

Pentecost Sermon

Acts 2:1-3

John 14:23-31

The Holy Spirit Enlivens the Christian

Pastor James Preus

They heard the sound of mighty wind rush upon them. Tongues of fire rested upon their heads. And they began to speak in languages they had never learned! The disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit. And what did they speak? What did the Holy Spirit cause them to say? The people who gathered around from different corners of the world understood them. They weren't speaking gibberish. They were speaking actual languages. The crowd said, "we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God."

And which works did they speak about? St. Peter tells us, "Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs God did through him in your midsts, as you yourselves know— this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it." (22-24) and so St. Peter exhorted the crowd to believe in Jesus Christ. For sure the rest of the disciples, speaking in different languages, preached similar sermons using the Old Testament prophecies to prove the gospel of Christ.

But let's put this episode into context. Where are they? They are in Jerusalem. Seven weeks earlier in that same city, Jesus was arrested by order of the chief priest. He was brought before Pilate and King Herod. Pilate ordered Christ flogged and crucified to death. And where were the disciples? Peter played the coward, denied Jesus to a little girl and ran away crying. The rest ran away in fear that Christ's fate would be their own. And on that first Sunday Jesus found his disciples still cowering behind bolt and locked doors, fearful of what the Jews would do to them.

Yet today, just fifty days later, the disciples preach in boldness. Peter, who couldn't confess Christ even to a young maiden boldly proclaims to the crowd of Jews, "this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men."

This is the same crowd that demanded Jesus' crucifixion. No long period of time has passed. The coward Pontius Pilate, who ordered Christ's death at the behest of this same crowd, still ruled as governor. The murderous King Herod still reigned. Caiaphas was still chief priest. Everyone who murdered Jesus was still in power. And they received no promise that they would be safe from them. Rather, Jesus says, "They will force you out of the synagogues" and "whoever kills you will think he is doing service to God" and "If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you." And yet, these men who fled like rabbits just seven weeks ago stand boldly and confidently proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus in the face of his murderers.

This is the work of the Holy Spirit! The Holy Spirit is not an impersonal force, who moves people. He's not an emotion. He is God. He hovered over the waters when he created the world. He comforted King David in his distress. He is equal to the Father and the Son in majesty, glory, power and eternity. He is not begotten of the Father as the Son is, but he proceeds from the Father and the Son. This Holy Spirit, who is sent by the Father and the Son, is at work on Pentecost.

What did the Holy Spirit do on Pentecost? He emboldened the disciples. He gave them the courage and strength to speak before a crowd of murders! He made strong men out of weak men, heroes out of cowards. Not only did the Holy Spirit enliven the disciples' boldness, he gave them their words to speak. As the Holy Spirit carried men of God to write the prophetic books of the Old Testament, so he caused these uneducated men to proclaim the truth of Christ, using the Scriptures with fluency a Scribe could only dream of.

Do we still have the Holy Spirit today? Does he still work today? We sure do need him. We could use such boldness to confess Christ. Our religion is mocked by the culture. God is denied as the creator. What God calls evil the world calls good. And our children will be persecuted for confessing what the Bible teaches. Not only do we need boldness to call sexual immorality and murder what they are, abominations to the Lord, but even more we need boldness to confess Christ. We need boldness to tell people we actually believe that Jesus Christ, true God and true man, is our Savior. That he died and rose from the dead and that his death redeems us from sin, death, and hell. We need boldness, not even to

speak to crowds, who might very well kill us, but to our loved ones. Our husbands and wives, brothers and sisters, our children.

Does the Holy Spirit still work today? Do we have access to him? None of us has tongues of fire on our heads. We don't speak in tongues. We don't prophecy. We don't miraculously heal people. So how could we have the Holy Spirit?

We absolutely have the Holy Spirit. There are many who determine whether they have the Holy Spirit according to these gifts of speaking in tongues, prophecy, and miraculous healings. Many false teachers try to convince people they have the Holy Spirit by claiming to heal people. Many claim the gift of speaking in tongues (however many of them prove to not even be speaking a language, but just speaking gibberish). But we do not prove that we have the Holy Spirit in these ways. The Holy Spirit caused St. Paul to write in 1 Corinthians 13, "Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away." (vs. 8)

The Holy Spirit gave the church the ability to speak in tongues for a time. That the disciples spoke in languages from across the world demonstrated that the Gospel of Jesus Christ, his forgiveness and promise of eternal life, is for everyone. God intends for this message to be proclaimed to the whole world; every nation, tongue, and people. But the Holy Spirit did not promise that these gifts would continue (quite the opposite, in fact). But the Love of God will not pass away. Our Lord says, "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him."

We can only love Jesus if the Holy Spirit creates faith in us. St. John writes, "We love him, because he first loved us." (1 John 4:19) St. Paul writes, "No one can say, 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit." (Rom. 12:3) We know we have the Holy Spirit, because we have God's Word, we have his Sacraments, and we have faith. When speaking in tongues and healings are glorified over God's Word and the forgiveness of sins, the Holy Spirit is not present.

We have the Holy Spirit with us today, because we have God's Word. John the Baptist spoke in John 3, "For he whom God has sent utters the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without measure."

(John 3:34) As surely as we hear and confess that Jesus Christ is the true Son of God, whom God delivered up for our trespasses and rose for our justification, so do we have the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit cannot be separated from God's Word.

We have the Holy Spirit with us today. St. Paul writes, "He saved us, not by works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy through the washing of rebirth and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior. So that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs, having the hope of eternal life." (Titus 3:5-8) In Baptism the Holy Spirit washes us clean of our sins and makes us God's own people. He also leads us by his Word to return to our baptism by repenting of our sins daily for the forgiveness of sins. When water is joined to God's Word in Baptism the Holy Spirit works a greater miracle than speaking in tongues. He enlivens a dead soul.

Jesus breathed on his disciples and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins they are forgiven. If you withhold forgiveness it is withheld." We have the forgiveness of sins from Christ himself, so we have the Holy Spirit, his power, and his good gifts.

The Holy Spirit gave the disciples utterance. That means he caused them to speak what they said. So with conviction the disciples preached repentance and forgiveness of sins. They called for them to repent of murdering Christ. And they declared free forgiveness for Christ's sake. So, today faithful pastors preach repentance. They call people to mourn their sinful condition, to turn from their real sins and try to live better. Moreover, they proclaim that Jesus freely forgives all who cry to him in faith.

The Holy Spirit asserts. He confesses. He isn't wishy washy. He's not unsure. He's bold. So the Church preaches with boldness. A pastor doesn't give his opinions. He declares God's Word with confidence, so that the Christian may believe with confidence. The Holy Spirit is bold. So Christians confess with boldness. (story of Poya and other persecutions) Today, the Holy Spirit grants such faith. Even today, Sara will confess her faith in her Savior Jesus, who has forgiven her all her sins, as she was taught from the Bible and the Small Catechism. This is proof of the Holy Spirit's work.

Do we have the Holy Spirit. Absolutely! Do we need the Holy Spirit? Desperately. He gives us faith in Christ. Without the Holy Spirit, we could not believe in Jesus. And without the continued work of the Holy Spirit, our faith would die. The Holy Spirit forgives our sins with Jesus' blood. He comforts us when our souls are sick. And he only speaks to us through his Word. So we take confidence when we hear the true preaching of God's Word, when we hear that God loves us and gives us eternal life for Christ's sake, when we receive the Sacraments in their entirety, we know that the Holy Spirit is with us. When we confess our faith, we know that the Holy Spirit moves us to do so. And the more we hear God's Word, the more bold we will become, the more confident in our Savior.

The Holy Spirit is working today. He causes confirmands to promise to remain faithful to the true faith even to death. He causes men and women to stare their murderers in their face as they confess Christ. And he gives you power... to assert... to confess that there is no other name under heaven by which you must be saved than Jesus Christ. That there is nothing good in you that can save you, but that God has washed you clean from your baptism. That your Baptism truly is a miracle from God. That Jesus really does feed us with his true body and blood in the Sacrament. That the Bible is God's true word, without errors. The Holy Spirit does not cause you to doubt. He doesn't cause you to hate or sin or deny his Word. He causes you to believe, to take heart, to trust, to confess, to be bold, to love.

May this Pentecost encourage you to hear the Gospel preached by the Apostles and confessed by the Christian Church throughout the ages. May the Holy Spirit make his dwelling in you, give you confidence to confess Christ and pray.

In Jesus' name. Amen.