

# "What Pentecost Is and What It Is Not"

Text: Acts 2: 37-42

Grace, mercy and peace be multiplied to you from God our Father and Creator, from our Lord Jesus Christ, and from the Comforter, God the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Dear Fellow Bondservants of the Triune God:

As most of you know, each week we collect an offering here at St. Paul to be used in the work of the Church. Each week that offering is counted by volunteers from the congregation, each week it is deposited by the Church Council member entrusted with that task, and each week a deposit slip from that transaction is passed along to the Church Treasurer.

Understanding therefore the system that is in place, answer this question: What is the function or value of the deposit slip that is presented each week to the Treasurer, especially in relation to the money it represents? The answer is that the deposit slip really only has value in the area of information or verification. You can't buy even a cup of coffee with a deposit slip, yet that same slip might verify that a small fortune has been deposited into your account.

Why in the world, you are probably wondering, would we be talking about deposit slips on Pentecost Sunday? Deposit slips, believe it or not, can teach us something about Pentecost. When Christians today hear mention of Pentecost, the solid majority conjure up images of ecstatic utterances known today as "speaking in tongues." In fact Pentecost itself has been diminished in the minds of countless Christians to images of strange and somewhat frightening outbursts of emotional religious fervor.

What we are then left with is a situation where the outward manifestation or proof of Pentecost has been promoted to the point that it has almost become the event itself. The Bible teaches us, however, that Pentecost is not all about tongues, or faith healings, or handling snakes, or any such thing. Pentecost is about the personal, indwelling gift of the Holy Spirit, poured out upon the New Testament Christian Church on this day. It is about wisdom, depth of understanding, and courage of commitment.

Here is where deposit slips come into play. Tongues are to Pentecost what deposit slips are to money in the bank. In other words, just as deposit slips are nowhere near as important as the funds they verify, so too the gift of tongues was intended as the outward verification that the incalculable

gift of the Holy Spirit had truly been deposited in full measure on the Day of Pentecost into God's New Testament Church. How foolish then to focus upon (and assign top billing to) the deposit slip (tongues) rather than to the infinitely more valuable commodity it verifies (strength of faith, wisdom, and insight).

With this understanding we begin our study of Pentecost – both what it is and what it is not. Our text for this Pentecost Sunday is found in the New Testament Book of Acts, the Second Chapter:

<sup>ESV</sup> **Acts 2:37-42** *Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" <sup>38</sup> And Peter said to them, "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. <sup>39</sup> 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." <sup>40</sup> And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, "Save yourselves from this crooked generation." <sup>41</sup> So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. <sup>42</sup> And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.*

So far the very words of God the Holy Spirit. This is, of course, the same Holy Spirit who gave those special gifts to the Church on the first Pentecost, and who is celebrated among us today. With true reverence for these words of God we pray, **"Sanctify us by Your Truth, O Lord. Your Word is truth."** Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians, this is the Sunday we dedicate to God the Holy Spirit, the Third and all too often forgotten Person of the Trinity. This is Pentecost Sunday. Pentecost, for many, remains one of those "hard to get a good handle on" church holidays. Most church holidays are easy for us to understand. Christmas, for example, is easy: Jesus was born – God was made man. Good Friday and Easter, simple: Jesus died for my sins so that I don't have to, and rose again as proof that his payment was and is sufficient in the eyes of God the Father to pay my sin debt. Ascension is a bit more difficult, but we can see that event as the moment when Jesus returned to the bliss and glory of heaven, and look forward to the day when he will come again in the same way to take us home.

But what about Pentecost? How should we feel? What is it all about? How should we thank God for Pentecost? The interesting thing is that

the original Pentecost is not at all hard to understand. It is not difficult to see what God did for the Church on that particular occasion. Our confusion comes as a result of what man has said and written about Pentecost since that time. Man has turned Pentecost into something that it is not, and therein lies the confusion. The first thing we will note is that the most common perversions of this day were probably created, at least in part, by spiritual laziness.

In a society that lives and breathes for instant gratification - in everything from food to the purchase of a car or home - it should not surprise us that the craving for "instant" has crept into the spiritual. Understand this well. There is only one source through which all of the mysteries of God are learned - the Bible. There is no shortcut. God works not directly from heaven to man, but has chosen to work through "means." Think of the water that comes out of your faucets. That water doesn't go directly from the well or reservoir into your cook pot. The "means" it takes to get the water from the ground to your kettle is a network of pipes. The Holy Spirit has chosen to work through means instead of working directly. The "pipe" or means through which he works is the gospel, in Word and in sacrament. That is why the Bible says, **"Faith comes through hearing the message** (of Christ Jesus)." That is also why Peter in our text said, **"Repent and be baptized...for the forgiveness of sins..."** God has chosen not to work directly from heaven in man. He has chosen to work through the Word, and the Word connected to the sacraments.

The problem with the modern misconception of Pentecost is that mankind wants to believe that it is some sort of shortcut to spiritual knowledge and growth – a notion that is nonsense born of pure spiritual laziness. The reasoning seems to be that since the first Apostles learned a foreign language without first studying it, therefore we can even today obtain an instant grasp of the Word of God directly from the Holy Spirit. We should therefore never have to go through the challenging and time-consuming process of studying the Bible. Only that's not the way it works. Satan, however, loves this sort of reasoning. What more fertile grounds for the corruption of God's Word can you imagine than several generations of spiritual leaders who have never really studied the Word? How the devil must fairly quiver in anticipation whenever he hears that men are relying not on the Word of God, but on their "personal inner light" to guide their understanding. How many churches are even now paying the price for allowing themselves to be guided by an "inner light" which they mistakenly believe to be God the Holy Spirit working in them?

Our text for this morning reminds us that Pentecost was indeed given to the Church for a reason. That reason was not to encourage spiritual laziness, but to give incredible gifts to God's Church. Our Old Testament

Lesson for this morning (Genesis 11:1-9) provided the background for the need of the special gift of languages given to the Apostles on the first Pentecost. God had to confuse the speech of the people at the Tower of Babel so that they would obey his command to disperse and fill the earth. At the first Pentecost, God gave to his Church the means to instantly overcome this obstacle by blessing the Apostles with the ability to speak that all-important Word in different languages instantly. Unfortunately, as we noted earlier, mankind has since elevated this one small aspect of that first Pentecost into superstar status.

This gift of languages, or tongues, was in fact a relatively small part of the gift of the Holy Spirit. It was both a visible proof and a means to communicate. In fact only when the Apostles started to *communicate* were the real gifts of Pentecost revealed to mankind. Remember the nagging idea that the Jews could not get out of their heads (including the Apostles themselves)? They clung tenaciously to the idea that the Messiah was to be an *earthly* ruler. Even after Jesus had re-educated his men for three years, even after he had told them countless times that his **"kingdom is not of this world,"** even though he had allowed himself to be killed and then to rise again - still what was the very last question they asked him before his ascension? **"Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"** (Acts 1:6) Note too that the disciples were timid and fearful prior to Pentecost. They spent their days locked away in seclusion – passive and scared.

And then came Pentecost - the Gift of the promised Holy Spirit. The *proof* that something was different was of course the speaking in different tongues or languages. The far greater gifts, though not so obvious, were also very evident. First of all the disciples, from this point on, never again appeared uncertain or unclear about the gospel. Secondly, they no longer hid in fear. Finally, these first missionaries no longer hoarded the Word of Truth but freely and boldly shared it with a dying world. They never again retreated.

How foolish and superficial it is to dwell on the speaking in different languages to the exclusion of the far greater wonders that were worked by God the Holy Spirit on that day. How magnificently, for example, the Apostle Peter divided law and gospel in that first Pentecost sermon. This was a direct demonstration of the greatest gifts given at Pentecost. First he spoke pure law to his audience, both pointing out and then condemning their sins. Our text says simply and yet profoundly, **"They were cut to the heart."** What joy to read that those men, through the word spoken by Peter, gave up on themselves and stood crushed by the weight of their sinfulness. Only then did those sinners speak the words that every witnessing child of God longs to

hear: **"Brothers, what shall we do?"** The law had done its job. It was time for the gospel.

What happened next? Peter masterfully laid aside the law and pointed those crushed sinners to the good news of forgiveness in Jesus Christ. The people had asked what they could do. Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit's gift of spiritual wisdom, informed them that they could not *do* anything. **"Repent and be baptized,"** he told them. The *doing* would not come from man but from God the Holy Spirit, who would work faith through the gospel, whether in the spoken word or in the sacrament of Baptism. This is not law (man working or doing) but pure gospel (God working, God doing.) What pure sweet joy this gospel message must have produced in those men and women – those who could well have been part of the very crowd that had called for the crucifixion of the Son of God. The man they had crucified had himself died to pay for their sins. Despite all that they had ever done wrong, they were forgiven.

Here we see the true gifts of Pentecost. Here we stand as witness to the Holy Spirit living and working in man. Here we find the Spirit of God where he has promised to be found, fulfilling the promises made by the Savior before his resurrection. The speaking in different languages converted no one. In fact it confused those who heard – causing some to suspect that alcohol was at work at nine in the morning. Hardly the stuff that mass conversions are made of. But the Word, the powerful message of law and gospel that Peter spoke with the wisdom and confidence of Pentecost, that *did* have a powerful effect. Then and now.

Peter's own inspired words bear out the truth that this was the greatest gift of Pentecost. He said, **"Repent and be baptized."** The purpose for being baptized? **"...for the forgiveness of your sins."** God the Holy Spirit here promises to work faith through the means of grace in baptism. He goes on, **"And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."** Would everyone who heard Peter speak in tongues? Hardly. Yet everyone, according to Peter, would most certainly receive **"the gift of the Holy Spirit."** That great gift then must be something other than the speaking in tongues. By these words we can know that the greatest gift was and is the wisdom and insight that is ours through the Holy Spirit working in us through the means of grace.

You and I share in this gift, even today, which is why on this day we celebrate God's gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Thank God in particular for the greatest of his gifts that day - the faith, wisdom and understanding to receive the truth of God's Word, especially the gospel message of salvation in Christ Jesus. Pentecost does not offer us any kind of direct,

unstudied revelation from God the Holy Spirit. Do not allow Satan or the world to mislead you into chasing that which is not, to the abandonment of that which truly is. Abandon instead the quick fixes and shortcuts and turn daily to the Word. Let that life-giving Word be the true joy and delight of your heart, from this day forward. Live and breathe that Word of God day by day, for in that Word the Holy Spirit has promised to meet with you, still today, and to shower you with gifts whose true worth man is not able to fully comprehend or appreciate.

*"Grant to us, Lord, the true gifts of Pentecost." Amen.*

## Scripture Readings

<sup>ESV</sup> **Genesis 11:1-9** Now the whole earth had one language and the same words. <sup>2</sup> And as people migrated from the east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. <sup>3</sup> And they said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly." And they had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar. <sup>4</sup> Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth." <sup>5</sup> And the LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of man had built. <sup>6</sup> And the LORD said, "Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language, and this is only the beginning of what they will do. And nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. <sup>7</sup> Come, let us go down and there confuse their language, so that they may not understand one another's speech." <sup>8</sup> So the LORD dispersed them from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city. <sup>9</sup> Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of all the earth. And from there the LORD dispersed them over the face of all the earth.

<sup>ESV</sup> **Acts 2:1-6** When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. <sup>2</sup> And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. <sup>3</sup> And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. <sup>4</sup> And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. <sup>5</sup> ¶ Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. <sup>6</sup> And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language.

# ST. PAUL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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Today's Organist: Angela Pfennig

**Pentecost Sunday – May 15, 2016**

## The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

## The Opening Hymn – 224 (Red Hymnal)

"Come Holy Ghost, God and Lord"

## The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (Brown Hymnal)

## The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

**The First Lesson:** (Genesis 11:1-9) Mankind sinned against God's command to "fill and subdue the earth" by attempting to build one grand, central city around the Tower of Babel. God frustrated this sin by confusing the languages of man. This set the stage for *one of the elements* of the event we celebrate on this day – Pentecost – which was the special gift or ability to speak in other tongues or languages. God thereby made provision for the punishment he visited upon mankind at the Tower of Babel.

## The Psalm of the Day – Psalm 51 (Page 31)

**The Second Lesson:** (Acts 2:1-6) This is the account of the event we celebrate on this Sunday in the Church Year – Pentecost. Again, speaking in different languages was by no means the greatest gift given on this day. That special ability was an outward manifestation or proof of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on God's Church in the New Testament era. On this day then we seek to understand and thank God for Pentecost.

## The Confession of Faith -

The Apostolic Creed – page 15. (Brown Hymnal)

## The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 226 (Verses 1-7) (Red Hymnal)

"Come, Oh, Come, Thou Quickening Spirit"

## The Sermon – Text: Acts 2:37-42 (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

**"What Pentecost Is, and What It Is Not"**

## The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

## The Post Sermon Hymn -225 (Red Hymnal)

"Come, Holy Spirit, Come"

## The Offering followed by the Prayers

## The Benediction

## The Closing Hymn -226 (Verses 8-9) (Red Hymnal)

"Come, Oh, Come, Thou Quickening Spirit"

## Silent Prayer

**Welcome!** - We warmly welcome any visitors who might be with us this morning and invite you to join us every Sunday at this time. St. Paul is a congregation in fellowship with the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) – a conservative Lutheran synod with churches and missions throughout the United States, as well as Canada, India, and Africa. We are glad you are here. Thank you for letting us share the Word of God with you. Please record your visit in our Guest Book, and come again!

## Attendance - Sunday (75) Ave (48)

### This Week at St. Paul:

<b>Today</b>	<b>-9:00 a.m.</b>	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	<b>-10:00 a.m.</b>	– Sunday Worship Service
	<b>-11:15 a.m.</b>	– Fellowship/Coffee Time
<b>Saturday</b>	<b>-10:00 a.m.</b>	– ILC Graduation Service
<b>Next Sunday</b>	<b>-10:00 a.m.</b>	– Sunday Worship w/Communion
	<b>-11:15 a.m.</b>	– Fellowship/Coffee Time

**CLC News** – Pastor David Pfeiffer has accepted the call to Holy Trinity of West Columbia, SC. Immanuel of Mankato, MN has called seminary graduate Joseph Naumann, who is also considering the call to Mt Zion of Detroit. Gethsemane School of Spokane, WA has called Teacher Jeff Karnitz.

**Pastor Out of Town** – Pastor Roehl is scheduled to attend the graduation service at ILC in Eau Claire on Saturday, returning Saturday night.

**Summer Schedule** – This morning is our final Sunday school and Bible Class, as we transition to our summer schedule. Please also note that there are no mid-week Bible Classes or Confirmation. We will, God willing, resume our normal schedule after Labor Day.

**Ruth Meiers Food Drive** – We are once again conducting our food drive in support of the Ruth Meiers House. Please see the information on the table in the fellowship hall, and bring any items you would like to donate by June 1. For more information, please see Eileen McEnroe, or refer to the card in your mailbox.

**Baby Shower** – A baby shower is planned for next Sunday for Samuel and Karla Meyer, and their son David. The shower is hosted by Eileen M. and Angela P. For more information please refer to the card in your mailbox, or speak to one of the hostesses.