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Day of Pentecost

St. Paul's Lutheran Church

Ezekiel 37:1-14

Psalms 104:24-35b

Acts 2:1-21

John 15:26-27; 16:4b-15

05/20/2018

Gospel

The Holy Gospel is written in the 15th Chapter of St. John, beginning at the 26th Verse:

26 But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me: 27 And ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with me from the beginning. 4 b And these things I said not unto you at the beginning, because I was with you. 5 But now I go my way to him that sent me; and none of you asketh me, Whither goest thou? 6 But because I have said these things unto you, sorrow hath filled your heart. 7 Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you. 8 And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: 9 Of sin, because they believe not on me; 10 Of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more; 11 Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged. 12 I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. 13 Howbeit when he, the

Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come. 14 He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you. 15 All things that the Father hath are mine: therefore said I, that he shall take of mine, and shall shew it unto you.

Here endeth the Gospel for the Day.

Prayer

Let us pray,

Almighty, Everlasting God, Lord, Heavenly Father, Whose Word is a lamp to our feet and a light on our way: Open and enlighten our minds that we may understand Thy Word purely, clearly and devoutly, and fashion our lives according to the same; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Pentecost

Good morning! Today's sermon isn't on the Gospel reading from John, instead, I'm focusing on our second reading, the gift of the Holy Spirit in the book of Acts. The famous homiletician William H. Willimon writes that "*The inbreaking of the Spirit is profoundly unsettling and deeply threatening to the crowd in the street, (and I would add to us the present day readers) and so it must devise some explanation, some rationalization for such*

irrationality."¹ I think that pretty much hits the nail right on the head. It's an especially hard text for Lutherans to hear. Ours is not a tradition rich with the spiritual gift of speaking in tongues, so the story sounds bizarre to us. Which is strange seeing as our faith is based on the very belief that God resurrected Jesus Christ, three days after he was killed. Guys coming back from the dead, that we can believe, speaking in tongues... not so much. In fact, when you compare the passages about speaking in tongues to this story in Acts we can see that this is something much more than speaking in tongues. According to St. Paul, when someone speaks in tongues it takes an interpreter to help translate what the person is saying. We can't normally understand what is being said when someone speaks in tongues. In today's story we witness something far more amazing. The disciples speak and are understood in ALL languages, everyone from all the corners of the world listen, and can understand as if they were speaking their native tongue.

Amazingly, this isn't even the most audacious thing the Holy Spirit does on that day. No, what the Spirit activates on Pentecost in our lesson from Acts today changes the direction of the church forever. Where before the Gospels show us the mission and ministry of Jesus Christ, what we see here is the first steps of the church on its own. The activity and audaciousness of the Spirit is so powerful that one commentator argues that the writer of Acts struggles with the tension of the "*radical freedom to move as it wants*"² all the while attempting to tell a story that doesn't limit the outbreak of the Spirit.

The more I thought about it, the more I realized that the day of Pentecost is all about transcending the traditional norms and expectations of what God can do and is doing. The

¹Willimon, William H. *Acts*. Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988. pp. 30.

²https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=3665

Lutheran church is often seen now as a denomination tied down by tradition and boring institutionalism that can seem outdated. But that just isn't true! The Lutheran church began because Martin Luther and other reformers were convinced that the church had stopped listening to the radical ministry that the Spirit was trying to accomplish in the world. The Lutheran church IS a Pentecost church!

Now this might sound a little funny coming on the same day that we decide to do a worship service setting that was written 30 years before this preacher was even born, but bear with me! Pentecost isn't about casting off everything simply because it's old. This day is about really trying to understand what God is doing in the world. And the church is often faced with two different camps, both of which I think are wrong. On the one hand we have the traditionalists who see no reason to change, who call out anything different as heresy and work to make sure that things stay the same. This group was probably standing around during Pentecost arguing "But we've never done it this way before!" On the other hand we have those so set for change that they don't even stop to think about what they destroy as they go about it. Anything new is fine as long as it's different and edgy. They forget that sometimes the church doesn't do things a specific way because it doesn't fit with the theology that we know to be faithful.

Now the danger at this point is for you to think that we need to just walk some middle road, offering a balance between the two, but this is not what I'm advocating. Pentecost drives us to think long and hard about what we do and why we do it. It pushes us to activity in the world and equally toward faithful contemplation about the "why."

Pentecost is about waking up and truly noticing the different ways that God is calling us to witness in the world. It's about that rushing wind that burst into the room that the disciples were all together in some two thousand years ago. In fact, that wind is a reminder of the breath of God that spoke creation into being, that tamed the chaos and that gave us life. The Hebrew and Greek words for breath, wind and spirit are all the same. When we realize that we are a Pentecost church we can realize that nothing is too far-fetched for God, no task is too impossible and no dream too unrealistic. Do you think those twelve disciples stopped in the middle of the Pentecost and said "wait, this is impossible, we're just a dozen guys! How can we do anything substantial?" No! God worked through that rough group of women and men to change the course of history. Now one third of the entire planet knows the story of a Jewish man born in the boondocks of Israel two thousand years ago! So I ask you today... what change is the Holy Spirit whispering to you?

¶ *The Sermon being ended, the Congregation shall rise and the Minister shall then say:*

THE Peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.