

Today we celebrate the great day of Pentecost. And it is a great day. It's a huge turning point in the history of the church, and it's equally significant in the life of the believer. I do wish we could change some things about the way it is perceived. I know myself, growing up and even through school, when I heard the word Pentecost my thoughts were something like, "Oh, Pentecost, yeah that's the season that takes up half the year and doesn't want to end. Couldn't we do something more creative than twenty some weeks after Pentecost?" But when you look at what Pentecost is and what it means for us, it's entirely appropriate that nearly half our church year be given over to the days after Pentecost.

In a very real way, the day of Pentecost defines both our church as it exists today and it defines who we are after we come to Christ. The days after Pentecost show us what the church of God is like after the Holy Spirit came as Jesus promised. And we each have received the Holy Spirit on the day we came to faith. For each of us, our lives days after Pentecost. So it's entirely appropriate that we spend much of our church year in the days after Pentecost, because that is where we live and where we function.

There are a number of parallels worth examining between the actual day of Pentecost for the Christian church and our own personal journey of faith, so let's maybe back up and take a look at some of those, starting with the day of Pentecost itself. The disciples had more or less been in a holding pattern after Jesus' ascension. They replaced Judas to bring their number back to twelve, but otherwise not much is recorded about the ten days between the ascension and Pentecost. Of course, Jesus had told them not to leave the city until Pentecost came. And sure enough, ten days later, fifty days after the resurrection, when they were all gathered together, the Counselor, the Encourager, the Holy Spirit came to the disciples with a show of power.

The disciples, you see, had been given a very specific mission by Christ right before he ascended. They were told to go into the world and tell them about himself, sharing the Word of God and baptizing them into the name of the triune God. They were then also to teach these people everything Jesus had taught them. Once again, we hear our two key words for Christian life, to go with the word and to grow in the word. But again, the disciples were told to wait to start this mission in earnest. You see, for the twelve, this mission was not quite the same as it is for us. Yes, the directives are the same, but the environment that they had to carry it out in was entirely different, and so they needed a specialized set of tools to carry it out. It would be like saying your goal was to build a highway. You're going to approach that in different ways and with different tools depending on whether you're trying to build through the desert, the forest or the mountains.

The major difference for the disciples was simply the newness of this message. Yes, the plan of salvation by God's work alone had been the plan since the Garden of Eden and had been the truth that the true Jewish religion carried with it and shared with anyone who wanted to know. But still, for thousands of years God had focused his effort on the Jews and so the truth here was extremely localized. And there was new information to consider. Many of the details of the Messiah were written down in the Old Testament prophets, but never before had it all come together and crystalized in reality that could be told as a complete story. And so because of the sort of region-locking and newness of this message, the disciples needed special tools to overcome these obstacles.

So that is what the Spirit gave on that day. The men were enabled to speak in languages they did not know, to enable them to move freely among the foreign nations that would need to hear their message. And we know from elsewhere in scripture that they were enabled to perform miracles as God allowed, in order to draw attention to the message and show that it had the credibility of God behind it. But most importantly was the tool that Peter himself used in this event, the word of God itself. This was something they always had, but by the power of the Holy Spirit they understood it properly and were equipped to use it.

But even these, gifts and tools from God that they were, the world found a way to try to bury its head in the sand and mock them. They are drunk! Nevermind that the language they spoke was clear and intelligible, the world just wanted to reject it because it was from God, because it was a holy gift. And the world can't stand God or his holiness.

But the gifts were true, and so, enabled by the Spirit, we see a man who a month and a half ago denied even knowing Jesus now stand up in the middle of a crowd of Jews and proclaim him with ferocity. And not just proclaim him but if you read the rest of Acts 2 you see that he outright accuses the crowds of being part of those who put the Lord to death on the cross. But he also offers them the truth of forgiveness. That Jesus died to take away their sins and even as he quotes here, those who call on the name of the Lord will be saved. In the end, three thousand were added to their number that day.

Of course, along the way the disciples needed a few extra pushes. They didn't spread out as far or wide as God intended right away, so he allowed extra persecution to hit Jerusalem eventually. And that persecution drove them far and wide so they would use the gifts God gave them to accomplish the mission God asked of them. You see that it was all down to God's power. He gave them everything they needed, both personally and to do what he asked of them. And he set events in motion to accomplish what he wanted done.

This is just like you and me. Now, since there is no word of God written about any of our lives, we can only point to the broad strokes as the word of our God, and we must be careful to claim too much about the details. We know that he works everything, every detail in our lives for our benefit, that much is true, but we don't want to get too specific and say that *this* particular event he intended to produce *that* specific blessing.

Despite that, there is still a great deal we can say because of what our God has told us. For starters, there is the plain and simple fact that you need him. God gave us all a directive for our lives, one goal we had to meet in order to satisfy him. Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect (Ma 5:48)! And you don't have what you need to get that done. You are born the opposite of perfect, horribly flawed, rooted in sin and corruption against God. That world, the one that hates God and mocks him, that is the world you were born part of. God cannot let sin stand in his presence. For being perfect, the reward is heaven. For failing, the punishment is damnation to hell.

You failed.

By the time you are old enough to realize you've failed, it's already too late for you to do anything about it. You need God. And thank God that simply because he decided to care about you, he decided to give you what you needed. He was under no obligation to do this, you have given him no reason to treat you with any kindness, but nevertheless he chose to care for you. And not in just some simple, easy way. He chose to take your place. You couldn't live perfectly, so he did. You earned a punishment, he lived it for you. On the cross love and justice met, and God earned for you everything you truly need. He paid your debt and he gave you the perfect life God demanded. By his actions, he made it possible for what Peter quoted here to be true, that anyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

As that implies, the salvation won by Christ is freely available to anyone who simply trusts the Lord to provide it. The only problem, of course, is what we mentioned before. We are born of the world and the world hates God. It does not and simply cannot trust him. We cannot trust God on our own, we won't. And so much like he did for those first disciples, the Holy Spirit comes to us and gives us what we need. He uses the refreshing waters of baptism or the message of God's Word to reach our hearts with his power and change them. Within the rotted husk of the sinful self he brings to life a new person, born out of love and created to love. A new self that loves and trusts our God. And through that trust we receive the saving benefit of Christ's work for us.

If you want to talk about what we need, that's it. You could live this life starving, alone, unemployed, homeless, in constant pain or any other combination of factors, but if you have this, this trust given to you by God through the Holy Spirit, then you have all you need. Because all those other things will end. Those pains will stop and all believers will be greeted by an equal unending heaven of bliss. On the flipside you could live here with every creature comfort all your days but if you lack this one thing, your eternity would be unending torment. The Holy Spirit has come to you and given you the one thing you need; trust in Christ for forgiveness and eternal life.

But, still being here, God has something to ask of you. You already have what you need. He would like you to help others get it as well. His direction to you is the same as it was to the eleven on the mount of ascension. Go out with the word and grow yourselves in the word. Grow yourself so you can stay strong and connected to him, and so that you are better equipped to go out and share that word with those who still need it. They will die without God's help and God asks for your help to tell them about it. Not to change hearts, not to force faith, but simply to tell the truth and let the Holy Spirit do his work. You have what you need to do this too. You are equipped for the task just like the disciples were. The tools are different because the situation is different. But you are equipped nonetheless and the task has not changed.

By the power of the Holy Spirit working through the word you have been given what you need. You know the truth of salvation and you trust God to provide it. Whatever happens here and now, that is all that matters, you are going to heaven in the end. There are too many left who do not yet trust, they will be lost if nothing changes. Go with the Word of God and the power of the Holy Spirit behind you to give them what they need. Amen.