

The Festival of Pentecost & Confirmation Day  
St. John 14:23-31: "We Hold the Word of God Sacred."  
May 22/23, 2021 | Saude, Jerico, & Redeemer Lutheran Churches

**In Nomine Iesu**

+ + +

EXORDIUM

The difference between a little fire and a wildfire is the wind. You can't control the wind. You can try to block it with trees or buildings, but you can't make it stop. You can't slow it down when it screams by like a locomotive, and you can't grab it by its tail. "*The wind blows where it wishes,*" said Jesus, "*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*" (Joh. 3:8).

With a sound "*like a mighty rushing wind,*" God the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples on Pentecost and "*tongues as of fire appeared*" and rested on them (Act. 2:2-3). The disciples did not harness the Spirit; the Spirit harnessed them. He rushed into them and filled them with faith and boldness and understanding, and He gave them inspired words to speak.

They spoke about "*the mighty works of God*" (v. 11). They spoke about Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God, who died and rose again for the salvation of sinners (vv. 22-32). They spoke about His exaltation at the right hand of God the Father and His pouring out of the Spirit just as He promised (v. 33).

And like a wildfire racing on the wind, the message of God's grace toward sinners burned in the hearts of one after another in the crowd. They cried out to the apostles, "*Brothers, what shall we do?*" (v. 37). And Peter said, "*Repent and be baptized 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*" (v. 38). Three thousand were born again that day through Baptism by the power of the Holy Spirit.

And the fire and the wind of the Holy Spirit have continued to rush along and ignite faith in the hearts of sinners down to this very day. We hear the wind of the Spirit blowing in the Gospel message of our redemption and resurrection through Jesus. We see the fire of the Spirit burning when more and more are led to the baptismal font to be clothed with Christ and brought to the altar to be fed and filled by Christ.

We don't control the Spirit, but God sends Him to kindle in us the fire of His holiness, His life, and His love. We now rise to sing our festival verse, hymn #399, "O Light of God's Most Wondrous Love":

O Light of God's most wondrous love,  
Who dost our darkness brighten,  
Shed on Thy Church from heav'n above,  
Our eye of faith enlighten!  
As in Thy light we gather here,  
Show us that Christ's own promise clear  
Is Yea and Amen ever.

O risen and ascended Lord,  
We wait fulfillment of Thy Word;  
O bless us with Thy favor!

+ + +

---

*The sermon text for today is taken from the fourteenth chapter of the Gospel according to St. John. We read selected verses in Jesus' name:*

Jesus answered and said to him, "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. He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine but the Father's who sent Me. / "These things I have spoken while being present with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you. Peace I leave with you; My peace I give you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled neither let it be afraid. / "You have heard Me say to you: 'I am going away and coming back to you.' If you loved Me, you would rejoice because I said 'I am going to the Father,' for My Father is greater than I. And now I have told you before it comes, that when it does come to pass, you may believe. I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming, and he has nothing in Me. But that the world may know that I love the Father, and as the Father gave Me commandment, so I do. Arise, let us go from here." (NKJV)

---

*These are Your words, heavenly Father. Sanctify us by Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen. (Jn. 17:17)*

---

In Christ Jesus, who kept His promise that the Father and the Son would send out the Holy Spirit for our instruction, comfort, and salvation, dear fellow redeemed, and especially you, Kole/Wyatt, on your Confirmation Day:

When you were younger, you learned to sing the simple phrase, "Jesus loves me! This I know, For the Bible tells me so." It comes from a children's song, but it is the kind of children's song that you never outgrow. No matter how many years God gives you, it will always be true that Jesus loves you. You know this, for the Bible tells you so.

But why should you trust what the Bible says? You can trust it because the Bible is not a collection of human opinions or thoughts. Paul said that he and the other apostles spoke "*in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit*" (1Co. 2:13, ESV). Peter wrote that "*no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit*" (2Pe. 1:21).

The Bible was written down by men, but it is God's Word. That means the Bible is powerful. When God speaks, His Word is done. The Holy Spirit is the Person of God who carries out the commands of God. Jesus told His disciples that "*[w]hen the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come*" (Joh. 16:13).

The Holy Spirit's first aim is to reveal our sin to us, so we recognize our need for a Savior. He does this through the Ten Commandments. The Ten Commandments are God's will for moral conduct that does not change whether it is the year 2021 B. C. or today. Even without studying the Commandments too deeply, we see that we have broken each one. And God makes it clear that the breakers of the Law could never be the fixers of the Law. The imperfect can never raise themselves to the level of His holiness. So the Holy Spirit brings us Jesus.

Jesus is the true Son of God begotten of the Father from eternity, and He is also true Man born of the virgin Mary. He saved us from the condemnation of the Law by fulfilling it completely in our place. And then He died on the cross to pay for our sins. The passages that our confirmands have chosen beautifully express what Jesus' death means for us. Kole's passage is 1 John 1:7: *"The blood of Jesus [God's] Son cleanses us from all sin."* And Wyatt's is Ephesians 1:7: *"In [Jesus Christ] we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace."*

The Holy Spirit brings you Jesus by imparting His holy life and His saving blood to you through the powerful Word and Sacraments of God. You were baptized into Jesus when His forgiveness was applied to you and His righteousness placed over you by water and the Spirit. You are filled with Jesus when the Holy Spirit gives you faith to believe that you eat Jesus' true body and drink His true blood in the Supper for the remission of your sins.

There is no question that Jesus loves you. He proved it by His holy life and death to save you, and He still proves it by coming to you, even to your sinful heart and mind, to give you His gifts. But do you love Jesus? Loving Jesus is more than just saying so. We want our actions of love for Jesus to speak even more loudly than our words of love. Jesus says, *"If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word."* What does it mean to "keep" His Word? The verb used here does not mean to "obey," it means to "hold onto" or "pay attention to." If we love Jesus, we will keep His Word close. We will listen to what He says. We will gladly hear and learn it.

So I ask again: Do you love Jesus? Kole/Wyatt, you have learned to study God's Word more deeply and thoroughly in the last two years than ever before. You have committed many Bible passages to your memory. It has become clear to you what Jesus has done for you, and what He still does for you through His Word and Sacraments. But as much as you have grown in your faith, and as eager as you are to receive Jesus' body and blood in His Supper, you know that you don't love Jesus like you should. None of us does.

If we loved Jesus like we should, nothing would be more important to us than His Word. We would fill our whole day with its reading and meditation, and we still couldn't get enough. We would eagerly live according to it. We would gladly speak its promises to others. We would willingly set aside every pursuit, every passion, every plan to follow the voice of our good Shepherd, to listen to and take comfort in His Word.

But we are sinners. We are weak. We often think the world has more to offer us than the Word. Sometimes we even "despise preaching and His Word" (Catechism, Third Commandment). We don't want to hear it. We rebel against it. It seems like our sinful stubbornness and selfishness would cause Jesus to stop loving us, stop speaking to us, go and find others who would

appreciate Him more. But that is not the case. He has brought us all safely here today because He wants us to hear His Word. He wants to come to us and dwell with us.

Jesus keeps coming through His Word day after day and week after week. The Father and the Holy Spirit come too. The Triune God is not ashamed to associate with us sinners. Our merciful and gracious God is eager to bless us. This is why **We Hold the Word of God Sacred**. God's Word is our connection to His gifts. His Word is the channel, the conduit, the pipeline through which He comes down and meets us in all our sin, trouble, and doubt. He does not come to punish us or harm us. He comes to forgive us, comfort us, and save us.

We hold His Word close and pay attention to it, because we know that His Word is the way that God keeps us close and the way that He defends us from the attacks of the devil, the world, and our own flesh. We show our love for Jesus by holding tightly to His Word, and Jesus shows His love for us by coming and strengthening us in the faith through the same Word. Jesus says, *"If you abide in my word – dwell in it, remain in it, live in it –, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free"* (Joh. 8:31-32).

We don't like to think about it, but the opposite is also true. If we do not abide in His Word – if we do not dwell in it, remain in it, live in it –, we will no longer be His disciples, we will fall away from the truth, and we will return to the slavery of sin and death. Jesus says, *"He who does not love Me does not keep My words"* – this one does not "hold His Word sacred and gladly hear and learn it" (Third Commandment).

God grant to our confirmands and to each one of us that we do not grow out of the Word as we grow older, but that we grow more and more into it; that we do not lose our handle on the Word, but hold it ever more tightly. God will not fail to bless us through His sacred Word. The all-powerful, all-gracious, all-holy Father, Son, and Holy Spirit will come to us and make their home with us. Then we will have all that we need, peace will fill our hearts, and His love will bring us joy and purpose for every day He gives us.

*Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, forevermore. Amen.*

+ + +