

Pentecost Power

Pentecost Sunday, May 31, 2020

Acts 2:1-21 / John 7:37-39

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When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.

Dear Christian Friends,

On the 40th day after His resurrection, Jesus ascended into heaven, where He would be exalted back on high and crowned as the successful Savior of this world and the Lord of all lords. Luke records His final words before He ascended, which were in response to one last question His disciples asked, “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” As was His custom, He didn’t really give them a straight answer. Instead He told them that it wasn’t for them to know the times or the seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority, he told them that when the Holy Spirit came upon them, they would receive power and they would be His witnesses first of all in Jerusalem, secondly in the surrounding region of Judea, and ultimately to the ends of the earth.

Today was supposed to be a really glorious day here at St. Paul Lutheran and in so many congregations across the state who are slowly but surely opening up our church doors and one more time assembling together in the flesh. In my mind, this sermon was going to be about the power of the Holy Spirit being poured out in supernatural and superabundant fashion on the the Church, this sermon was going to be about life getting back to normal and what it means to be the people of God going out into our circles of friends and family and work places witnessing to the grace and the goodness and the awesomeness of our God!

And then, as if we didn’t have enough trouble and division and bitterness in our land, a few policemen in Minneapolis do what they do, and all hell breaks loose. Huge numbers of folks try to protest in peaceful fashion, and a much smaller number of folks ruin it for everyone else. One step forward by the grace of God, and ten steps backwards, and one more time we’re left to wonder - Is the Savior of this world really sitting at the right hand of His Father ruling all of heaven and earth on behalf of His Church? Is the Lord of lords really in charge? Is God really good all the time? Pentecost Power?

Just out of curiosity, I looked up the opposites of the word “power”, and I found a list of 227 antonyms. I won’t list them all, but I did choose 50 of them, since this is the 50th day after the resurrection. Here we go. Before we talk about the three signs of the power of the Holy Spirit coming upon us, namely a mighty wind and tongues of fire and a miraculous ability to speak in languages never learned, I invite you to bring all of the following to the foot of the cross this morning.

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Bring your feelings of powerlessness / weakness / inability / incompetence / helplessness / impotence / uselessness / incapability / ineptitude, and surrender.

Bring your feelings of exhaustion / irrelevancy / failure / sleepiness / ineffectiveness / ineptness / subservience / lethargy / fragility, and inferiority.

Bring your feelings of disadvantage / fatigue / hopelessness / spinelessness / shortcoming / inadequacy / tiredness / defectiveness / heart-stopping fear, and worthlessness.

Bring your poor health / weak spots / feebleness / frailty / delicateness / fecklessness / woundedness / injuries / paralysis, and deficiency.

Bring your feelings of emptiness / futility / limitations / blemishes / warts / diseases / sins / guilt / iniquity, and #50 your wanting to just give up and not deal with it any more.

Pentecost Power is our sermon theme today, as we think about what it means in these days to receive power from on high and to be witnesses to the Gospel near and far.

First of all, Pentecost power came as the sound of a mighty rushing wind that pointed people in the direction of Jesus. Luke records it this way, **“When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting.**

In the Hebrew language the word “ruach” can be translated breath or wind of Spirit. Moses wrote that God gives breath to all living things. When God created Adam, He breathed into Adam’s nostrils and man became a living creature. Job’s friend Elihu affirmed that The spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life. Isaiah predicted that at the baptism of Jesus, the Spirit of God would descend in the form of a dove, that “the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord”

Wind cannot be seen, but its effects can be felt and heard — *as is the case with the Holy Spirit*. We cannot see Him, but we can feel the effects of His presence and His power. On the Day of Pentecost, the sound like that of mighty rushing of wind came suddenly. It took the disciples off guard and by surprise. The same word is used in Luke 21:5 to describe the deafening roar of the sea.

The Holy Spirit had always been present and working from the beginning of time. Prophets of the Old Testament spoke as they were moved by the Spirit of God. No person in the history of the world has ever come to believe in the one true God except by the power of the Holy Spirit. But on the Day of Pentecost, the Spirit was poured out in such a way that 120 disciples were equipped and empowered to turn the world upside down.

To this very day, the Holy Spirit works faith through the faithful preaching and teaching of God’s Word. He grows faith through the waters of Baptism and the eating of the bread and

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the drinking of wine at the Supper. To this very day, when the wind of the Spirit blows upon a church that is struggling or drifting or declining, life is renewed, hearts are changed, neighborhoods are directed to the only name that saves, which is Jesus.

In Ephesians 4, Paul warns Christians against being infants in the faith who are tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine. James compares one who is doubting to a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. Jesus declares in John 3; **You must be born again. The wind blows where it wishes and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.**

The kingdom of God is like a group of small-town people who see on TV the inner city on fire and in turmoil and they get down on their knees. They confess their own sins of racism and prejudice and laziness and spinelessness. They cry out for the Spirit of to fill the hearts of the faithful, they cry out for the light of the Gospel to be driving away the darkness, they pray for the love of Jesus Christ to be evident in the way that they listen, in the way that they behave, in the way that they speak, they want more than anything else for their hearts to be like flowing rivers of living water and for hurting and wounded humanity to be directed to Jesus.

First, we Saw that Pentecost power has to do with wind, and secondly, it has to do with fire.

Secondly, Pentecost power came as tongues of fire that signified the presence of God.

Luke records it this way, **“And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them.** In Exodus 3 God appeared to Moses in a bush that was burning and yet it was not consumed. In I Kings 18, the prophet Elijah prayed for God to send down fire from heaven and consume the burnt offerings of the prophets of Baal and that’s exactly what happened. In II Kings 1, Elijah prayed for God to send down fire from heaven and consume a captain with his 50 men who were worshiping false gods and then another captain with another 50 men doing the same worship of false gods, and in both cases, that’s exactly what happened.

Fire in the temple was used to consume burnt offerings and incense and was a visible sign of the continuous worship of God. John the Baptist declared that He would baptize with water, but Jesus would baptize His with fire and the Holy Spirit.

In our text for today, the flame of fire is a symbol of God’s power and the Holy Spirit showing up as promised. The day of Pentecost is considered to be the birthday of the New Testament Church. From this day forward, the Church would be commissioned to take the Gospel of Jesus Christ near and far. Not just the prophets and the pastors would be speaking God’s Word, but all Christians, both female and male, were to be witnesses.

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Lutherans believe in the priesthood of all believers. By that we mean to say that all Christians have direct access to the Father by virtue of Christ's death and resurrection and ascension into heaven. All Christians may access the forgiveness of sins through sincere repentance and a growing faith in their Savior.

In the Book of Revelation, Jesus warns us against a lukewarm practice of our faith. This very day, we would bring all of our lethargy and our laziness and our lack of energy for the mission of Christ here on earth to the cross of Christ, we would lay it down in exchange for new life, a renewed passion, and some fire in the belly.

The kingdom of God is like a family of believers working their way through the ups and the downs of their life together. They know that every conversation and every post on social media is an opportunity to be in the presence of God in real time. They know that wherever two or three are gathered around the promises of God, there is Jesus in the midst of them. They cry with those who feel like crying, they listen to those who feel like venting, they are quiet with those who feel like being quiet, they ask God again and again to fan the flames of their faith, to give them fire in their collective bellies.

First, we saw that Pentecost power has to do with wind, secondly with fire, and third with language.

Third, Pentecost power came as a miraculous ability to speak in languages the people could understand. Luke records that **they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.**

In the days leading up to Pentecost, scholars suggest that as many as 100,000 pilgrims had descended upon this city which on normal days would have about 30,000 residents. On that day, the gift of tongues was given for the purpose of communicating the Good News of Jesus in the mother tongues of foreign Jews in Jerusalem. Its purpose was to call the attention of Jews from every nation to the Good News of Jesus Christ, crucified and risen, as Savior and Lord. On Pentecost, Galilean Jews, who were generally considered to be country hicks, said things that spoke right to the hearts of those who heard because they were speaking the languages they had known from childhood, the languages they thought in.

Many in the crowd who heard this variety of languages were amazed, they were perplexed, they wondered out loud and in sincere fashion, "what does this mean?" As is usually the

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case, there were those who had to make a joke of everything. They made fun of the tongues speakers, suggesting they had already started drinking.

The kingdom of God is like a country hick preacher who has a hard time speaking the language of city dwellers who have grown up in neighborhoods that look and feel nothing like where he grew up. He knows how to cry with those who are crying, he's has to work hard to listen without interrupting, some days he represents Christ well, and other days not so much. But every day, the Holy Spirit has promised to come alongside of him and to be his guide, his encourager, and his teacher. With that in mind, he looks again and again at the plaque in his office which remains his favorite. "O God of second chances and new beginnings, here I am again." Amen.