

Happy Pentecost Sunday! This is the beginning of the Season of Pentecost, also called the Season of the Church. We have two seasons. The first is the Season of Christ; from Advent until Ascension Day we focus on the life and work of Jesus from his incarnation to his Passion, Resurrection, and Ascension.

The focus of the Season of Pentecost is the building up of the Body of Christ, beginning with the introduction of the 3rd person of the Holy Trinity, the Holy Spirit. This morning we're going to talk about what this means for our walk with God and with one another.

OPENING PRAYER

ACTS 2:1-21

When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. ² And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. ³ And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. ⁴ And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. ⁵ Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. ⁶ And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. ⁷ And they were amazed and astonished, saying, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?" ⁸ And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? ⁹ Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰ Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, ¹¹ both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians—we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God." ¹² And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" ¹³ But others mocking said, "They are filled with new wine." ¹⁴ But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them, "Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words. ¹⁵ For these men are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day. ¹⁶ But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel: ¹⁷ "And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; ¹⁸ even on my male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy. ¹⁹ And I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke; ²⁰ the sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the day of the Lord comes, the great and magnificent day. ²¹ And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved."

Originally, Pentecost was a Jewish celebration 50-days after Passover. In Hebrew, it was called the Feast of Weeks. In Greek, it was named for the 50-days after Passover, as in “pente” for 50, or Pentecost. It was a festive occasion, for the people celebrated the Exodus, God’s deliverance of them from bondage under the pharaoh in Egypt.

But the disciples weren’t celebrating. Despite the festivities happening all around, they were huddled up together in hiding, a ragtag bunch of unemployable misfits. Jesus had been with them just the week before and they had watched him ascend into heaven, but they despaired, nonetheless.

But God showed up. Just as he had during the Exodus, God showed up. Jesus had told the disciples much earlier that, **“The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit” (John 3:8).**

The disciples could not have anticipated how the Holy Spirit would come to them. They did not know what they needed; they had not asked for the Holy Spirit to intervene. But God showed up, and he provided everything they needed for their next step in the ministry Jesus had called them to.

God showing up at just the right time is one of his signature moves. The Bible is filled with stories about God showing up. God showed up for Adam in the Garden with the fateful words, **“Where are you?”** God showed up for Noah, and he said, **“Make for yourself an ark.”** God showed up for Abraham, and said, **“Go forth from your country.... And I will bless you.”** And he showed up for Mary and said, **“you will bear a son, and you will call his name, Jesus.”**

God shows up at critical moments in our own lives. There was a time in my life when I was hurt; I was frustrated. But it was there in the midst of my sadness the Lord reached down and calmed my spirit, lifted up my heart, and I experienced his peace. What was happening around me remained the same, but God showed up and he gave me a reason to hope again.

When God showed up on Pentecost, Peter quoted the prophet Joel, who had written some 800 years earlier, **“in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I**

will pour out my Spirit on all flesh.... And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Acts 2:17,21).

Peter’s knowledge of God’s Word was like a rudder for him. The wind of the Spirit blew, it caught the sails of his heart, and the Word of God which he held there, directed him and his listeners to Jesus.

We cannot hold too high a view of the Scripture. St. Paul wrote that he held **“fast to the Word of Life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain” (Philippians 2:16).** God’s Word provides direction.

The author of Hebrews wrote that God’s word **“is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12).** God’s Word shapes our conscience and our identity as children of God.

St. Paul taught that **“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16).** God’s Word is about understanding the things of God.

Peter had known God’s Word for a long time, and he’d personally known the heart of Jesus. But it was only now with this work of God among the people on Pentecost that he was inspired to preach the Gospel. For me this speaks to an opportunity for growth. Peter was saved by God’s grace when Jesus rose from the grave on the 3rd day, but he was still growing. On Pentecost he became the mouthpiece of God, the spokesman of the Christian church which the Lord had envisioned from the beginning when he renamed him, **“Peter,”** or the **“Rock.”** Try to imagine what may’ve happened if Jesus had given up on Peter amidst his many blunders at any point in their walk together. But he didn’t.

So too God never gives up on you and me. But he shows up: He shows up when we’re down with a word of encouragement from a brother or sister; he shows up with resources to care for our family when we need them most; he shows up with an inspirational thought when we’re at our wits end. God is with you.

The whole point of the signs and wonders of that first Christian Pentecost is often lost amidst the shock and awe of the flames of fire that appeared to settle on the

Apostles and the foreign languages which they spoke, languages they had never known before. But in God's world, signs and wonders are never an end in themselves. Rather, they always point to something else. They are like a flag waving on a ship which says to those who see it, "Hey, I'm from the U.S." That's what signs and wonders in the Bible are for. They say, "Hey! Look over here! I have something from God to tell you!" According to the Prophet Joel the something that God wanted to tell everyone was **"that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Acts 2:21).**

This morning's reading from Acts does not include the climax of the story. After Peter quoted the prophet Joel, he brought his message around to how God saved everyone through Christ's death on the Cross, and then the story reads, **"when (the people) heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Brothers, what shall we do?' ³⁸ 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....' And those who received (Peter's) word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. ⁴² And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers" (Acts 2:37-42).**

It was no accident that Israel was celebrating its deliverance from bondage under Pharaoh when God the Holy Spirit showed up. Our Lord Jesus came to call us all from every tribe, people, and language to set us free from sin, death, and the devil. Our Lord set us free from the heartache of this world. Our Lord set us free from the emptiness inside. God showed up, and he continues to show up day by day in each one of our lives. Like Israel, we too celebrate this great deliverance. Brothers and sisters in Christ, Happy Pentecost!

This week let us freely share with the Lord all of our cares and needs. We do not know how or when he'll show up, but we know he will.

This week let us grow in our mastery of God's Word, like St. Peter did, that we might recognize the hand of God moving among us.

And this week let us share this Good News with another person who really needs to hear it, in the name of Jesus. Amen.