

Sermon: Pentecost

Text: Acts 2:1-21 (v.17a)

Theme: The Work of the Spirit

Goal: To assure that the same Spirit who came upon the Apostles on the 1st Pentecost is still active among us.

Dear Friends,

Introduction: Pentecost is not just an event of the past to be remembered. Of course, the pouring of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles in a very special way – a violent wind and tongues of fire, happened only once 50 days after Easter. But the Spirit is still active and coming upon us to reveal Christ and to bring us salvation.

Without the work of the Spirit throughout the history the Christian Church wouldn't have survived or even be established and we wouldn't be Christians.

Martin Luther describes the work of the Spirit in a very didactic way in the Small Catechism: *"The Holy Spirit...calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the true faith."*

I – The Holy Spirit calls

The frightened disciples "were all together in one place" waiting for the promise of the Father Jesus had told them to wait from above. Fifty days already passed since the resurrected Jesus had appeared to them and it was only 10 days before that He had left them, going back to heaven on Ascension Day. They knew and believed that Jesus was with them and that they had a huge task to accomplish: To share the Gospel with the entire world! But they knew also that they couldn't do it by themselves. Jesus had promised them power from high.

Pentecost was a big festival for the Jews and many Jews from all around the world used to go to Jerusalem for the celebrations. God chose this specific day to begin to share the Gospel with all the nations, because they were representatives from at least 15 countries, as we heard in the reading of Acts 2. “Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where the disciples were sitting.” This sound called the attention of the entire population of Jerusalem and of the visitors, who ran to the streets following the direction where the sound was going to. And “they saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of” the apostles.

This was the way the Holy Spirit chose to **call** people together on the first Pentecost. Do we hear the sound of a strong wind nowadays calling people? Do we see lights on the head of God’s servants? Not anymore. But the wind of the Spirit is still blowing and the fire of the Spirit is still kindled wherever God’s Word is being preached. *“I believe that...the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel”* we confessed with Luther. There is no other way how the Spirit calls people to God but through the preaching of God’s Word. This includes the Baptism and the Lord Supper, who are God’s Word added to visible elements. If someone has doubts about the way the Spirit acts nowadays, just think about how you were called to the Christian faith? Most of us were called through the Holy Baptism as infants; others were called by the Gospel as adults. The Spirit doesn’t blow from the sky anymore, or comes through special personal revelations as many believe, or in tongues of fire. The Means of Grace as channels through which the Holy Spirit works are clear in the Bible.

II – The Holy Spirit gathers

And this call of the Spirit happens one by one until the called people

come **together** in the Holy Christian Church. *“I believe that ...the Holy Spirit gathers... the whole Christian church on earth.”* The fact that we are united in a congregation is not simply the result of human organization. I always find it a miracle that people still come to the church on Sunday morning, in spite of so many other appointments and leisure opportunities. It’s the work of the Holy Spirit to strengthen our faith and our love for each other. Some people resist to the Holy Spirit and don’t listen to His call to come together as God’s family. Paul warns: “Do not put out the Spirit’s fire” (1 Thessalonians 5:19). The lack of fuel extinguishes the fire.

“A crowd came together in bewilderment” at the first Pentecost. The Holy Spirit had called them together to listen to the Gospel of Jesus. Peter had the opportunity to announce them that Jesus of Nazareth, who had been put to death by them some weeks before, was raised from the death by God the Father and that He is the Lord and Christ!

III – The Holy Spirit enlightens

When we say that *“the Holy Spirit... **enlightens** me with His gifts”*, this is not just a figure of language. The entire Bible, from the beginning to the end, always presents God as Light and His work as a work of light, a work of the day, and not of the darkness or of the night. The contrast between light and darkness is well known and experienced by all. And this is the work of the Spirit when He creates faith in the life of each of us. We are not walking in darkness anymore, aimlessly in our lives, but we are enlightened to walk in the Light, who is Christ Himself. We walk secure in the enlightened paths of Jesus, guided by the Holy Spirit. He gives us the gifts of faith, love, hope, and all the other spiritual gifts we need for the new life in Christ.

The multitude gathered on the first Pentecost was enlightened by the Spirit and came to repentance and faith. About three thousand were baptized that day and were added to the number of believers.

IV – The Holy Spirit sanctifies

The work of the Holy Spirit doesn't stop after our conversion. He follows up each person, **sanctifying** us day by day. Each time we receive the forgiveness of sins, each time we are guided to do some good deeds, each time we grow in knowledge and hope, the Holy Spirit is sanctifying us, till we are perfect in heaven. Even though we are saints in the eyes of God by the grace of Jesus, we struggle every day against temptations and sin. Sanctification is a process that continues as far as our grave. But we are not alone in this battle. The Holy Spirit sanctifies us like a daily shower when we stand under His blessings poured out from His Word and the Sacraments.

V – The Spirit keeps us in the true faith

Because the Holy Spirit doesn't want to lose those who He had called, gathered, enlightened and sanctified, He **keeps** every one of us in the true faith and He wants to keep us till the end. Even if some, like the Prodigal Son, run away from the Father's house, the Holy Spirit goes and searches for him, trying to bring him back. He never gives up, but He gives us all conditions and resources to preserve us in the true faith in Jesus. The Gospel is offered daily in the Bible reading; the fellowship with Jesus and His family is offered weekly at the Lord's Supper; the forgiveness is always available when we pray the Lord's Prayer and when we receive the Absolution at the Service.

Conclusion: Pentecost is still a reality in our lives and in the life of the Church. Follow the sound of the Spirit and gather with your fellows to receive the blessings of the Holy Spirit. To Him be the glory, with the Father and the Son. Amen.

Pastor Carlos Walter Winterle, Cape Town, 15 May 2016