

Sermon Pentecost 2021

May 23, 2021

Acts 2:1-21

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

The feast of Pentecost demonstrated the mighty works of God bringing about a unity that overcame the world. That's a mouthful and brainful, isn't it? But it's true. This feast that we see here in the reading from Acts, it demonstrated the mighty works of God and brought about a unity that overcame the world. But what does that mean?

Well, let me start with the feast. You know, we celebrate Pentecost every year. And what do we celebrate as we're doing that? The gift of the Holy Spirit to the Church, right? We honor that our Lord Jesus sent the promised Spirit and so the Church was born of that Spirit on that day to live until His return. But how many of you knew that this feast was actually a Jewish one? Yes, we celebrate Pentecost as a Christian feast, but notice that there were all these people coming to the Temple for a Jewish celebration. **"Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven."** Why were these devout Jews in Jerusalem? They were there for the feast of Pentecost. Ok, so what was that, then? Well, for homework go home and search for Pentecost in your Old Testaments to find out.

As I say that, though, you won't find it. Why not? Why isn't it there if this is a Jewish festival? Because in Exodus 34 and Leviticus 23 where it tells us about this, it's not called Pentecost. It's called the Feast of Weeks. So, why the change? Well, the word "Pentecost" is Greek and it relates to Fifty. The Feast of Weeks is 50 days after the Passover. There's the connection. But what about this feast?

So, first we have to make the point that the worship in the Old Testament, while it centered around the temple, and the service in the Temple in the morning and evening, we have to also understand that the high point was the Sabbath. The Sabbath was the holy day. This was the Shabbat, the Seventh Day—for us Saturday. And think about that. What would make that so important? Well, you have the Commandment itself, right? But what else? What was the Commandment grounded in? It was grounded in the connection to the creation, right? God created all things, and then He rested on the Seventh Day. And in that rest man was called also to rest and keep the Sabbath Holy.

Now, this Feast of Weeks, that was fifty days after the Passover. This was a Sabbath of Sabbaths after that first feast, plus one: seven weeks of seven days, but then into the

eighth day of that last week. I think I've mentioned this before, but the Eighth Day, then, connected from the Old Creation, the Creation that finally was broken in the fall into sin, and it went into the New Creation. The Promise of God to make all things New. So that was important about this Pentecost, this Feast of Weeks.

It also was important, because just as the Sabbath was grounded in creation, and the promise of God's care on the day of rest, so also this Feast of Weeks connected to creation. On the Passover, the Israelites brought forth a sheaf of grain as an offering. Only after that day could Israelites eat grain from the new harvest. At the Feast of Weeks, there were offered loaves of bread by the Israelites. This marked the ritual end of the grain harvest. They also were instructed to leave the corners of their fields un-reaped at this time. All of this indicated the understanding that as they were connected to this creation, God was providing for them, not just the landowners among them, but even the poorest of the poor.

So that's all the Jewish feast, though. That's what the Jews dwelling Jerusalem at that time were celebrating. What's that have to do with what we hear in Acts Chapter Two? What these Jews were doing when they all saw the tongues as of fire resting on these Christians there was that they were coming to the temple to bring their loaves for this sacrifice. And what that did is allowed for this feast of Pentecost to demonstrate the mighty works of God and bring about a unity that overcame the world.

So, having explained what Pentecost was for them, how they came to the temple and brought these loaves, we can now unpack what it means that this allowed for this to demonstrate the mighty works of God. What does that mean?

Well, you see, I think in our Christian culture there has been a lot of influence by those who hear about Pentecost and assume the glory of Pentecost was this demonstration of the Holy Spirit that could be seen in this speaking in tongues. And of course you do see the Holy Spirit poured out so that tongues would result, but what does that look like? Well, if you go to a Pentecostal church here in America, it's assumed that this looks like the Christians sitting or standing in this place where they were gathered and this wind coming upon them and they all started speaking in gibberish.

I bring this up with some regularity because of my own sensitivity to it by being drawn into that mindset when I was in college. For whatever reason, my assumption was that the speaking in tongues meant that same thing. The disciples of Jesus spoke in this gibberish. As I say that, if you look at what Paul says in I Corinthians 12-14 about this, it wasn't right. This speaking in gibberish puffs the speaker up instead of truly praising and glorifying God. Why do I say that? Because God can't give people the gift of tongues?

Because things like that don't happen now? No, but when they do happen, they happen like we see in Acts 2. They happen where the tongues do something different. They don't just create this mystical emotionally driven experience. No. Look at what this speaking of tongues served in the Lesson. **“they were amazed and astonished, saying, ‘Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? ... we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God.’”** What happened with the speaking in tongues here? The disciples spoke in tongues in order to be heard by those who didn't know Aramaic, the language they spoke. And why did God do that? Because He wanted something heard by them. His “mighty works.”

What do you think that means? When the disciples were talking about God's mighty works, what do you think they were saying? Well, we see something akin to it when Peter pipes up and starts preaching. And if you go home and read the rest of Peter's sermon here in Acts 2, you see what he's taking about. He's talking about Jesus. He's making the point that this Christ is the One who has fulfilled the Old Testament. The Jews present at the crucifixion had called for Jesus' death, but this death was for them, it was to fulfill their Scriptures. It was to fulfill the death that we all deserve. In fact, it even fulfilled this Pentecost feast. As the Jews honored God's provision for them in the fields by bringing the grains for the grain offering at Passover and as they brought the loaves from the grains at Pentecost, Christ offered Himself for us. He offered up His body as the firstfruits to God so that we would be found acceptable before Him, our sin forgiven. He Himself worked the perfect life, that we could rest from our works being needed to get us to heaven. He, in other words, is your perfect Sabbath rest. Sabbath of Sabbaths to eternal life and joy. And in Him you see God's provision, not just for an earthly care, but one that's eternal—one He ensures you have in His Word and one He feeds to you in His body and blood. But that one worked as God mightily overcame sin death and the devil on the cross.

So that's the purpose of the tongues. Pentecost isn't Pentecostal in the American sense of the word, it's about the Holy Spirit confessing Jesus, because that's His job. It's His job to speak the mighty works of God and to point to what Jesus has done. As it says in the Gospel lesson, “to bring to remembrance all that” He said.

And as we meditate on this theme think about what happens: The feast of Pentecost demonstrated the mighty works of God bringing about a unity that overcame the world. This proclamation unites. It creates a fellowship.

We had our Circuit Visitor meeting this week and the speaker talked about what we often call fellowship. Or if you saw some of the materials that came out of synod when our current president, President Harrison was elected, there was a theme of witness, mercy, and life together. This is life together that the speaker talked about. He said that as we gather around Jesus, as we gather around His gifts to us, then we are gathered in a co-participation. We co-participate in His work, we co-participate in His forgiveness, we co-participate in this life together. And to talk about this, he looked at how Paul describes this in I Corinthians. And there you see it how Paul shows that this is different. You know this isn't just a group of us who are of the same mind gathering together. We aren't just here because we're all republicans or democrats. We're not all here because we're a society gathered to discuss the approach for dealing with the world. Sure there might be conversations that overlap on political things or social things, but that's not the main point. The main point is that we are united in Christ. We are bonded together in the body of this Christ who actually unites us in Himself. You know, that's what we have in the Lord's Supper. That's what He's doing with us. We have the aspect where Paul tells us that we proclaim Jesus' death till He comes. There's a part of this where He's speaking through our gathering. That's why we have closed communion, we want to protect people from confessing something other than what they believe if they don't agree with our teaching. But Jesus gathers us here in that body and blood and unites us with Himself. In that, He unites us with each other in Him.

Christians, that's exactly what we see at Pentecost. The feast of Pentecost demonstrated the mighty works of God bringing about a unity that overcame the world. I think I mentioned this last year, but this is why we have the Old Testament Lesson that we have. Look at that lesson. In their arrogance, mankind decided that it was good for them to go against God's call to them to spread over the earth. Instead, they wanted to glorify themselves, "make a name" for themselves and build the tower going up and up and up. God brought judgment against that by dispersing them and dividing their languages. In Christ, that division is overcome. You see it, sin is what truly divides. The devil is the one who divides. The Lord Jesus has died that sin would be forgiven and the devil would be overcome. And this overcoming of language at Pentecost shows that. It shows that peoples of all stripes would hear and be united in Him.

Christians, that's what we see, then: The feast of Pentecost demonstrated the mighty works of God bringing about a unity that overcame the world. Thanks be to God. May He bless us in that unity here, and may He grant for that unity to be with us as we go into the world which has such dire need of Him. And May He grant for us to do so in the assurance of His promise that by His mighty works that unity is accomplished. Amen.