

**SALVATION NOT BASED ON FEELINGS**  
**Sermon for the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Easter, 2026**  
**Acts 2:14a, 36-41**

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 1<sup>st</sup> reading from before, Acts 2:14a, 36-41.

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

Dear friends in Christ,

There are many Christian denominations worldwide. At the last estimate, the number was close to 50,000, although a narrower count might identify about 300 major ecclesiastical traditions. One of these traditions, Pentecostalism, is expanding rapidly, with estimates of over 600 million adherents worldwide. It is estimated that around 35,000 new followers are added each day.

Many Pentecostals are found in Africa, around Nigeria, as well as Brazil and Asia. South Korea hosts some of the world's largest Pentecostal megachurches. Rapid growth is also observed in China, Indonesia, and Singapore. It's the opposite here in Australia, where the number of people attending a Pentecostal church has dropped, but it's like that in all Christian churches here. Australia is rapidly losing its religion.

Anyhow, Pentecostalism is known for its very *charismatic worship*, often emphasising personal experience, healing, and prophecy as evidence of a positive spiritual life. These churches are full of energetic young people; there will be loud music, and a very charismatic pastor leading them from the front, up on the stage. Often, people will be in an almost trance-like state as they wave their arms everywhere, singing praises to God. Well, that's okay, isn't it? Doesn't Psalm 150 say to "*Praise the LORD! Praise God in His sanctuary... Praise Him with trumpet sound; praise Him with lute and harp! Praise Him with tambourine and dance; praise Him with strings and pipe! Praise Him with sounding cymbals; praise Him with loud clashing cymbals!*" (150:1, 3-6)? Maybe we ought to take a leaf out of their books and make our worship services come alive! I keep hearing that our membership hasn't increased much over the years; in fact, we are smaller now than 30 years ago, when the AELC was formed. Wouldn't it be good to increase our membership? Maybe we need to spruce things up a bit and look to some Pentecostal churches to see how they conduct themselves and emulate their mission programs.

Yes, it would be nice to increase our membership, but *not the way the Pentecostals do*. Why not?

Let's take a quick look at the worship services used by Pentecostals.

First, there can be no doubt that the Word of God is spoken at those services, and there are those who attend such services who do have a true and genuine faith and have been saved for eternity.

It is unfortunate, though, that corporate confession of sin is not usually part of the service, and no creed is confessed. Holy communion, often called the Lord's Supper or the Breaking of Bread, is only seen as a vital act of remembrance and obedience to Jesus, typically understood as an ordinance rather than a sacrament, practised symbolically, focusing on Christ's sacrifice and spiritual presence. While valid baptisms are performed, *infant baptism is not practised*. This is because of the belief that infants are not included in Christ's words to His disciples to "*go and baptise all nations*" (Matt. 28:19), as they are not yet mature enough to *make a decision for Christ*. People will also often come forward to give

testimony of their faith, talking about how they gave their lives to Jesus, accepted Him into their lives, and decided to follow Him.

In a nutshell, Pentecostal churches often base their theology on *emotions*. Your faith depends on *how good you feel*. The better you feel, the closer you are to God, and a charismatic pastor and loud music will help you do that. And by the way, no Law is preached, only Gospel. After all, who wants to be reminded of their sin or how much they have offended God? God loves you just the way you are, so we won't remind you of your sinful human nature.

The text before us today is the closing section of Peter's sermon to the crowd on the day of Pentecost. Peter was the spokesman for the other apostles, and in fact, the work of Peter is the focus of the first 12 chapters of Acts. If you read this sermon, which, of course, was inspired by the Holy Spirit, you will find no indication that we are to base our faith on our feelings.

After Peter finished preaching his sermon, we are told that his hearers were "**cut to the heart**." The Greek here means being stabbed or pierced through. That is, *they were deeply grieved*. While it is true that being cut to the heart *is* a feeling, a deep one at that, yet this feeling only came after Peter had preached the Law to them. It was not their feelings that brought them to repent, but the Holy Spirit working through the spoken Word, reminding them of how sinful they had been to the risen Lord. That same kind of feeling of deep regret and remorse, that true repentance, is hardly, if at all, ever found in Pentecostal churches.

When Peter reminded the people of their sinfulness, of how they had put an innocent Man to death, the crowd, being "**cut to the heart**," said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "**Brothers, what shall we do?**"

Peter did not then respond to their question with, "*Well, first of all, I am not going to remind you of your sin by preaching law. No, I'm going to preach nothing but the gospel to you. Then I want you to do something that will make you feel good. Maybe getting together some kind of band that will play live and loud gospel music will help.*" No. He immediately said to them, "**Repent and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.**"

Peter did not leave them hanging but *immediately* preached the Gospel to them. It was similar to the prophet Nathan's visit to King David many years earlier. Remember how Nathan confronted David with his sin of adultery. When David realised his sin, he said, "*I have sinned against the LORD.*" This is contrition, and David immediately hears the absolution when Nathan replies, "*The LORD has also put away your sin*" (2 Samuel 12).

Peter's audience had grieved their past rejection of Christ and their part in His crucifixion. The hearing of the Law had done its work. Now, Peter would bring the Gospel to them, that is, turning their sinful unbelief to faith in Jesus, from their self-righteousness to trust in His redeeming work. Jesus Himself had proclaimed the Gospel message, saying, "*The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the Gospel*" (Mark 1:15). These words echoed John's earlier call for a public show of contrition and an adoption of a new way of life. Now, Peter would do the same. "**Repent and be baptised,**" he said.

Whenever someone repents or turns to the Saviour in faith, it must be understood that this repentance or turning is *not something the sinner does by his own power*. Our Lutheran Confessions<sup>1</sup> teach that human free will possesses liberty regarding earthly, mundane, or outward choices but lacks the power to produce spiritual righteousness or fear and belief in God *without the Holy Spirit*. The will is bound by sin, making salvation entirely a gift of God's grace. God alone brings about changes in the sinner's

---

<sup>1</sup> Article XVIII of the Augsburg Confession

heart and will, so that he turns away from sin and unbelief to Christ, faith, and forgiveness. Contrition, that is, when we have true terror of conscience, making us feel that God is angry and grieves over our sin, is a *passive action*. That means contrition is worked in man by God's Law. *God works repentance in us*. Then, being crushed by the Law, God works in us through the Gospel, making us alive through faith. Faith in Christ—the belief that for Christ's sake all our sins are forgiven—cheers, sustains, and enlivens us. We truly believe that “*the blood of Jesus... cleanses us from all sin*” (1 John 1:7). The atoning sacrifice of Christ, given “*while we were still sinners*” (Romans 5:8), is an unshakable rock of comfort, a done deal, a fact that Satan and hell cannot erase. “*God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son!*” Notice the subject of that sentence—God! Notice the direct object—the world! Our salvation occurred on God's initiative, with the Son's crucifixion, and was sealed and guaranteed forever with the Father's unshakable verdict. And now, “*If anybody does sin, we have One who speaks to the Father in our defence—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One*” (1 John 2:1).

Faith simply grasps the forgiveness of sins offered for Christ's sake. No one ever has, and no one ever will “make a decision for Christ.” ***In other words, no one can, by the exercise of his own mind or will-power, turn from sin, guilt, and unbelief to faith in the Saviour and salvation given through Him.***

What Peter told the crowd was very similar to what Paul would later tell the jailer at Philippi. At that time, Paul and Silas were in prison, praying and singing hymns to God (not songs!). All of a sudden, the earth shook, the prison doors flew open, and the chains became loose around their waists and ankles. The jailer, thinking Paul and Silas had escaped, resorted to killing himself, but Paul stopped him. “*The jailer called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas.*”<sup>30</sup> *Then he brought them out and said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”*<sup>31</sup> *And they said “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.”*<sup>32</sup> *And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house.*<sup>33</sup> *And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was baptised at once, he and all his family* (Acts 16:29-33).

While members of Pentecostal churches will talk about the day they *accepted* the Holy Spirit, the moment they decided to follow Jesus, it is more proper for us to speak about how we *received* the Holy Spirit, because not one of us made any decision to allow Him to enter our hearts. We received the Holy Spirit when we were baptised. Often in Pentecostal churches, people will only be baptised after they are able to make a decision for Christ. But God decided before the foundation of the world that He would send His Son to die and rise for us on the cross, and that through our baptism, God the Holy Spirit would make His home. For most of us, this happened when we were still babies. This is completely in agreement with what Jesus told the disciples: “*Go into the world and baptise all nations*” (Matthew 28). It would be ridiculous to think that “*all nations*” does not include babies! For any of you who were baptised as babies, can you ever remember making that decision to allow Jesus to come and dwell in your hearts? Not at all! The fact that we are baptised is of great comfort, *because it is not dependent on us*. God has decided to make us His children, and He is never far away from us, *no matter how we feel*.

Our salvation does not depend on our feelings, and *thank the Lord for that*. We all have our bad days or weeks, and sometimes cry out, “Where are You, Lord?” “*Why are You so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning?*” (Psalm 22:1). And since the Lord isn't helping, we are tempted to find relief by trying with our actions to draw closer to Him.

So, in times of distress, when everything goes from bad to worse, where are we to find Him? The simple answer is found in Peter. What did he do? Peter pointed the people to Christ by preaching the Word and telling them to repent and be baptised.

What are we doing here today? As baptised children of God, we confess our sins, we hear the Word of God, and if it is a Holy Communion Sunday, we receive the Lord Himself in, with, and under the

bread and wine. If any of you feel the brunt of your sins, or are going through a tough time, don't go looking for relief in your feelings, but come where the Lord offers Himself to you in Word and Sacrament. That is how Christ works. Remember the words of Psalm 42, "*Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise Him, my salvation and my God*" (42:5). These words capture the reality of faith: sorrow amid trials, yet certainty in the Lord's care.

Finally, Christ still calls on all people to repent and be baptised. "**Those who received (Peter's) word were baptised, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.**"

We shall carry on with the Lord's work as Peter did, preaching the Word of God, calling people to repentance, and baptising. As a church, we do not need to go down the path of being "happy clappy," stirring up emotions. No, God works through means, and they are means that are *outside of us*. They are *His* means. We don't know, but maybe the Lord has plans through our preaching to add another 3000 people to salvation, or maybe only another 3. But we leave that in His hands. "*For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall My Word be that goes out from My mouth; it will not return to Me empty, but it will accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it*" (Is. 53:10-11).

As time goes by, we shall continue to gather around the Word and Sacrament, confessing our sins and trusting in His grace alone, confident that the Lord will continue to be with us, serving us. Let us joyfully go forward in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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