

“The Work of the Holy Spirit”¹
Acts 2:1-21²

Pentecost – June 12, 2011
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S1 – Introduction – Acts 2:1

What an amazing party Pentecost must have been! Josephus, the ancient historian, provides insight into the celebration.³ Fifty days after the Passover, (hence the name (Pente”) Hebrew people from all over the middle east would gather to praise and thank the Lord for the spring crops, the grain, and the many blessings of God. On Pentecost Eve, the priests would gather in the inner court of the temple. The city of Jerusalem would be filled to capacity, and perhaps beyond.

On Pentecost morning, farmers from the area would gather outside the city. A flute player would lead them up Mount Zion, as they brought baskets of grain, and everyone joined in singing God’s praise. They would sing the section of the Psalter known as the “Songs of Ascent,” Psalms 120-136. As they arrived at the temple, thousands upon thousands of people antiphonally joined together and sang: ***Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever.*** ²***Give thanks to the God of gods, for his steadfast love endures forever.*** ³***Give thanks to the Lord of lords, for his steadfast love endures***

¹ PR: CP45:198

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³ See Concordia Self-Study Bible ESV – p. 1835.

forever; ⁴to him who alone does great wonders, for his steadfast love endures forever;⁴

This great song of praise would continue, as one after another, the gifts would be presented to the priests. The Priest and the farmer would take the basket and swing it back and forth as a wave offering before the Lord.⁵ Imagine the joy, the celebration, the children, the praise of the Lord.

But this year, it was a different Passover. I'm sure most did not think so. In fact, some had probably already forgotten the events scarcely two months earlier, when the man named Jesus was crucified, and when the reports circulated of His resurrection. Who would think of that? This was Pentecost, time for a party. And then, when no one expected it, the first of several miracles occurred. Like other miracles, when Jesus was present, there would be a definite ripple effect and some rather shocking responses.

S2 – The Spirit – Lord & Giver of Life

If one were to rate the miracles, this one would have to rise to the top of the list. Everything changes the moment the Holy Spirit steps up to the plate. Timid, fearful, queasy little disciples, suddenly become empowered, alive, dynamic, able to act in ways they could not have imagined themselves acting only moments before. It was as though they came to life. In fact,

⁴ Psalm 136:1-4

⁵ See Deuteronomy 26:5-10a

that is what happened. We say it this way in the Nicene Creed. The Holy Spirit is ***“the Lord and giver of life.”***

S2a – Spiritual Life

He gives life, even more important, He sustains the spiritual life. Paul described our natural condition as: ***“You were dead in the trespasses and sins.”***⁶ To the Corinthians he wrote: ***“The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.”***⁷ And again, ***“...no one can say “Jesus is Lord” except in the Holy Spirit.”***⁸

Now look at the lesson for today. Jerusalem was teeming with thousands of people, people from at dozens of nations, people who could not understand each other because of the natural language barriers, but most important, people without the Holy Spirit at work in their hearts. In this midst of all this noise, Luke says it happened like this: ***“...suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. ³And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. ⁴And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit ...”***

Miracle of miracles! Wonder of wonders! Mystery of mysteries! The fire of heaven seered its way into the hearts of men, women and children. By the simple, majestic working of the

⁶ Ephesians 2:1

⁷ 1 Corinthians 2:14

⁸ 1 Corinthians 12:3b

third person of the Trinity, God the Holy Spirit, everything changed.

S2b – Spiritual Mysteries

In that moment, the fears and timidity of this world gave way. Upon the dozen disciples, plus perhaps a hundred or so others, the Spirit of God fanned their flickering little faith into white hot flame. Nothing would ever be the same again. Within a matter of moments, the Holy Spirit, who gives and sustains and builds up the abundant, abiding life, transformed everything.

S3 – The Holy Spirit Works Through Means

How did this happen? Here is an important fact. Wind and fire were evidence of the Spirit being present, but the methods used by the Spirit to turn lives on fire was far less sensational.

S3a – The Spoken Word

The spoken word became the tool of choice. Oh, yes, when God is at work, there is no limit to the impact words can have. ***“[the disciples] began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. ... at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. ⁷And they were amazed and astonished, saying, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? ⁸And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language?”***

Every person heard, clearly, distinctly, in their own native language, the Word that transforms life.

The chaos caused by God at Babel,⁹ the confusion of languages, for this day and moment was replaced with the clarity of the Gospel. Read the words of Peter. There is no question. The Word is clear! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!

The same tool as the Spirit uses today, the voices of the people of God, became the tools of choice that day.

S3b – Entrusted to Us

Think of the miracles that day! Tongues of fire, sound of wind; each hearing in his own native tongue; and yet one more miracle. Faith was generated in the hearts of many, who prior to that day did not believe.

By simple – yet powerful tools, the spoken Word of God, and the water of Holy Baptism, at least three-thousand people became children of the triune God, heirs of life everlasting. How amazing is the power of our God!

S4 – The Holy Spirit – not Irresistible

There is yet one more important lesson today. This is a hard – sad – but important truth. As powerful, as wonderful, as

⁹ See Genesis 11

amazing as God is, never and nowhere does He force Himself on anyone.

In Hebrews we read this truth: *“The word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”*¹⁰

Jeremiah writes: *Therefore thus says the Lord, the God of hosts: “Because you have spoken this word, behold, I am making my words in your mouth a fire, and this people wood, and the fire shall consume them.”*¹¹

Yet, it remains painfully true, God forces no one to believe in Him.

S4a – Doubters & Mockers

Listen to the response of the crowds that day. *⁶At this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. ⁷And they were amazed and astonished, saying, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? ⁸And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? ⁹Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, ¹¹both Jews and*

¹⁰ Hebrews 4:12

¹¹ Jeremiah 5:14

proselytes, Cretans and Arabians—we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God.”¹²And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?”

Some wondered, others were amazed, anxiety set in among some, and then, there’s always someone who tries to make a big joke of the whole situation. Verse 13 says: ¹³***But others mocking said, “They are filled with new wine.”*** The Holy Spirit would have no place in their lives. God would not influence their thought. Even with all the proofs of that day, some would only doubt and mock.

St. Paul says it always works this way, ***“We are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, ¹⁶to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life.”¹²***

It doesn’t take much to misjudge, to laugh at, to ridicule the things of God. People do it every day. They refuse to realize the seriousness, and the potential eternal consequence of their arrogant behavior.

The worst thing that can ever happen to a person is to die without faith in Jesus Christ. Without faith in Christ, all one has is spiritual death. And when one dies without faith, all one receives is to awaken to the torment of hell forever. Not very funny, is it!

¹² 2 Corinthians 2:15-16

S4b – Believers

Thanks be to God, when faced with the choice, to believe or to reject, the Holy Spirit has equipped us to respond as did Simon Peter. He rebuffed the scoffers. He proclaimed the powerful truth: *“Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know—²³this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.²⁴ God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it.”*

This is the heart and core of our Christian faith. This is the message we proclaim. This is the prayer of all prayers answered. God’s Holy Spirit enables us to believe, and to share in the great truth of our risen Savior, the great hope of our eternal home, the great reality of His presence in Word and Sacrament.

O Holy Spirit, fill us with Your grace,
Encourage us with Your presence,
Guide us with Your power,
and enable us to stand firm, faithful, and true,
for this day and even to the day of life eternal.
Amen.