

It was almost a year ago that I made my way to Peace Lutheran, in Loves Park, Illinois. Having served as vacancy pastor of the congregation for a little over 10 months, the journey was a familiar one. I had traveled the route 3-4 times a week normally. It took about an hour. This was a special day – we were going to install and ordain a new seminary graduate as pastor. My vehicle was a bit low on gas, but I had enough to get there. Then I would buy some more gas for the journey home. What I did not realize until later is that I had forgotten my wallet at home. It wasn't until after the service and the fellowship meal and almost all were gone that I realized my predicament. I felt a bit embarrassed to ask to borrow money for gas but decided to ask the young pastor from our Rockford congregation – and since many young people seldom carry cash – he had to ask his wife - we came up with \$10 so I was able to make it home.

In our text, we witness one of the most amazing events in history! Pentecost! The Ascended Savior poured out the Holy Spirit in a special way and he changed the course of history for this world! Today we live in a world that for the most part either doesn't care or doesn't understand the meaning of Pentecost. Many with the crowd in our text ask the question, "What does this mean?" There remains an uncertainty or doubt about this Holy Spirit and his work.

For most of us, that Spirit first came to us in our Baptism to bring us to faith, but if we are to make it home to heaven we need his continuous work in our hearts through Word and Sacrament. We need to regularly be 'refueled'. Paul says in Galatians (5:25), "**Since we live by the Spirit, let us let us keep in step with the Spirit**". Do our lives reflect the constant need to 'refuel' on the Word and thus to live "in step with the Spirit"? So we consider –

THEME: THE HOLY SPIRIT COMES AT PENTECOST – WHAT DOES THIS MEANS?

First - I. MAN SPEAKS;

then II. GOD SPEAKS.

The name Pentecost was not a new one at the time of Jesus. For centuries, God's chosen people had celebrated this important festival – a celebration of the harvest, 50 days after the celebration of the Passover. Pentecost literally means 'fiftieth'. But now in the New Testament Church, Pentecost that came 50 days after Christ's Resurrection would have new meaning.

This day had been promised already in Old Testament times – particularly in our first lesson from Joel that Peter quotes in our text. Prior to his Crucifixion, in our Gospel reading Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit in a special way. On the very day that Jesus ascended into heaven he told his disciples, "**Do not leave Jerusalem but wait for the gift my Father promised... you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.**" Acts 1:4

Now at Pentecost, 50 days after Jesus rose from the dead, we find the disciples together - not just the 12 but the 120. Suddenly, unexpectedly, perhaps like a tornado that might sneak up on you, the room was filled with the sound of a violent wind. Those who witnessed the event saw, "**what seemed to be tongues of fire that appeared and came down to rest on each of them.**" They heard and saw an amazing display. And then the topper, "**All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.**" The Holy Spirit filled the hearts of these disciples and gave them the ability to speak in intelligible languages about the Savior. How do we know these were actual languages not gibberish? We are told there were "**God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven...**" And those who spoke were all Galileans, uneducated- but "**each of us hears them speaking in his own native language.**"

God, the Holy Spirit, spoke through the disciples. But over that all we hear MAN SPEAKING. Many spoke in ignorance. The sights and sounds had attracted a large crowd. They were amazed – but bewildered and confused and asked, "**What does this mean?**"

Ignorance! Perhaps, not unlike the native tribesman, the aborigine of Australia, who sees the Mona Lisa, considered by many to be a great work of art, but has no hint of its true beauty or importance. “What does this mean?” Those who spoke are described as **“God-fearing Jews”**- surely they of all people should have known some of God’s promises – A SAVIOR IS COMING. But the Holy Spirit had not yet opened their hearts through the message of the Word. And all they could say was, “What does this mean?”

Man speaks! Others spoke not only in ignorance, but with vicious, evil intent – to ridicule. **“Some, however, made fun of them and said, ‘They have had too much wine.’** Ignorant mockers! Like those who told Jesus, ‘If you are the Son of God, come down from the Cross.’ Such ignorance, such evil intent should not surprise us – the Holy Spirit had not completed his work in their hearts. And the Lord tells us, **“The man without the spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him...”** I Corinthians 2:14.

Our natural state is not unlike those who spoke in our text. Our natural spiritual blindness, still at times hates the wisdom of God. The reason why we ask, ‘What does this mean?’ in ignorance or even make fun of godly things – is because too often, we ignore the means God, the Holy Spirit, uses to speak to us – to change hearts. How often don’t we leave our Bibles on the shelf and are drawn into an unspiritual crowd and then deceived!

The world in which we live is EXPECTING MORE in some areas but SETTLING FOR LESS in others. Expecting more material things and settling for less in spiritual blessings. Let me give you an example. In 1980, my family and I moved into a Milwaukee bungalow- a story and ½, 1000 square feet on the first floor originally 2 bedrooms, one bath. The family that built the house and lived there for 50 years raised 5 children there...How many people today would do that? Yet in that time that included the great depression, WWII, some economic growth but more struggles... Christian Elementary School rose to an all-time high in our Wisconsin Synod. A large number of Area Lutheran High Schools were started.

How could they afford it? It was a matter of priorities. Many were convinced – how could we afford NOT to give our children and young people the best possible Christian Education? Where are we today? Having seen some of the highest employment and incomes? Enrollments have dropped dramatically. In some part due to lower birth rates but largely because priorities are different. In a land that has known PLENTY – the focus has moved to jobs and careers, homes and vacations, sports programs and secular academics. *Perhaps, one of the lessons the Lord is seeking to teach us through this pandemic is this –***“man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.”** Matthew 4:4 There are things that are more important than winning a football scholarship or a trip to Disney World!

Sadly too often we have been caught up in the same sin. Do we recognize the danger? Or do we sit back with the Pentecost crowd and snicker and say, ‘What is that little man in the pulpit so excited about?’ What does this mean? If that is what we hear inside, it is MAN SPEAKING – sinful man and if that is the one we continue to listen to our souls will be lost. We may die with an open mind but a closed Bible.

II. But Christian friends, that’s not what God wants for you and me. That is not what he wanted on that first Pentecost. God, the Holy Spirit, Speaks! Listen!

Do you know why God gave the disciples the ability to speak in tongues? It was not just to wow the crowd. Rather, the Holy Spirit filled their hearts and moved their lips to speak the beautiful message to be shared with every nation under heaven. **“We hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own languages.”**

What do you think of when you hear the words, “the wonders of God”? Perhaps, the amazing 6 day creation, the crossing of the Red Sea on dry ground, Daniel in the Lion’s Den or Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead after 4 days. These are great wonders!

But there was one central wonder that the Holy Spirit wanted to share on that first Pentecost. God's love for sinners in spite of their sin. Peter spoke to the crowd, **"You (not just the guy next to you), you put to death the Son of God."** You nailed him to a cross. You should have known better, but you killed him. For your sin you deserve to die eternally, but listen to this wonder, Jesus did not remain dead, **"God raised him from death, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep hold on him."** Death could not hold the Son of God! Jesus died for sin! The price is now paid for all sin for all people. How do we know? He rose from death in victory!

The Spirit is speaking to us today in these words. He is saying, 'I know there have been times in the past when you have been lazy, ignorant of the Word, unwilling listeners, maybe even mockers of the Word of God. By this sin, 'You put to death the Son of God' made it necessary for him to die! But in spite of that -Jesus died for you! He shed his blood for you! He lives for you! Now repent, change your way of thinking-recognize your sins, believe in My forgiveness. **"Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, so that your sins may be forgiven. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."**

God speaks – 3000 heard and believed on that first Pentecost. The Holy Spirit working in the powerful Word brought them to faith. He can and does do the same today.

But there is more to the Spirit's work than bringing us to faith. At the close of this chapter we are told these believers day after day gathered around the Word, the Lord's Supper, and in prayer. He also keeps us in the faith and leads us to live God-pleasing lives that are in "step with the Spirit".

Jesus said, "Feed my sheep". His disciples were to preach and to teach the Word, to let the Holy Spirit speak, both about sin and the forgiveness Christ won for us. The Spirit still works today through certain means -the Word and Sacrament. The Spirit who gave us life by faith also wants us to "keep in step" with the Spirit – build our faith through these means. He still invites you for worship services, for Bible classes, Sunday School, Bible reading, and home devotions.

It is only the Spirit working in the Word that teaches us how to truly "love one another" - to live lives that are "in step with the Spirit". Yes, in our families, at work and in the church. How can we learn to deal with the person who always, "seems to know it all", who is so often critical, often complains, or always seems to want to "run the show" – be in control. The Spirit through the Word teaches when great patience is called for, when a loving rebuke is appropriate and when the matter may be truly unimportant. He teaches us to ask before we speak or act – 'Is this bringing glory to God?'

I think it has been some time since I have run out of gas on the highway. I tend to watch the gas gauge and I know running out of gas has bad consequences. The same is true in spiritual matters. Regularly refuel on the Word and Sacrament. Don't be fooled by a faulty 'gas gauge' – the sinful flesh that says, 'I don't need all of that'. Remember the Wonders of God – his amazing undeserved love. In his Love we will find the strength to live lives that are truly, "in step with the Spirit".

Amen