

Festival of Pentecost

June 4, 2017

Acts 2:1-21

The Holy Spirit's Indispensable Work

Rev. George Ferch

Dear friends in Christ Jesus,

The believers who had come to Jerusalem for the harvest festival called Pentecost, 50 days after the Passover, were in the right place at the right time. Little did they know that Jesus' disciples sitting in a house together soon would have an experience that would change many lives. The risen and ascended Christ chose that day to keep his promise to his church. "In a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."

One thing we have to determine is what parts of this event are prescriptive, and what parts are descriptive. Where is Luke giving a prescription of what we must expect and do, and where was Luke describing what happened at that time? Was this a onetime special occurrence for the church, or do such things repeat?

The way the Son sent the Holy Spirit on his disciples to give them the instantaneous gift of knowing other languages was a onetime miracle. Luke is not prescribing the expectation of such a repeated baptism of the Holy Spirit, especially connected to speaking unintelligible gibberish. Luke is describing the power of God's Word when preached as the Holy Spirit works faith in Christ in peoples' hearts. The Pentecost miracle prescribes our use of the Word to grow the church, and describes how the Spirit adds to the church, as he did on that day by three thousand souls.

Through the preaching of Jesus Christ comes **The Holy Spirit's Indispensable Work**. Let's review the manner of the Spirit's coming; the object of the Spirit's coming; and the marks by which we recognize the Spirit's coming.

What is the manner of the Holy Spirit's coming? He comes to us through the word of Christ that is the gospel, the good news of our forgiveness. God did in this one time miracle give the Holy Spirit directly to the disciples with the gifts of courage and being able to speak in the languages of those who had come to Jerusalem.

These disciples already had the Holy Spirit in their hearts through the Word of God Jesus had shared with them before his death and resurrection. This outpouring was not to bring them to faith or strengthen their faith. It was to equip them for the work of being his witnesses in Jerusalem and Samaria and to the ends of the earth.

The Holy Spirit could still come directly but nowhere does God promise this or tell us to expect it. God tells us to preach the Word like Peter did. He tells us to share the wonders of God with others as all the disciples did. Disciples continue to do that in all the languages of the world our missionaries use to preach the gospel.

Above the entrance to the chapel at our Seminary is the Greek for Preach the Gospel. This remind us preachers that the Word of God is the manner the Holy Spirit uses to come into our hearts; whether that Word is preached, or connected to visible elements in the sacraments. That is why preaching the Word, baptizing, and administering the Lord's Supper are the central features of our worship life.

We use the Word by which the Holy Spirit accomplishes the object of his coming. The object of his coming on that first Pentecost was as the answer to Jesus' promise that he would send the Spirit to them to enable them to be his witnesses. He gave them the gift of languages. The object of the Spirit's coming was to equip them for the work.

It was the work of using the Word, however that accomplished the Spirit's object of bringing Old Testament believers, and those who had rejected Christ, into the New Testament church. The disciples proclaimed the wonders of God, and Peter preached his sermon to bring about the object of creating faith in their hearts. To grow the church, the disciples sowed the seed of the Word of God. Peter did not hold back the law. By the Law, the Spirit pricked the hearts and consciences of those who had rejected Christ. When they cried out in contrition, Peter called them to trust in Christ. He offered the gift of Holy Baptism to them and to their children. Many believed and were baptized as the Holy Spirit accomplished the object of his coming through the Word.

It is still the Spirit's object of his coming to call people to repentance. He works that purpose by working daily contrition and repentance in us through the Word, preserving us in faith. He works that purpose by calling unbelievers to faith and bringing them into the kingdom of God. The Holy Spirit continues his work of changing minds and hearts from the tiniest baby to the oldest adult facing death. He accomplishes his work according to his will through us. He is, as Jesus, says, "The Spirit of truth." He had led us to and into the truth.

It is by continuing to sow the seed of God's Word, even as it has many different results that the Holy Spirit will continue to grow the church.

The Holy Spirit's indispensable work is done only through the indispensable gospel. The marks by which we recognized the Spirit's coming are the Word and sacraments. Speaking in unknown tongues, healing, visions, an inner voice are not the marks of the Spirit's work. Large numbers of people and YMCA type activities are not always signs of the Holy Spirit doing his work.

The marks of the Spirit's work in the heart are a recognition and confession of sin and the punishment sin brings, death. The marks of the Spirit's work are trust in the cross of Christ for forgiveness, an inner strength in temptation, an abiding joy in the midst of sorrow. Through the Spirit's work we see the mark of sinners who repent and with whom we rejoice that God has called them to new life and eternal salvation.

The coming of the Holy Spirit to do his indispensable work was highly visible on that first Pentecost following Jesus' ascension. The Holy Spirit's coming to do his indispensable work continues to be highly visible as he preserves us in faith, and adds to the church daily those who are being saved. Amen. <SDG>