

**Festival of Pentecost
June 4, 2017**

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Jesus is still pouring out the Spirit..

It's been called the "quintessential Lutheran question." It's made its way into book titles about Lutherans and punch-lines about Lutherans. Many of you had to memorize it over and over as kids in confirmation class, because it's the question found between the commandments, the parts of the creed, the petitions of the Lord's Prayer and Luther's explanations of all those things. Do you know what question I'm talking about? You got it: "What does this mean?"

Luther was onto something with that question, wasn't he? I mean, what good does it do to know a commandment if you don't know what it means to keep it? What good does it do to recite the words of the creed, if you have no idea what you're saying you believe?

Maybe it's a good question for us to ask today, too. Today we celebrate the festival of Pentecost...but do you know why you're celebrating? Christmas and Easter we can explain pretty quickly. But what does Pentecost mean? Oh, sure, we know that for the apostles, it meant they received the gift of the Holy Spirit, just as Jesus promised. So, good for them! But what does it mean for us?

Thankfully, that good Lutheran question was already asked 2000 years ago. Crowds that day heard violent wind, saw fire rest on the apostles' heads, heard them speaking in their own native languages. And they were amazed. And confused. And they asked, "What does this mean?"

And Peter explained. Not just what Pentecost meant for them, but what it means for us. And it really is a reason to celebrate! Because the gift Jesus gave that day is one that he still gives today to you and to me. What does Pentecost mean? Jesus is still pouring out the Spirit... on you and through you.

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. ² Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. ³ They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. ⁴ All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

⁵ Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven.

⁶ When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken. ⁷ Utterly amazed, they asked: "Aren't all these who are speaking Galileans? ⁸ Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language?

⁹ Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰ Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from

Rome ¹¹ (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the

wonders of God in our own tongues!”¹² Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, “What does this mean?”

¹³ Some, however, made fun of them and said, “They have had too much wine.”

¹⁴ Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: “Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. ¹⁵ These people are not drunk, as you suppose. It’s only nine in the morning! ¹⁶ No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:

¹⁷ “In the last days, God says,

I will pour out my Spirit on all people.
Your sons and daughters will prophesy,
your young men will see visions,
your old men will dream dreams.

¹⁸ Even on my servants, both men and women,
I will pour out my Spirit in those days,
and they will prophesy.

¹⁹ I will show wonders in the heavens above
and signs on the earth below,
blood and fire and billows of smoke.

²⁰ The sun will be turned to darkness
and the moon to blood
before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord.

²¹ And everyone who calls
on the name of the Lord will be saved.’

I. On you

When God the Holy Spirit came, he made his arrival pretty obvious. Can you imagine what it was like to be there? Suddenly you hear the sound of a hurricane force wind – only none of the leaves in the trees are moving. Then there’s fire – fire that splits up and rests on the disciples’ heads. But their hair doesn’t burn. Then maybe the most spectacular miracle that marked the Spirit’s arrival: If you’ve ever studied a foreign language, you know how long it takes to learn one. But in an instant, the Spirit gives these men the ability to speak fluently the languages of countries they couldn’t even name.

Yep, the Holy Spirit meant to catch people’s attention with those miracles, and he certainly did. But let’s not get too distracted by them. They weren’t his goal in coming. His goal in coming was an even greater miracle – one he was working in the disciples’ hearts as **they were filled with the Spirit.**

Take Peter, for instance. Not even two months earlier, he was in the high priest’s courtyard, and he was swearing up and down: “*I don’t know who Jesus is.*” But now? Now he stands before a crowd of thousands and says, “*I’m gonna tell you who Jesus is.*” Or take the rest

of the disciples. Even after they had heard and seen and touched the risen Savior, a week later they're still locked in an upper room afraid the Jews would kill them like they killed Jesus. Now, they step forward in front of a crowd of Jews right alongside Peter.

Do you see the greater miracle that day? The hurricane sound without the hurricane wind and the burning fire without the burning hair were audible, visible signs that testified to something even greater: On Pentecost, the Holy Spirit gave these men more faith in Jesus.

So, what does this mean - for us? When the crowd asks, Peter explains: This isn't a one-time miracle just for them. **This is what was spoken through the prophet Joel: In these last days, I will pour out my Spirit on all people...** No, Peter says Jesus is going to keep pouring out his Spirit for all people. He does that – not with miraculous signs – but through the means of grace. In the word and the sacrament, he keeps performing that greater miracle of giving people faith in Jesus.

Do you realize how much you need this? You might remember learning it in the “What does this mean?” of the third article of the creed: “I believe that I cannot by my own thinking or choosing believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to him.” Without the Spirit, you'd never believe in Jesus. It was a miracle when he gave you faith – and it's no less a miracle when he keeps you in faith.

But it's hard to remember that, isn't it? If he came like he did on Pentecost – with wind and fire and different languages – then we might remember how wonderful his work is. But he doesn't. Jesus is still pouring out his Spirit, but now the means are humble – just words on a page or spoken with water or bread or wine. The method isn't miraculous - nothing flashy or exciting about it. We don't see him working. In fact, we don't even feel him working.

So it's easy to *neglect* his working. It happens when we treat the miraculous as if it were mundane. And time spent in God's Word becomes just another item on the to-do list. At church, we hear God's message with a yawn. We come to the Lord's Supper out of habit. The Spirit's working falls further and further on the priority list, and always plays 2nd fiddle to something more “urgent.”

So maybe on this Pentecost we shouldn't just ask, “What does this mean?” But, “What *would* it mean...if Jesus weren't still pouring out his Spirit on me?” I'd quickly fall back into living under the lie I don't really have any sins that need forgiving – or under the crushing guilt that my sins are too many to forgive. I'd live thinking there was no such thing as heaven or hell – or with the false hope I could do enough good to earn the one and escape the other. I'd live frantically trying to scoop up as much of this world as I can before death robs me of it all. I'd lay on my deathbed afraid of what's coming next...only to find out in hell that my fears were very well-founded.

That would be us – without the Holy Spirit. So we really do have reason to celebrate today, don't we? Because what Jesus did for his disciples on that first Pentecost he's still doing today: He's pouring out the Spirit. Freely, no cost, no strings attached, for all people – you and me included. He's pouring out his Spirit through the means of grace, and the Spirit's doing for us what we could never do on our own: Giving us faith. Convicting us of the truth about the greatness of our sins...but then removing our guilt by showing us the Jesus who carried its

crushing weight to the cross and took it away. He convicts us of the truth that we're so bad we could never earn heaven...but also that Jesus is so good that he earned it for us and gives it to us as a gift. Replaces fear with peace as we close our eyes in death...knowing that for Jesus' sake we'll open them in the glory of heaven.

Every time we're hearing his word, come to his supper, Jesus is pouring out his Spirit. Don't let the humble appearance fool you – treasure those means. Cherish them. Eagerly use them. Because the faith the Spirit gives through them is nothing short of miraculous – and just what you need most.

II. *Through you*

But it's also what this world needs most. It's no coincidence Jesus poured out his Spirit the day he did. Pentecost was the Jewish harvest festival – Jerusalem was packed with Jews from all over the world that day. The sound effects and light show on Pentecost wasn't just meant to wow and dazzle – it was meant to draw a crowd. And the ability the Spirit gave the disciples to speak in foreign languages was so that people could understand what the disciples were saying.

And what were they saying? It wasn't gibberish! The crowds said, **“We hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!”** It was the wonders of God they were declaring – the wonderful things Jesus has done to save us. See, Jesus didn't just pour out his Spirit on his disciples that day – through their message, he wanted to pour him out on the crowd, too. And he did! After Peter's sermon, 3,000 believe and are baptized.

So: What does this mean for us? Again, Peter quotes Joel the prophet to teach us: **“In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy...¹⁸ Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy. And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.**

You have to understand the Old Testament to realize how amazing what Peter said is. Then, the Spirit revealed God's word to prophets, who'd proclaim what they heard to others. Peter says in these last days, *all* God's people are prophets. Men, women, young, old – we're *all* prophesying, proclaiming God's word to the world.

In other words, Jesus pours out his Spirit on others through you. So they too might know Jesus, **call on the name of the Lord and be saved.**

Do you see yourself that way? Prophets? We know we're *supposed* to tell others about Jesus...but don't we often treat it as if it were more somebody else's job than mine? Pastor does that – he's trained to do it. But I'm not. Maybe some Christians have a knack for sharing their faith, but I don't. I'll leave it to the rest.

But Peter says here: If you're a Christian, you're a prophet. If you have the Spirit, God uses you to pour out the Spirit on others. You don't have to be trained for this – the Spirit has trained you for this. He's made known to you the wonders of God. The wonder that, in spite of all of our sins, God still loves us. The wonder that he'd become one of us and die to save us. The wonder of forgiveness in Jesus, the wonder of life in heaven with Jesus.

No, the Spirit probably won't use wind and fire to draw a crowd of thousands for you to share that with. But every day, he draws people into your life who need to hear it. No, you may never be able to preach a well-crafted sermon like Peter, but you can tell them the wonderful things Jesus has done for you. And that message is as powerful in your mouth as Peter's sermon was – because Jesus pours out the Spirit through it. He promises that.

What does Pentecost mean? Jesus still pours out the Spirit. And Peter's final words here remind us how urgent that is. The great and glorious day of the Lord is coming. Jesus will return. And then only those who by the Spirit's power call on the name of the Lord will be saved. So now's the time to use the means of grace, so the Spirit keeps faith in us. Now's the time to declare the wonders of God, so he brings others to faith.

Because, now, Jesus is still pouring out his Spirit...on us, and through us. God grant it. Amen.