

Sunday: Pentecost Sunday
Date: May 31, 2020
Text: Acts 2:1-21
Title: The Dramatic Reversal

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Please pray with me.

Pentecost. A celebration that is far older than the day we read about in our Second reading today. Pentecost dates back to the rescue from captivity of the Israelites. Pentecost is the transliteration of the Hebrew word for “fiftieth.” In the Hebrew calendar, Pentecost, was the fiftieth day after Passover. The celebration of Pentecost capped the Feast of Weeks, or the Festival of Booths, which was the celebration of the first harvest. This was a time for devout Jews to travel to Jerusalem and make offerings and sacrifices at the Temple.

There is more history, to the fiftieth day after the Passover, in Jewish tradition. It is taught that on the first Pentecost, as the Israelites were gathered at Mount Sinai fifty days after having been rescued from Egypt, God spoke to the Children of Abraham from the mountain. Last Thursday, I heard a rabbi refer to Pentecost as the day the Jews received the Torah. This is the day that the Ten Commandments were given to the gathered people of God. This day terrified the Israelites as they heard the booming voice of God and experienced the lightning and thunder coming from the Holy Mountain.

Their freedom and presence at Mount Sinai marked a dramatic reversal of their fortunes, from captivity and subjugation in Egypt to freedom as God’s chosen people. No longer under the brutal regime of the Pharaohs, they were protected and led by God toward the land promised to Abraham and his descendants. This fiftieth day was the day their lives were sealed with God as they promised to be faithful to Him who had always been faithful to them.

As the crowds gathered in Jerusalem in our text today, they were reveling in the joy of the harvest. They were basking in being the chosen people of God. The high point of the feast was upon them. Soon the celebration would be ending, and they would return to their ordinary lives. People from all over the region were gathered in Jerusalem for the culmination of the feast. On this day, almost two thousand years ago, they and all the world would experience a greater culmination.

This is the day when we see the culmination of Jesus' work of salvation. This is the day when the Gospel is proclaimed to all people, Jew and Gentile alike. This is the day marked by a dramatic reversal, as the Holy Spirit is poured out on Peter and the disciples. This is the day that marks a monumental change in divine-human relations.

Acts 2 and following is the historical record of the fulfillment of the Gospel. It is a record of the events that unfolded at a particular time in history. It is not to be considered as our personal-Pentecost. It is not our spirit-gifts encounter. It is not to be diminished by making it about you or me, instead it is much grander.

Pentecost is a landmark in the history of redemption. Jews and Gentiles, the nations of the earth who are represented by a plethora of regional names and a listing of nations, if you will, are now going to be included in God's covenant family. The nations, as the Israelites referred to every people who were not Children of Abraham, who were excluded and exiled from the time of the Tower of Babel, were experiencing the restoration of fellowship with God.

This event marks a dramatic reversal in the world. Those outside the presence of the kingdom of God, were invited in. Those who sat on the outside of God's family are welcome now on the inside. This is the fulfillment of Matthew 4:16 which draws from Isaiah 9:1-2,

¹ But there will be no gloom for her who was in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he has made glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations.

² The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone.

The light of the world will shine upon all people. By the blood of Jesus, shed on the cross, Jew and Gentile will be indwelt by the Holy Spirit because they have been cleansed from unholiness by that blood of Christ.

The Pentecost event is the debut of a rehumanized humanity restored in the likeness of God, possessing once again as in Eden, the Holy Spirit within their persons. This day is the first day of pay-dirt for mankind in the new world order: Jew and Gentiles, male and female, rich and poor ushered into the Kingdom of God from the kingdoms of Pharaoh and Caesar. This entrance into the kingdom of God is marked by Baptism as the redeemed children of God, endowed with the

Holy Spirit as proof they belong to the new and true Lord of Heaven and earth; that they are united in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus as Paul speaks in Romans. It is the Holy Spirit who creates faith in Jesus within the hearts of man.

This event jolts the world into taking note that something entirely new is taking place. God is coming to live in our midst through the indwelling Spirit of God gifted through the Word of Christ because we have been reconciled by the blood of Christ. There is gospel. There is good news. There is great good news for all the world, the exile is over for Jews and Gentiles alike.

In this mighty work of God, we see the power and grandeur of his spectacular, miraculous occurrence which both authenticated this event as an act of the God of Israel and served as a meaningful symbol of the earth-shaking change taking place in world history. With the sound of a mighty wind, with tongues of fire, and with proclamation of the Gospel in the language understood by all in Jerusalem, God bewilders and amazes the revelers at the feast of Pentecost.

As the disciples spoke in “other tongues” we see the undoing of Babel. Language no longer separating people from the true worship of God. This would have been totally unexpected. As Jews in Jerusalem for the celebration of Booths, the people would have all known that the only authorized language to use in the Temple for the purpose of praying, singing, or speaking of God’s word, was Hebrew. To do otherwise was a violation of an established tradition.

Luke tells us as Peter and the disciples spoke in “other tongues ...as the Spirit gave them utterance” (Acts 2:4) the hearers were amazed. They were amazed because it was the Spirit who gave them utterance. The word “utterance,” is important because it refers to the kind of divinely authoritative speech characteristic of a prophet or similarly inspired person. Peter’s speech is described as bold, authoritative, and inspired by the Spirit. The miraculous work of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost was about inspiring the Gospel message and empowering it with authority and efficacy, in the native language of each person present. God was fulfilling his promise to reclaim his global kingdom and all of its peoples, the people of Israel, and all those beyond the territorial borders of Israel in the Gentile regions.

Here is where we clearly see the miracle of Pentecost. Peter gave a sermon in the language that even Gentiles could understand. God was now speaking and inviting those once-alienated Gentiles back into His family, back into covenant love with Him. The miracle of Pentecost was the Gospel being prophetically

declared in the Courtyard of the Gentiles in a language understandable to the Gentiles themselves. The mystery of Pentecost unveiled is how the Gentile nations, exiled from the covenant favor of God because of the audacity of the Tower of Babel, and geographically scattered from His presence, and confused their languages so they could not understand His Word, these people (the likes of you and me) are now welcomed in by the blood of Christ. Gentiles are welcomed in by way of an invitation spoken in our own language.

Pentecost is the dramatic reversal of Babel. It reverses the scattering and gathers in the Temple all people who believe in Jesus Christ. Pentecost puts an end to the deafness and ignorance of non-Jews by preaching the Gospel of God's grace. God's welcome to all the world. If God was going to save the whole world and reclaim His global kingdom, then the exiling, the confusion, the ignorance, and scattering had to be ended. Pentecost signals this dramatic reversal in a spectacular way.

At the heart of Pentecost, the coming of the Holy Spirit launches the new Temple of the Lord, His holy Church. This new church is the result of Christ's work for you and for me. In the message proclaimed by Peter that first Pentecost, we hear the world changing message of Jesus whose life was forfeited at the hands of lawless men. Peter proclaims the condemnation of the law to all who could hear. He does not convict them of their sinfulness and leave them to wallow in despair and self-pity. Peter shares the truth of God's raising up of Jesus, loosing the pangs of death because it was not possible for Jesus to be held by them. Demonstrating the fulfillment of the prophecies of old, Peter says,

Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God has sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing ... Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified. (Acts 2:29-33, 36).

Peter's message cut his hearers to the heart and they asked what they must do to be saved.

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. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself (Acts 2:38-39).

Pentecost is not about you and me. It is about God's actions in restoring mankind to his family. In a dramatic reversal, God undoes the curse of Babel and unifies all people in the language of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Pentecost is not about us; it is for us. Through our baptism, the message of hope, the gospel proclaimed by Peter that day in Jerusalem, is the message of hope for you and me in Christ Jesus our Lord. No longer confused by the arrogance of Babel and its resulting curse, we hear the message of the Gospel in our own language. We, too, receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit, faith in Christ Jesus, who lived for you, was crucified for you, rose on the third day for you, ascended into heaven for you. This Jesus takes up residence in our hearts, keeping us faithful to life everlasting.

In Jesus' Name.

Amen