

FULL TO OVERFLOWING
Sermon for Pentecost, 2021
Acts 2:1-21

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is our First Reading from before, Acts 2:1-21 ¹ **When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place.** ² **Suddenly a sound like a violent blast of wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting.** ³ **They saw tongues that separated, like flames, and one rested on each of them.** ⁴ **They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages as the Spirit gave them the ability to speak.**

⁵ **Jews who feared God from every nation under heaven were staying in Jerusalem.** ⁶ **When that sound occurred, a crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard the disciples speaking in his own native language.** ⁷ **They were astonished and amazed and asked: “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?** ⁸ **Then how is it that everyone of us hears in his own native language,** ⁹ **Parthians, Medes and Elamites, people living in Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and the province of Asia,** ¹⁰ **people living in Phrygia and Pamphilia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene, visitors from Rome, Jews as well as proselytes,** ¹¹ **and people from Crete and Arabia? We hear them declaring in our own languages the wonderful works of God.”**

¹² **They were all amazed and puzzled. They asked one another, “What does this mean?”** ¹³ **Others sneered: “They are full of new wine.”**

¹⁴ **Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed them: “Men who are Jews and all of you who are living in Jerusalem, understand this and listen closely to what I say!** ¹⁵ **These men are not drunk, as you suppose. For it is only nine in the morning.** ¹⁶ **Rather, this is what has been spoken through the prophet Joel:** ¹⁷ **‘In the last days, God says, “I shall pour out My Spirit on all people. Your sons and your daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions and your old men will dream dreams.** ¹⁸ **Indeed, even on My male slaves and female slaves I shall pour out My Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy.** ¹⁹ **I shall show wonders in the heaven above and miraculous signs on the earth below: blood, fire and a cloud of smoke.** ²⁰ **The sun will turn dark, and the moon turn to blood before the coming of the great and splendid day of the Lord,** ²¹ **and everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”**

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

The account of Pentecost is a beautiful story. In using the word “story”, we do not mean that it is not true. It is, and this whole account does paint a beautiful and exciting picture. The disciples of Jesus **“were all together in one place”** when suddenly **“a sound like a violent blast of wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting.”** The Bible doesn’t say that there was a wind, just the sound of it - and it sounds as though it may have sounded like a tornado or a hurricane - loud, violent, rushing wind! While this sound is happening, **“they saw tongues that separated, like flames, and one rested on each of them.”** Perhaps this brings to mind those pictures we remember from Sunday School of a flame, sort of short and squatty, burning just above the heads of all the disciples. **“They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages as the Spirit gave them the ability to speak.”** It doesn’t actually say what they were saying, except that they were telling **“the wonderful works of God.”** Each one was speaking in another language, one which they had never learned before. **“Jews who feared God from every nation under heaven were staying in Jerusalem.** ⁶ **When that sound occurred, a crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard the disciples speaking in his own native language.”** Some, of course, heard all the noise, and all they heard was babbling and sneered: **“They are full of new wine.”** They assumed that the disciples were drunk. After all, it must have been something like a carnival atmosphere for a time. **“Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed them.”** We are not told what language he spoke, or if the others were interpreting Peter as He spoke - that fact is not important to the account. What is important is that Peter tells these Jews gathered that what they are witnessing is what had been prophesied by Joel about the pouring

out of the Holy Spirit in the last days.¹ He said, “**In the last days, God says, “I shall pour out My Spirit on all people. Your sons and your daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions and your old men will dream dreams. ¹⁸ Indeed, even on My male slaves and female slaves I shall pour out My Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy. ¹⁹ I shall show wonders in the heaven above and miraculous signs on the earth below: blood, fire and a cloud of smoke. ²⁰ The sun will turn dark, and the moon turn to blood before the coming of the great and splendid day of the Lord, ²¹ and everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”**”

Those who were gathered in one place were *full to overflowing* with the Holy Spirit. That is what Pentecost *began*. The Apostles found themselves filled with the Holy Spirit so much that they could not help but preach, even though it was in another language! What a remarkable thing that must have been! To be preaching but hearing your own voice come out in another tongue! The message was the one God had given them, and the words were supplied by God, and the powerful effect was by God’s work too.

We say that this was what Pentecost *began*, and not what Pentecost was, because our lives in the church and the faith are also the work of God, powered by the same Holy Spirit. Sometimes we think it would be nice to see and feel the Holy Spirit as He works in us and through us. That desire is the source of the drive that lies behind the Pentecostal denominations who look for some sort of spectacular sign of the presence of the Holy Spirit. There are people who claim that the glory of God has covered them with gold dust. Others claim that anointing oil began to flow from their hands and feet. Others exhibit uncontrollable laughter and call it holy laughter. Others appear intoxicated and claim that a Holy Spirit high is stronger than any other. Still, others babble away in nonsense and call that speaking in tongues. The creativity of false teaching shows no limit. Whatever it is, such people want to see it and feel it, and they want to have the same sense of wonder that the disciples must have felt as they experienced their Pentecost. But that is not the plan of God.

Pentecost was something *unique*. God was doing something in a remarkable way so that it would be clear *what* He was doing and that it was *He* that had done it. He provided His Church with His ongoing presence and did so with a visible and audible illustration of the gift. He even duplicated the gift to some small extent with what is called *the Pentecost of the Gentiles*, in the home of Cornelius the Centurion, as Peter preached there. Acts 10:44-46 says, “*While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell on all who were hearing the Word. ⁴⁵ The believers who had been circumcised, namely, all those who had come with Peter, were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles. ⁴⁶ For they were hearing them speaking in tongues and glorifying God.*” God made it unmistakably clear to the disciples that us Gentiles were also welcome to the Holy Spirit and the grace of God in Jesus Christ. Pentecost was about beginning the Church in earnest and confirming His presence and activity in it by these signs. Having made His point, God has expected us to walk by faith and not by sight ever since.

God has not left Himself without a sign, mind you. He simply is not going about doing those flashy things all the time. If God had to prove Himself all the time, then it *is no longer faith; it is sight*. Besides, if every Sunday were like Pentecost, then a sound of rushing wind and flames and foreign languages would become an ordinary, everyday thing, and people would be craving for something really remarkable to prove God’s work and presence among them. If you are inclined to doubt that, think about the Exodus. The Israelites had the pillar of cloud by day, the pillar of fire by night,² and the miraculous daily gift of manna.³ Yet, they still wandered into sin and idolatry. They still grumbled about God and His treatment of them - even complaining about having to eat the manna - which initially they thought of as delightful! It didn’t seem to strike them that they were eating a miracle, and it was free, and they didn’t have to work for it, but it was very quickly just an everyday, ordinary kind of thing.

Today, God has given us the signs of His presence: **Word and Sacrament**. Instead of preachers who speak in new tongues, God has provided everything to be translated into our tongue - and has provided us with preachers who speak our language. He has given us Bibles and, in our day and age, education so that we can confirm the truth preached to us and not depend on the will of undependable “educated” men to teach us the truth. He has given us baptism so that we, too, can witness the Holy Spirit being poured out on each one of us individually. He has given us the Lord’s Supper to receive the true body and blood of Christ and with it forgiveness, life and salvation. We can see it happen. We have a visible sign that God has each of us, individually, in mind, as He has arranged for the precious gifts of the

¹ Joel 2:28-32

² Exodus 13:21

³ Exodus 16:4f

Supper to be placed into our mouths individually - and speaks each of our names in baptism, calling us His own.

So, what if some doubt or do not see it or believe it? There were those who stood in the crowd on that first Pentecost and grumbled, accusing the disciples of being drunk. They paid no mind to the enormous sound of the rushing wind. They ignored those flames on the heads of the disciples. They were unimpressed by the fact that the speech of the disciples was making sense to others in their hometown language. They took it all in and called it *bogus* and said they didn't see or hear anything but a bunch of drunks. Is it any wonder that men do not believe God's Word about baptism and refuse to believe that the Lord's Supper is a Sacramental miracle? They could pick up manna every morning and complain that it was tiresome and dull and nothing special.

What is amazing is that any of God's people even listen to those who are so slow of heart and full of unbelief.

Pentecost started the Church. Nothing has changed, really, since then. It is still the same message which God has given us to speak. He still pushes us out there and makes us speak it, even when it gets us into trouble. Every little bit of the good that is accomplished by the Church is by the Word preached and the power of the Holy Spirit, who is still doing what Acts 2:47 says, "*Every day the Lord kept adding together those who were being saved.*"

The message with all of that power? Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and also true man, has borne our guilt and sins to the cross, and there died personally innocent but wearing our guilt and shame to redeem us. He has nailed our sins to His cross and has paid the justice of God the price due for sin - death. He has paid that price for each and every one of us, and has given us His righteousness and holds out eternal life to all who will simply trust Him, take Him at His Word and believe. All our sins have been forgiven, and God has given us the gift of everlasting life. He will even raise our bodies from their graves one day and outfit us for life with no more death, no more sickness, and no sorrow or pain. It is the gift of God, for the sake and on account of Jesus Christ. Such is the love of God for us!

This is not merely a potential. It is a present reality. It is, however, a reality we do not witness with our senses yet. God tells us, and invites us to believe Him, and learning of His goodwill and love for us, to trust Him the way Adam and Eve should have.

Just as with ancient Israel and that manna, many modern so-called Christians grumble and chafe under the goodness and grace of God. The Gospel is free, and yet people want to make it about their works and deserving it or living up to it before we can be saved. They don't stop to think that they, too, are partaking of a miracle, and it is free, and they don't have to work for it. Even the Holy Supper, that miracle food, is rejected, its gift denied, often by the same people who cannot tolerate the thought of salvation by grace *alone*.

In Pentecost, we also see the reversing of the cursed effects of sin. When the world was still new and men were not too long in sin, God confused the language of men to keep them from effectively using their intellects and skills and sin to destroy themselves. He divided them by confusing their tongues and letting human sin and fear and suspicion drive them apart.⁴

In Pentecost, God has reversed the tower of Babel. Suddenly men could speak His Word to others without the obstacle of language dividing them. He only gave us a sample on that day, but it was clear that this Gospel was healing the damage due to sin among mankind. But we need faith to see it and to trust it - faith in God. In Christ, God is again uniting all men - of course, that is, all men who believe. Those who reject God and refuse to see His work and believe His Word remain separate and divided, just like those who accused the disciples of being drunk at nine in the morning.

We, like the disciples, have been filled to overflowing with the Holy Spirit. He is the reason we believe - or can believe. His is the message we proclaim, and He is the power behind our preaching and teaching and confessing of Christ. He pushes us out to speak and to do. The signs are here, and the wonders - that is, for the people of God, who believe what the world calls *old-fashioned and foolish*. The really amazing thing about Pentecost was not the show. It was the gift of the Holy Spirit: The Comforter and the Earnest of salvation in each of us that believes. He was given then and remains with us right up to the present moment that God's people may be filled to overflowing with faith and hope and love. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

PRAYER FOR PENTECOST

⁴ Genesis 11:1-9

Loving heavenly Father, we thank and praise You for pouring out Your Holy Spirit on Your Church as its source of life and strength for ever, and for bringing us to faith in Jesus Christ through Him. By His daily presence and power in our lives, continue to keep us in the true faith and knowledge of Jesus Christ, to equip us for the Master's service, and to make us ready for every good work. To this end, help us to love and use the Holy Scriptures, so that the Spirit can make us increasingly wise unto salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. Help us to love our Saviour with our whole being, and to live in cheerful obedience to His commandments. Enable us to reject the ruler of this world, and to follow with pure hearts the things that produce righteousness, faith, love, and peace.

Let the wisdom and renewing power of the Comforter fill Your Church, so that it may be strong in faith, and active in proclaiming in every language the great deeds that You have done for us. As the Spirit touched the apostles with tongues as of fire, fill all Your people with the fire of faith and conviction, love and worship, witness and service.

Make Your Spirit's influence felt in all our homes. Grant that He may lead all children to live in love and obedience, and give to all parents the spirit of understanding, truth, and love, so that all families may live in godliness and peace.

Rule over the nations of the earth, and help them to acknowledge Your sovereign power and final authority, so that all people may turn from their evil ways and live. Strengthen all who are our leaders to be firm in what is right, unyielding in what is good and just, and eager in what is eternally true and valuable, so that Your name may be hallowed in every sphere of life.

Give the peace of Christ to all who face troubles and trials. May Your Spirit help them in their weakness, show them how to pray as they ought, and give them all the resources of Your love and strength.

All these things we pray in the name of Jesus our Saviour, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

PENTECOST

Ezekiel 37:1-14

¹ The hand of the LORD came on me. He brought me out by the Spirit of the LORD and put me down in the middle of the valley. It was full of bones. ² He kept leading me past them and all around them. I saw very many of them on the surface of the valley and saw that they were very dry. ³ Then He asked me, "Son of man, can these bones return to life?"

I answered, "Lord GOD, You Yourself know."

⁴ Then He told me: "Prophesy over these bones and tell them, 'Dry bones, listen to the Word of the LORD! ⁵This is what the Lord GOD has said to these bones: "Look! I shall cause breath to enter you, and you will live. ⁶ I shall put tendons on you, make flesh come on you and cover you with skin. I shall put breath in you, and you will return to life. Then you will know that I am the LORD.'"

⁷ So, I kept prophesying as I had been commanded. While I was prophesying, there was a noise and suddenly a rattling sound, and the bones came closer together, one bone attaching itself to another. ⁸ While I kept looking, I saw that there were tendons on them, flesh grew on them, and skin covered them over. However, there was no breath in them.

⁹ Then He told me: "Prophesy to the breath! Prophesy, son of man, and tell the breath, 'This is what the Lord GOD has said: "Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain people, that they may return

to life.'"

¹⁰ So, I kept prophesying, as He had commanded me, and breath entered them. They returned to life and stood up on their feet, an exceedingly large army.

¹¹ Then He told me: "Son of man, these bones are the whole family of Israel. Look! They are saying, 'Our bones are dry, and our hope is being lost. We have been completely cut off.' ¹² Therefore, prophesy and tell them, 'This is what the Lord GOD has said: "Look, My people! I shall open your graves and bring you up out of your graves. I shall bring you to the land of Israel. ¹³ Then, My people, you will know that I am the LORD when I open your graves and bring you up out of your graves. ¹⁴ I shall put My Spirit in you; you will live, and I shall settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I am the LORD. I have spoken, and I shall carry it out," declares the LORD.'"

Acts 2:1-21

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because each one heard the disciples speaking in his own native language. ⁷ They were astonished and amazed and asked: “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?” ⁸ Then how is it that everyone of us hears in his own native language, ⁹ Parthians, Medes and Elamites, people living in Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and the province of Asia, ¹⁰ people living in Phrygia and Pamphilia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene, visitors from Rome, Jews as well as proselytes, ¹¹ and people from Crete and Arabia? We hear them declaring in our own languages the wonderful works of God.”

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John 15:26-27, 16:4b-15

²⁶ “When the Advocate comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of Truth, who proceeds from the Father, He will testify about Me. ²⁷ You also must testify, because you have been with Me from the beginning...

^{16:4b} “I did not tell you these things at first, because I was with you. ⁵ However, now I am going away to Him who has sent Me, and none of you is asking Me, ‘Where are You going?’ ⁶ However, because I have told you these things, sorrow has filled your hearts. ⁷ Nevertheless, I tell you the truth, it is good for you that I am going away. For, if I do not go away, the Advocate will not come to you. However, if I go, I shall send Him to you. ⁸ When He comes, He will convict the world about sin, righteousness and judgment: ⁹ about sin, because they do not believe in Me, ¹⁰ about righteousness, because I am going to the Father and you do not see Me any longer, ¹¹ about

judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged.

¹² “I still have many things to tell you, but you cannot endure them now. ¹³ However, when He, the Spirit of Truth, comes, He will lead you into the whole truth. For He will not speak on His own authority but will speak whatever He hears and will tell you what is coming. ¹⁴ He will glorify Me, because He will take from what is Mine and will tell it to you. ¹⁵ All things that the Father has are Mine. That is why I have said, ‘He takes from what is Mine and will tell it to you.’