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Trinity Lutheran Church
Decatur, Illinois
Pentecost Day
May 31st, 2020

“Grand Opening”

God’s PEACE is ALWAYS YOURS in Jesus.

Hear the Word of God from Acts 2,

“When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enable them....Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd... “This is what was spoken of by the prophet Joel, ‘In the last days I will pour out my Spirit on all people...and everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

DEAR FRIENDS IN CHRIST,

Grand openings are always big events – fireworks, balloons, searchlights – anything to grab attention. Wind, fire, tongues, and life-giving words are what Pentecost is all about! The wind, fire, and tongues were unique at that first Pentecost. They were the pyrotechnics – sort of like the fireworks and balloons at a Grand Opening – for this was the Grand Opening of the church.

Some call Pentecost the church's birthday, and in a general sense that's correct – Pentecost was the day the Gospel was first proclaimed to all the different people groups gathered in Jerusalem, was believed by thousands, and was carried out into the world. But in a narrower sense Pentecost is not quite the church's birthday. Remember how God put Adam into a deep sleep, took a rib from Adam's wounded side, and formed a bride named Eve? So, in the same way, God caused His Son, Jesus, to fall into the deep sleep of death on Good Friday, and then He formed out of Jesus' wounded side a bride for His Son, called the church. Good Friday is technically the church's birthday, and that's why there was already a congregation of 120 believers – the entire, one, holy, Christian and Apostolic church, packed into someone's living room. But God was about to franchise His church into all the world, beginning with the BIG Pentecost event that happened on this day.

Pentecost is better seen as the church's Grand Opening. And when it comes to Grand Openings, timing is everything. You need to kick things off when there are people around. And so God chose the festival of Pentecost, one of the three biggest feasts in the Old Testament, when nearly a quarter of a million people would have been gathered in Jerusalem to celebrate the first-fruits of the winter wheat harvest, and God begins to gather the first harvest of believers, who heard the preaching of Jesus crucified and risen from the dead for sinners, and 3000 believers were baptized by the end of that day. Now that's quite a Grand Opening.

Remember on Easter Sunday, when the Risen Savior came into the upper room where 10 of the disciples were gathered, and He breathed on them the Holy Spirit? That was a little Pentecost – and Jesus harvested those 10 disciples as a sort of first-fruits of the great resurrection harvest. He harvested them with the Good News that the Savior Who was crucified in payment to God for our sins, wasn't dead any more and then He told them the significance of His resurrection: ***“Peace Be With You”, and with that He breathed on them and said, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit’***” And the Word “PEACE” means: “everything has been set right between people and God, because of our crucified and risen Savior, Jesus. On that first Easter evening a little Pentecost was taking place, and wherever you have the Good News of Jesus and Baptism are, Pentecost is still happening!

Now, 50 days later, Jesus breathed on 120 disciples that were gathered in that upper room, to kick off a bigger Pentecost. We're told there was a "***mighty rushing wind***" like the whirlwind from which God spoke to Job; but in this heavenly hurricane nothing is destroyed. No walls fall down. The roof isn't blown off. This is a Gospel wind, to let other in on the Good News that everyone's included in the all-inclusives death of Jesus, before anyone is excluded by their own refusal of the gift.

We're told that tongues of fire came down upon them. Remember John the Baptist had said, "***He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit, and with fire.***"? In the OT God reminded His people that He was with them in a Pillar of Fire. Christ spoke to Moses in the burning bush, and neither the bush nor Moses were destroyed. We're told that there was fire on Mt. Sinai, when Moses received the Word of God, but Moses was not harmed. So this is a Gospel fire resting as tongues on each of the believers, and they're not burned up by it. Not a hair of their heads is singed. This is a Gospel, life-giving fire; representing the gracious presence of God.

And with the wind and the fire come WORDS – Spirit-filled, life-giving, saving words, given to the church to believe and to speak, by the Holy Spirit. You see, the Holy Spirit is in the delivery business. The Holy Spirit is the UPS or Fed-Ex man of the Holy Trinity, taking the Words of Jesus, and delivering them to us.

Jesus had already hung dead on a cross for our salvation. The Father already said the whole world was reconciled to Him, when He raised Christ's dead bones to life on Easter morning. But YOU have to be told and believe the YOU'RE included in the death of Jesus; otherwise, the cross of Christ would be of no benefit to you. And that's the role of the Holy Spirit – to deliver the GOODS. In John 14 Jesus said, "***The Holy Spirit, Whom the Father will send in My Name, will teach you all things, and will remind you of everything I have said.***" The BIG GIFT of Pentecost is not the wind, fire, and tongues – that's the pyrotechnics – the BIG GIFT is the Spirit-filled words and life-giving breath of God, giving spiritual mouth-to-mouth to sinners, through the mouths of men: "***The sins you forgive in My Name are forgiven.***" Like Ezekiel, in the Valley of Dry Bones, with our human vocal cords, we breathe on the dead, and give them mouth-to-mouth through the Good News: "***Be of Good Cheer, your sins are forgiven!***" And they come to life. **Page 3**

The Spirit enabled the disciples to speak the singular Good News – that the whole world is forgiven because the Son of God bled to death on a cross one good Friday – in many languages, all at once, and each person heard the Good News in his own language: Parthians, Medes, Mesopotamians, Judeans, Cappodocians, Cretans, Arabs, Elamites, mosquito bites, bud lights,....you name it....everyone heard the mighty works of God for their salvation, in their own words. That’s the Gospel’s **“FOR YOU”!** Luther says, **“The words: “For You” require all hearts to believe.”** You’re included in the death of Jesus. You’re in. This Jesus who is for all, who lived for all, who bore the sins of all, who died for all, who forgave all, who rose for all, who will raise up all on the last day, is also FOR YOU, placed into the manger of God’s Word, in your own language, for YOU to hear and believe.

You’ve been give the Holy Spirit at your Personal Pentecost – which happened either at your Baptism, or through the Word of God – to let YOU know that YOU, the sinner, died with Christ – even though the nails didn’t go through your body – because God, for the sake of Christ, reckons, declares and counts the sinner in you dead – dead in the death of Jesus – and He reckons, credits, and sees you righteous in the righteousness of Christ, and risen to die no more, in your Baptism into Christ.

And now that you’re included in dead and risen Jesus, your primary vocation is to let the whole world know that they’re included too. Don’t say that you can’t do that. In repentance admit that you’re refusing to do it, and then turn from that sin. Remember, 50 days before Pentecost Peter was a wimp. All the disciples were. He wouldn’t even let a little servant girl know about Jesus. But now, by the Holy Spirit – even on the threat of death – Peter confessed, **“This Jesus – whom you crucified –God has raised from the dead.’** What changed Peter? Two things: the resurrection of Jesus, and the Holy Spirit convincing Peter through the Word convincing a sinful Peter, **“Because I live you will live also.”** And you have both of those gifts also.

So Peter preached and said, **“In the last days, God says, ‘I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh.”** Pentecost is really the beginning of the end. The beginning of the last days. The first-fruits of that final harvest God is gathering. The clock is ticking. Nothing more needs to be done for the salvation of the world, except for people to hear it and believe it.

It's the church's job that they hear it, and the Holy Spirit's job that they believe it. You've got the message: ***“Father forgive them. It is finished. Christ has died. The cross worked. The tomb is empty. Christ is reigning. And the Holy Spirit will take from what is mine, and make it known unto you. And then the end will come.”*** Forgiven mouths forgive. Blood-bought forgiveness loosens our tongues. In one day the church went from 120 to over 3000 all through the life-giving, Spirit-filled, Word of God, proclaimed by those who now knew that Jesus' death and resurrection was for them, but not just for them. The church still has the fiery breath of God – although we sometime don't act like it. We have the same Word that was breathed out of the mouth of God on Easter evening, and Pentecost morning, chocked full of the same Holy Spirit.

The key to Pentecost is not the pyrotechnics – the wind, fire, and tongues – even fireworks gets old when you see it every day. Just ask the folks living next to Disneyworld. The wind, fire, and tongues were like the balloons and fireworks at a grand opening. This was the grand opening of the church, but grand openings are NOT *“business as usual”*. Business as usual is the WORD and BAPTISM. When the wind, fire and tongues, came upon the disciples what did they do? They proclaimed the Good News of Jesus. Peter said, ***“God raised up this Jesus – whom you crucified – and made Him both Lord and Christ....He raised Him from the dead, freeing Him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on Him.”*** And when the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said, ***“How then can we be saved?”*** And Peter didn't say, ***“You need to speak in tongues, or receive two baptisms, or perform well enough.”*** NO! He said, ***“Repent! And be baptized in the Name of Jesus, for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the Holy Spirit....and everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”*** What Pentecost and the End Times is all about is that God breathed His life-giving Word on us in baptism and through the Word, and by the Spirit our dead bones came to life; so now we breathe those life-giving Words on others, and Baptize, and by the Spirit their dead bones come to life to die no more. All in Jesus. Amen.