

Day of Pentecost 5/19/24
Acts 2:1-21 B

OUR SERMON TEXT IS THE APPOINTED EPISTLE LESSON FOR PENTECOST, FROM THE 2ND CHAPTER OF ACTS.

Not long after the great flood that destroyed the world by water, the leaders of the world gathered together at a place called Babel. They planned to build a tower that would reach into the heavens. They wanted to make a name for themselves. They did not want to submit to God. They thought they were smarter than God and didn't need God. So, God punished them in their pride by confusing their languages so that they couldn't understand each other. Their building project had to be abandoned because of the language barrier.

Pentecost is often called the birthday of the Christian Church. As Jesus had promised, the Holy Spirit descended miraculously upon the apostles. They were given the supernatural gift of being able to speak in foreign languages that they had never learned. Pentecost was the reversal of Babel. At Babel, God confused their languages to **divide** the people; at Pentecost, God spoke the same gospel message in many different languages to unify the people. At Babel, God confused the languages in mercy, because those people were trusting in themselves to save themselves and their common language gave them a false hope. At Pentecost, God overcame the confusion of languages. The gospel is for people of every tribe, nation, people, and language – the whole world. Pentecost teaches this. God gave the apostles the ability to speak in all of the languages of the Roman Empire to illustrate that no one was left out of Christ's commission to *"make disciples of all nations, baptizing*

them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Mt 28:19).

The Spirit of Pentecost has never left the church He created on that first Pentecost. The Father sent Him in Jesus’ name. Jesus sent Him from the Father. He came specifically to the men whom Jesus had taught. Jesus had ascended to the right hand of the Father in heaven, so He would no longer be visible, as He had been before His ascension. Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit, *“But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me. And you also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning” (Jn 15:26-27).* On Pentecost, He fulfilled His promise.

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth. He comforts us. He makes His home within us. He makes us holy. He makes us holy by means of the truth. He teaches us the truth about Jesus, so that we rejoice, trust, and find comfort in Jesus – Jesus alone. The Holy Spirit joins us to Jesus. And, He joins us all together as the Communion of Saints. The Communion of Saints is invisible to the naked eye. We cannot see our holy fellowship. But when we come to the altar and we eat and drink the body and the blood of Jesus that is given to us in the Lord’s Supper, the unity of Christ’s holy Church is most clearly expressed – and seen with human eyes.

The people at Babel believed that human unity was a human achievement. But, as sinners, it is a lie that humans can bring about true unity. Only God gives true unity. It is achieved at the cross – Jesus has reconciled us to God **and** to one another. True unity is achieved when the

Holy Spirit brings the fruit of Christ's suffering into our lives at the font, from the pulpit, and at the altar.

My Brothers and Sisters in Christ, we must ever remember that sin divides us. The blood of Jesus washes away our sin. The Holy Spirit unites us by cleansing us of the sin that divides us in the blood of Jesus. The Holy Spirit does this by telling us the truth. He is the Spirit of truth. False doctrine comes from Satan, the father of lies. False doctrine divides the flock by giving false hope. All false doctrine leads us to trust in human ability and trusting in the flesh is the surest road to destruction. The truth is revealed in the written word, the Bible. The truth is revealed in the incarnate Word, Jesus. The truth is revealed by the Holy Spirit.

Let me say this again: Sin divides us. We need the blood of Jesus to wash that sin away. Otherwise, we will be at war with each other. People who do not receive the forgiveness of sins from God through faith cannot forgive one another. The wonderful works of God that were preached on Pentecost were the works of Jesus. Peter didn't preach a message of religious self-improvement. He preached the law with the full thunder of God's judgment. And he preached Christ: His crucifixion and His resurrection. The man who just a few weeks earlier had cowered in fear as he denied his Lord was now filled with the Holy Ghost. He showed no fear as he preached to the crowd saying:

*But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel:
"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;
even on my male servants and female servants
in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy.*

*And I will show wonders in the heavens above
and signs on the earth below,
blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke;
the sun shall be turned to darkness
and the moon to blood,
before the day of the Lord comes, the great and magnificent day.
And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of
the Lord shall be saved.'*

It was the Holy Spirit who spoke through Peter. We read this in the verses following our Epistle,

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?" And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and for your children and to all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God call to Himself" (Ac 2:37-39).

St. Luke records for us that three thousand people were baptized that day and that they continued in communion with the gospel the apostles preached as they received the Lord's Supper together and prayed together. The Holy Spirit created and sustained the church through the same gospel and sacraments that we have here today.

The Spirit of Pentecost has never left the church because if He did the church would surely die. Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to be the Lord and giver of life. And, the Holy Spirit is to be found wherever the preaching of Christ – His crucifixion and resurrection – is heard. The Holy Spirit is to be found wherever the washing of Holy Baptism and the Sacrament of Christ's body and blood are administered in Jesus' name. These are the means that God Himself has chosen. And wherever the Holy Spirit is in these means, there is peace, there is comfort, and there is unity.

What GOOD NEWS that is for us, My Friends, because our faith is so weak and we are so foolish. We want something more exciting than hearing the same old words again and again and again and coming to the Lord's Table. But these are the words of eternal life, and they never grow old. Every time we come to church – having the absolution pronounced over us; hearing the Word of God; eating and drinking Christ's true Body and Blood -- the Spirit of truth comes into our lives and forgives our sin and raises us out of the death of sin, so that we may live a new life in Christ. We come in weakness, confusion, and sin for which we can do nothing but confess to God that we are sorry and believe He forgives us for the sake of Christ. And here, the Holy Spirit makes us holy. He clothes us in the righteousness of Jesus and pours divine love into our hearts. He fills us with hope and He makes us the Communion of Saints. How could we want anything more?

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.