

The Festival of Pentecost – Pr. Faugstad exordium & sermon
St. John 14:23-31: “The Holy Spirit Brings You the Gifts of God.”
May 27/28, 2023 | Saude, Jerico, & Redeemer Lutheran Churches

In Nomine Iesu

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Wings. Water. Wind.

The first time we hear about God the Holy Spirit in the Bible is at the beginning of Genesis 1: *“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters”* (vv. 1-2). *“The Spirit of God was hovering.”* That makes us think of the way a bird hovers in the sky. Fly forward.

After Jesus was baptized, *“the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him”* (Mat. 3:16). Once again, the Spirit was hovering over the waters. Fly forward.

Jesus spoke with a man named Nicodemus and said to him, *“unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God”* (Joh. 3:5). He spoke about the wind blowing where it wishes, flying wherever it flies, and declared, *“So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit”* (v. 8). Fly forward.

Ten days after Jesus’ ascension, His disciples heard a sound from heaven *“like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting”* (Act. 2:2). The Holy Spirit did not appear in the form of a dove, but He revealed His presence by the tongues of fire resting on each disciple. They began boldly to preach God’s truth in Jerusalem, and by the end of the day, three thousand souls believed the truth and were baptized. Fly forward.

When you were brought to the baptismal font, the Spirit of God was hovering over *those* waters. No one could see Him, but He was there with power. *“[B]y the washing of regeneration and renewal”* (Ti. 3:5), He caused you to be born again. He made you alive in Christ.

He still comes through the powerful Word and Sacraments, not bound by the laws of nature, not confined to space and time. He flies to you with the grace, forgiveness, and peace that are yours through the death and resurrection of Jesus. And He flies forward on His soul-saving, life-changing mission, adding more members to the church of God.

In praise of His magnificent work, we sing our festival hymn—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!

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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. (Joh. 17:17)

In Christ Jesus, whose ascension was the crowning moment of His saving work on earth, and who then sent out the Holy Spirit to distribute this salvation to sinners until the end of time, dear fellow redeemed:

It is very clear to all of you here why you needed God the Son to take on human flesh. You know that you are a sinner, and that you could not satisfy your debt to God. You needed Jesus to take your place, keep the holy Law for you, and die on the cross for your sins. But why was it so crucial that Jesus return to His Father? And why did the Father and the Son need to send out the Holy Spirit?

Jesus said to His disciples, "If you loved Me, you would rejoice because I said 'I am going to the Father.'" That does not seem like cause for rejoicing. Why would they rejoice when their great Teacher left them? He left them to suffer and die on the cross to make atonement for all sin. He had to go alone, because no one but Him could endure the wrath of God against sin. No one but Him could make peace between God and mankind.

When that work on the cross was complete, Jesus cried out, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!" (Luk. 23:46). And the Father received the spirit of His Son. He accepted His Son's sacrifice. We know He accepted it, because He raised Jesus from the dead on the third day.

Jesus' state of humiliation and suffering had ended. Now all authority in heaven and on earth were given to Him (Mat. 28:18), and He ascended to the right hand of His Father in the flesh.

Since salvation had been won, it was time for these glad tidings to be distributed. Ten days after His ascension, Jesus made good on His promise to send the Holy Spirit. Suddenly the disciples, common men from Galilee, could speak in languages they had never known before. They now stood up and spoke, not to draw attention to themselves, but to draw attention to Jesus and what He had done for all sinners.

And the Holy Spirit did more than give the disciples the gift of multiple languages. Through the Word they preached, the Holy Spirit was also giving the gift of faith to those who listened. We are told that the people *"were cut to the heart"* when they heard what was said. They did not realize that Jesus was more than a prophet. Now they knew they had crucified the Son of God, and that death could not keep Him in the grave. After what they had done to Him, how could they expect Him to be merciful toward them? *"Brothers, what shall we do?"* they cried.

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."* That sounds simple. All they had to do was say they were sorry for their sins and claim to have faith in Jesus, and the gift of the Holy Spirit would be theirs. But that's not really what happened. It was not a cause and effect. It was not, *"They do their part, and God does His part."* God did it all.

I guarantee that none of the people who were baptized on Pentecost Sunday woke up that day thinking, *"It's about time I admitted that I was wrong about Jesus. I should just believe that He is the eternal Son of the Father who died and rose again, and I should be baptized in the name of the Triune God."* It was the Holy Spirit who led them to repentance and faith and who prompted them to be baptized. All of it was gift; none of it was earned.

The same is true for you. You did not choose to be a believer in Jesus. Your parents or others brought you to the baptismal font and to church where the Holy Spirit worked faith in you. God had to do this work for you, because you were dead in your sins. An unholy person cannot make himself holy. Martin Luther put it this way, *"If you yourself were holy, then you would not need the Holy Spirit at all; but since we are sinful and unclean in ourselves, the Holy Spirit must perform His work in us"* (*Luther's Works*, Vol. 24, p. 169).

That's why Jesus said, *"Peace I leave with you; My peace I give you; not as the world gives do I give to you."* The world says the kind of peace you want to aim for is peace among nations and communities or an inner peace and calmness. But these kinds of peace are not permanent. The peace that Jesus left with us is the peace of His atoning death which reconciled us with our perfect heavenly Father. This is the peace the Holy Spirit imparts to us through the Word and Sacraments—the peace of sins forgiven, of eternal life secured, of a temporary rest in the grave before the resurrection of the body on the last day.

The Holy Spirit brings you what you cannot get anywhere else. He brings you the gifts of God. But He doesn't send these gifts directly from heaven to your heart like a bolt of lightning, or through a feeling you have that He is near. He brings you the gifts of God through the Word of God. Jesus 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." That is why we come to church and have devotions at home, because it is through the Word that God comes to dwell with us.

And it is through the Word that God teaches us the truth and comforts us. Jesus said that the Holy Spirit *"will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you."* Unless you have learned *"all things"* that God has to teach you, you still need to be a student in the school of the Holy Spirit. Unless you are perfectly holy, you still need the Holy Spirit to sanctify you through the Word.

And the Holy Spirit is glad to do this work. He is glad to take the forgiveness and life won for you by God the Son and apply it to you. He is glad to bring you comfort in your distress. He is glad to strengthen your faith in trials. He is glad to guide you on the path of righteousness. He is glad to prepare you for eternal life in heaven.

You can see how important the work of the Holy Spirit is. Without His work, we would have no faith. We would be without hope and without God in the world (Eph. 2:12). We would live for a short time and die and be dead forever. God the Father and God the Son sent out God the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, so that everything Jesus accomplished according to the gracious will of His Father would be applied to sinners.

You and I are some of those sinners, sinners who deserve God's wrath for our sins, who deserve eternal punishment in hell. But what we have received instead is the cleansing blood of Jesus that washed away all our sins. We have received His righteousness that makes us acceptable to the Father. We have received His mercy and peace and goodwill. By the power of the Holy Spirit through the Word, we have received all the fullness of Christ's redemptive work, grace upon grace (Joh. 1:16).

This is why we rejoice today. This is why Pentecost is such a pivotal day for the church. This is the day that all the gifts Jesus won for sinners came pouring out of heaven like stores of grain for the hungry, like waterfalls for the thirsty, like rain on parched earth. *"Come, Holy Spirit, and fill the hearts of Your faithful people, and kindle in them the fire of Your love."*

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.

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