

WE LIVE BY FAITH, NOT BY SIGHT

Sermon for Pentecost, 2026

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 read before, Acts 2:1-21.

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

Dear friends in Christ,

Pentecost is the Greek name for the important Jewish observance of the Feast of Harvest¹, or, as it was also called, the Feast of Weeks.² Pentecost means '50th,' for the feast took place 50 days after the Passover Sabbath. Every pious Jew tried to be in Jerusalem for this feast. Those who could not be there observed it in the synagogues throughout the Roman Empire and beyond.

As it did every year, Pentecost once again came around. But this time, God had special events in mind for the Pentecost mentioned in our text. What Jesus had earlier promised concerning the Holy Spirit would now take place.

This account of Pentecost paints a beautiful and exciting picture.

Now, the Bible does not make it very clear as to whether the events of that Pentecost, where you had the sound like a violent blast of wind, and the tongues of fire, rested only the 12 disciples, or the 120 or so who were with them at the time, but it doesn't really matter. They are gathered together, and there comes this sound of a violent blast of wind. It doesn't say that there was a wind, just the sound of it - and it sounds as though it may have sounded like a hurricane! While this sound is happening, "divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them." Here was the fulfilment of John the Baptist's prediction: "He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and with fire" (Luke 3:16), and Christ's promise: "In a few days you will be baptised with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 1:5).

The tongues of fire came to rest on each person present. All received the baptism of the Spirit, for each would have work to do in carrying out the great commission of baptising and teaching. "They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance." The disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit to such an extent that they could not help but preach, even though it was in another language! What a remarkable thing that must have been, preaching but hearing your own voice come out in another tongue! It takes years to master another language, yet through the Holy Spirit, these disciples were able to deliver God's message in words everyone could hear and understand. And while we do not know exactly what they spoke, they told of "the mighty works of God."

People were gathering and marvelling that they could hear their hometown native language being spoken to their amazement and apparent delight. Some, of course, heard all the noise and announced according to their judgment that the disciples "are filled with new wine." In other words, they were drunk. Then Peter stands up and begins to preach, telling the Jews gathered that what they are witnessing is what Joel had prophesied about the pouring out of the Holy Spirit in the Last Days.

Today, don't you sometimes think that it'd be nice to see and feel the Holy Spirit working in and through you? Wouldn't it be nice to see and experience the Holy Spirit flowing through your veins, granting you miraculous powers, such as speaking in tongues? But that is the source of the drive that

lies behind Pentecostal denominations. They 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 Pentecost. That is not God's plan.

That Pentecost was something unique. God was doing something in a remarkable way so that it would be clear what He was doing and that He 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 in the home of Cornelius the Centurion, to whom Peter also preached. Remember on that occasion that "while Peter was still speaking these words, (to a gathering of people in Cornelius' home), the Holy Spirit came upon all who heard the message. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles. For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God," (Acts 10:44-46). In this instance, God made it unmistakably clear that Gentiles were also welcome to the Holy Spirit and the grace of God found in Jesus Christ.

Pentecost was about beginning the Church in earnest and confirming God's presence and activity in it by these signs. Having now made His point, God expects us to walk by faith and not by sight. This is exactly what Paul told the Corinthian Church when he wrote, "We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, for we walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Corinthians 5:6-7).

God has not left Himself without a sign, mind you. He simply isn't going to do those flashy things all the time. If God had to prove Himself all the time, then you would no longer be walking by faith, but by sight. If every Sunday were like Pentecost, then rushing wind and flames and foreign languages would become something ordinary, an everyday kind of thing, and people would be hankering for something really remarkable to prove God's work and presence among them. And if you are inclined to doubt that, then just think about the Exodus. The Israelites had the pillar of cloud by day, the pillar of fire by night, and the miraculous daily gift of manna, and yet they still wandered into sin and idolatry, grumbling about God and His treatment of them, and even complaining about having to eat that 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 — they didn't even have to work for it! It very quickly became just an ordinary, everyday thing.

God continues to give us the signs of His presence through Word and Sacrament. And instead of preachers who speak in tongues, God has provided everything to be translated into our tongue, and He has provided preachers who speak our language. 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 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 Supper to be placed into our mouths individually — and speaks each of our names in Baptism, calling us His own.

So, what if some still doubt, do not see it, or do not believe it? As we mentioned earlier, there were those who stood in the crowd on that first Pentecost and sneered: "They are filled with new wine."

Accusing the disciples of being drunk, they paid no attention to the enormous blast of wind coming from heaven. They ignored those flames on the heads of the disciples. They were unimpressed that the disciples' speech made sense to others in their hometown language. They took it all in and called it rubbish and said they didn't see or hear anything but a bunch of drunks. So it is no wonder that men today 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 yet complain that it was tiresome, dull, and nothing special.

Pentecost started the Church. Nothing has changed, really, since then. The message preached that day is still the same message that God has given us to speak. He still pushes us out there and makes us

speaking it, even when it gets us into trouble. Every little bit of good that is accomplished by the Church is done so by the Word preached, and the power of the Holy Spirit, who is still doing what Acts 2:47 says, “And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.”

We need to get the message out there, no matter what it might cost. And that simple message, of course, is that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and also true man, has borne all our guilt and sins, and died on the cross to redeem us. All our sins, past, present, and future, have been nailed to that cross, and Jesus has paid in full the price due for our sin. He has paid that price for each and every one of us, and has given to us His righteousness and eternal life to all who will simply trust Him, take Him at His Word and believe. All our sins are forgiven, and God has given the gift of everlasting life. He will even raise our bodies from their grave, one day, and outfit us for life with no more death, no more sickness, and no sorrow or pain. All this is the free gift of God, for the sake and on account of Jesus Christ, and not by anything we do. Such is the love of God.

Furthermore, all this is a present reality. It is, however, a reality we do not witness with our senses. God tells us, and invites us to believe Him, and learn of His goodwill and love for us, to trust Him the way Adam and Eve should have.

Finally, in Pentecost, we also see the reversal of the cursed effects of sin. When the world was still new, and men were not too long in sin, God confused their language 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, fear, and suspicion drive them apart.

In Pentecost, God 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 that day, but it was clear that this Gospel was healing the damage caused by sin among mankind. But you 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 o’clock 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. This is the message we still proclaim, and He is the power behind our preaching, teaching and confessing of Christ. He pushes us out to speak and to do. The signs are here, and the wonders — that is, 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 who believes. He was given then and remains with us right up to the present moment, that we may be filled to overflowing with faith and hope and love. Amen.

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

1 Exodus 23:16

2 Exodus 34:22