

Pentecost Sunday, May 28, 2023

Readings: Genesis 11: 1-9, Acts 2: 1-21, John 14: 23-31

The Holy Spirit Gives Peace

Following the flood, Noah's descendants failed to spread out and fill the earth as God had spoken. Rather, they exalted themselves; with *"one language and the same words"* (Gen. 11:1) they spoke proudly and arrogantly. The Lord humbled them by confusing *"the language of all the earth,"* dividing and dispersing the people (Gen. 11:9). That dispersal was reversed on Pentecost Day (the fiftieth day of Easter), when God caused the one Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ to be preached in a multitude of languages. *"At this sound the multitude came together"* (Acts 2:6), for the preaching of Christ is the primary work of the Holy Spirit, whereby He gathers people from all nations into one Church. The Holy Spirit teaches and brings to our remembrance the words of Jesus, which are the words of the Father who sent Him. These words bestow forgiveness and peace to those who keep and hold on to them in love for Jesus. *"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid."* (John 14:27).

Sermon Transcript

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

So today our Old Testament lesson comes from Genesis and the very familiar story of the Tower of Babel. And we all know the basics and they build this great tower and God comes down, confuses their language, and they spread out throughout the world. But the question is why was this such a problem?

After all God goes down to look at what's going on and He says, "Look what they're doing. There's nothing that they propose that will be impossible for them." Well, what's wrong with that? God designed us and created us to be inquisitive, to want to create and design and to learn and to grow. Why is this a bad thing that nothing that they'd seek after will be impossible? It seems like that's exactly how God designed us, but here's the problem.

What were they trying to do? What is the purpose that they had in mind? They were trying to build this great tower and they had bitumen for mortar, which is waterproof. They had learned from the flood, maybe we need to protect ourselves. They were building a tower to go against God's Word. If God's going to try and wipe us out again, we'd better be prepared and we're going to fight against God. That's in essence what they're saying when they're building this tower. And not only that, they say, "Let's build this tower and gather everybody together and make a name for ourselves." In other words, they were focused upon their desires, their wants, and not upon the Word of God and what He desires for the life. Because he told the people, "go into the world, spread throughout the world and give glory to My name." Instead, they gathered all together and tried to give glory to themselves.

See, it's not so bad that we seek to do good things and to focus on a purpose, but it needs to be the purpose of God. And that is in essence what we're talking about here on this Pentecost Sunday, the presence of the Holy Spirit, the coming of the Holy Spirit to the apostles, to proclaim the Word of God and to give us, you and me, the ability to speak God's Word, to understand God's Word and to act in accordance to His will.

And so the people were not. And yet even though God scattered them and scattered their languages, He promised that He would come and bring them back together again. And that's exactly what happened on the day of Pentecost. These apostles begin speaking in languages that they have never learned or study, and the people hear them in their own language and are amazed. And the reason that the apostles could do this was because the Holy Spirit was with them, brought to mind as Jesus said, the Holy Spirit is going to bring to mind everything that I've told you. Not only bring it to mind, but enable you to proclaim it to all people. And that is going on to this very day, the Holy Spirit, through the power of his Word being translated throughout the world, He is continuing to speak in languages that we hear in our own tongue.

You notice there were no English or Americans in this list at Pentecost. English was not one of the languages, and yet we are the recipients of the same day of Pentecost when the Spirit came to the apostles because men preached in other languages that eventually got to the English language that eventually gets to us. And He continues to do that. We continue to translate the Bible and proclaim the Bible in languages that we do not yet know. But we go forth. Lutheran Bible translators and Wycliffe and all sorts of other missionaries going out and proclaiming the Word in the language of the people. This is a continuation of this Pentecost day that we celebrate.

And what is going on and why was this going on? Why did this come about now? As Peter says, "This is to fulfill what was happening and what was prophesied through the prophet Joel." And Joel says, "And in these last days," in other words, Jesus is making it very clear. We've been studying the book of Revelation for the better part of this year, and one of the things that has helped us in our study is to recognize that we are currently at this very moment in the last days. And have been since Peter spoke this, since Jesus ascended into heaven and until He comes again, we are now in the last days. We're not looking for some future tribulation or some other things. We are currently experiencing it right now and have been. So what do we do with that? Well, in these last days, we are going to prophesy and we're going to see visions. We're going to dream dreams and we're going to proclaim the Word of God in its truth and purity.

See, we don't focus upon the fear and the scary things that we think about when we think about the end of times. We focus upon God and the Gospel. And why do we do that? Because of the power of the Holy Spirit that is within us, because He has given us His Spirit into our own flesh. We see the Holy Spirit at work. Now, we don't talk about the Holy Spirit a whole lot in church. We talk about Jesus Christ a lot. We talk about the Father a lot, but if you pay close attention to our liturgy, if you look at the words, the Holy Spirit comes up again and again and again. He's always there in the background working behind the scenes to get everything together so that it might be complete and whole, and it begins in the baptismal font.

When a little bit of water and a few words are placed upon us, and that child or that person is stripped from a child of Satan to a child of God through water and the Word by the power of the Holy Spirit. See, the Holy Spirit is what gives the Word authority. The Holy Spirit is what gives the water the power to wash away our sins and continues to do that every Sunday when we hear the words of absolution. Continues to do it every day when we pray and ask God for forgiveness. That is the power of the Holy Spirit working in our lives. Nothing happens without the Spirit working. And we do prophesy and we do see visions. What is prophecy? Prophecy is at its barest and most basic function, speaking the Word of God. And so therefore, all of us speak God's Word because we have read the Word. We've been filled with the Spirit, and therefore we can proclaim that Word. When you speak a word of comfort to your neighbor, you are prophesying. You are speaking the Word of God to them. When you pray and say that God will be with them, you are prophesying in speaking

God's Word into their lives. We've seen visions. We've seen visions of water changing a person into a Christian. We have seen visions of the presence of God with us in the bread and the wine connected with the body and the blood of Jesus Christ. We have seen this vision of God here with us and all of that is because the Holy Spirit has enlightened us and brought to mind all that He has said just like He did to the apostles.

With that in mind, I'd like you to actually open your Hymnals to page 323. This is the Small Catechism in our Hymnals, and we're going to focus upon the Apostles Creed and especially the third article of the Apostles Creed. And this is where we confess what it is that we believe about the Holy Spirit. Now, it's interesting in this we have the third article. It says, "I believe in the Holy Spirit," and then it goes on to say absolutely nothing about the Holy Spirit, at least on the surface. It says, "I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Christian Church, communion of saints, forgiveness of sins, resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen." You see all of those follow after our belief in the Holy Spirit because that is what He is doing. That is where He is active in our lives, in the holy church, in the communion of saints, in the forgiveness of sins, in the resurrection of the body, and in our life everlasting. That is the Holy Spirit at work. That is what He does for us.

Now, let's see how Luther explains it and describes it because he's very clear and I want to emphasize this. So let us read the explanation together.

"What does this mean? I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord or come to Him, but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith. In the same way He calls, gathers, enlightens and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith. In this Christian Church, He daily and richly forgives all my sins and the sins of all believers. On the last day, He will raise me and all the dead and give eternal life to me and all believers in Christ. This is most certainly true."

I love the way he ends it. This is most certainly true. We stand firm on this. We know it. And why do we know it? Because the Spirit has enlightened us. He has gathered us. He has called us. He has sanctified us. All of this is done by the Holy Spirit. There is no one that seeks after God, not one, but the Holy Spirit working through the Word draws people in. And that is then our task as people who have been drawn in by the Word to then seek to draw others into the church, not by the cleverness of our wisdom and how well we can argue the points of how we are right and they are wrong, but rather we bear witness to the hope in Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. We bear witness that God loves us and loves them.

We don't have to convince them by cleverly designed reason and logic. All we have to do is declare the works of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. And He does the work of calling, gathering and enlightening us in the truth. And so it gives us purpose and gives us hope because not all of us are clever. Not all of us can think of the right answer at the right time. A lot of times we remember the right answer about 2:00 in the morning. Oh man... It's what I should have said. But we have a God who works in spite of us sometimes, but He works through us always. And so we thank God that He is at work. Not only does He enlighten us, not only can we understand the Word of God, He also sanctifies us, makes us holy. We are holy because the Holy Spirit is within us. We are not holy because we have tried really hard to live a good life and therefore we can look back and say, yes, I have been holy. No, when we look back, we're going, yeah, it's a hit or miss kind of deal. But when we look from the perspective of God, He says, we have been holy from the day we were baptized. From the day His Word descended upon us through the power of the Holy Spirit, He has seen us and knows us as holy and righteous before Him. And so we thank God that He sees us as He

desires us to be. He sees us as Jesus Christ was, and He forgives that which we fail to live up to. And what a great peace and rest we have in that.

Now, if the Holy Spirit calls, then we understand that it is Him at work in all things, but we understand greater because the Holy Spirit is within us. There are scholars, biblical scholars, biblical archeologists who study the Word and study the history of Israel, who do not believe in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. They read the words. They look at things as an interesting intellectual study, but they have not been led by the Holy Spirit. They have not heard the Spirit. They have not been drawn in by the Spirit. And so therefore, even though they read the words, they do not make sense to them. And so we pray that when people read the Word, the Spirit would grab them. When we pray for somebody, when we share a word of comfort with somebody, it's not just our word, but the power of the Holy Spirit working in and through that Word.

And we pray that God would do the work of planting the seed and bringing to life faith in all people. And not only that, we know that He forgives, the fact that we will be raised to new life. That is through the power of the Holy Spirit, through the resurrection of the body and life everlasting through the power of the Holy Spirit. He's at work in everything, in every aspect of our lives.

To emphasize that a little bit more, turn to the next page to page 324 in your hymnal, the second petition of the Lord's Prayer, "Thy Kingdom Come." And again, let's recite this together.

"What does this mean? The kingdom of God certainly comes by itself without our prayer, but we pray in this petition that it may come to us also. How does God's kingdom come? God's kingdom comes when our heavenly Father gives us His Holy Spirit so that by His grace we believe His holy Word and lead godly lives here in time and there in eternity."

God gives us the Holy Spirit. That is how His kingdom comes. His kingdom is through the power of the Holy Spirit. And we are His kingdom. So when we pray, we're praying that we would recognize what God has done, and that is again, why we celebrate the Holy Spirit. Because without the Spirit, they're meaningless words, but with the Spirit they are life and truth, and we hold fast to that life and truth because in it we have comfort. We have peace, the peace of God which surpasses all understanding. We have the helper and the comforter. That's the last thing I want to talk about, the Holy Spirit.

Jesus says that He's going to the Father, He's going to ascend the Father and He's going to send the Holy Spirit whom He calls the helper. Think about this. We believe in the Trinity. Next week, we're going to talk about that in more detail, but we believe in God, the Father, God, the Son, and God, the Holy Spirit, three persons, one God. And this person of the Holy Spirit comes to us and is our helper. God is our helper. That seems totally backwards. We should be praising God and worshiping Him, and we should be serving Him. And God should expect our praise and worship, but God coming down to help us. That seems beneath God and yet God is with us. God is a God who is nearby. He helps us. We have God with us, and He comforts us.

When we are in despair, when we are concerned and worried about all the chaos that is going on in this world, where do we go? How do we find peace? We find peace in the Word of God, through the power of the Holy Spirit that lives within us and in Him we have peace.

May that grace and mercy and peace be and abide with you always, now and forevermore, unto life everlasting. Amen.