his disciples in a special way when he **“breathed on them and said, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.’”** (John 20:22-23)

Do you remember the first appearance of the Holy Spirit of God in the scriptures? That happened at creation where God himself speaks at the very beginning of all things: **“Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.”** (Genesis 1:2)

Spirit – breath – wind – language, even perhaps the sound of a dove. Do you recognize similarities? That is intentional, for the Spirit of God is represented in Scripture by all of those things.

But the sound wasn’t the only thing. **“They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them.** Fire can signify many things. It shows power. It does purifying, as when a metal such as gold is heated with fire so that impurities are separated from it. It creates destruction, as must be done with our sinful flesh.

John the Baptist prophesied **“I baptize you with water. But one more powerful than I will come, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.”** (Luke 3:16-17) Here was the fulfillment of John the Baptist’s prediction and Jesus’ promise from just before he ascended into heaven: **“For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.”** (Acts 1:5)

The appearance of tongues like fire came to rest on each person present. All received this baptism of the Spirit, for each would have work to do in carrying out the great commission to **“go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.”** (Matthew 28:19–20, NIV84)

This was not fire; it was tongues that looked like fire. And the same Greek word “tongues” – just as in English – is repeated in the next verse. **“All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.”** They spoke in tongues, languages other than the language they normally spoke. This was not babbling or incoherent speech. It was perfectly understandable to those who knew the languages.

They then began speaking and those in the crowd who knew those languages would have gathered around them to hear what they had to say. And their message, of course, would have been the good news that Jesus of Nazareth had suffered, died, come back to life, and ascended into heaven, all to redeem them from their sins.

These dramatic signs: wind, fire, the ability to speak in other tongues were signs that the disciples of Jesus were now ready to be about their Lord’s business.

On this day, Pentecost, the Holy Spirit moved men to glorify God in languages that were understood by those who heard them. **“Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard them speaking in his own language. Utterly amazed, they asked: ‘Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans?’”**

Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language?'" Each heard and understood someone speaking the language of his homeland. The speaking was the miracle.

This was just the opposite of what happened when men tried to make a name for themselves at Babel by building a tower 'to reach to the heavens'. Do you see the similarity of words: Babel, babble, and even Babylon, a nation which long after the history of the confusion of languages at Babel became a pagan world power.

All these people gathered together were saying ***"we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues! Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, 'What does this mean?'"***

Haven't you been in the presence of someone speaking a language you don't know, and it sounds really strange? You don't know what they are saying. It would likely sound even stranger if there were only one person speaking in that language. But if you were in a foreign land where everyone else was speaking a foreign language and you heard someone speaking your native tongue, you would surely be excited. On this day people from three continents: Asia, Africa, and Europe were gathered in Jerusalem. They were hearing of the wonders of God in sending his Son Jesus Christ to save all mankind from sin!

"Some, however, made fun of them and said, 'They have had too much wine.'" Some people just didn't understand the foreign languages and they wanted to mock God and his message.

There will always be mockers of God and the Word of God, even today. How often have you heard or read of people mocking the Word of God and what you believe? How often hasn't this happened to you personally! Even laws and decrees from courts boldly mock God. How blatantly men disregard the Law and the Word of God!

"Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: 'Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say.'" He then proceeds with a marvelous sermon preaching Law and Gospel. You heard part of Peter's sermon as our Epistle lesson today.

Now we come to the most important purpose of the appearance of the Holy Ghost on Pentecost. Here is the goal of it all. Peter's sermon is recorded in Scripture as a model or an example of the preaching that was done on this day in Jerusalem. We could easily think that the very same sermon was preached in all languages, not because they all heard and then translated Peter's sermon, but because God, the Holy Ghost moved these holy men to speak God's message. Here is proof of what Peter himself later writes by the inspiration of God the Holy Ghost ***"For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit."*** (2 Peter 1:21)

There is only one line of Peter's sermon we are going to highlight today. That is this truth: ***"And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."***

This is the goal and the purpose of it all. The believers were now equipped and prepared to begin carrying out the assignment which the Lord had given to his church to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ to all people in all nations.

May we all call on the name of the Lord and be saved! May each of us do all we can to tell others the saving message of God! Amen.

Revised from a Ministry By Mail sermon for May 19, 2013.