**BEGINNINGS AND ENDS—THE STORY OF PENTECOST**

**The Festival Day of Pentecost**

**Trinity Lutheran Church**

**Springfield, Missouri**

**31 May *Anno Domini* 2020**

***When the Day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place.***

**What an unusual, unprecedented, and unpredictable couple of months the apostles and other followers of Jesus had experienced from the beginning of His final journey to Jerusalem weeks before the Holy Week of Passover to this day of Pentecost. From the highest expectation of success and greatness for the nation of Israel, their nation, to an overnight loss of everything that had been achieved and gained to the ironic and tragically painful Passover Day of Preparation, when their leader, the Master they thought was the Messiah of God, died in a tortuous, shameful, public execution. It was the end, and they were lost in despair and in utter hopelessness, self-quarantined in paralyzing fear. Forty hours later they had a new beginning and hope had been restored, although it came and went for forty days. Then the new beginning ascended into heaven, vanishing into the clouds, and they were again told to wait, not without hope this time, but without answers and specific directions. And so again they huddled together and waited a little longer.**

**They did know that Jesus was alive. Their faith in Who He really was had been**

**revived and strengthened. But He was not with them the way He used to be, physically and visibly present. He assured them He was with them the way God had always been with His people, invisible to their sight, but always watching out for them to assist them, always ready to hear them in their prayers, and in a very real and concrete way in His Scriptures. Jesus promised them a special gift that would make God’s plan and design for them and for the future much more clear. And then He told them to wait a little while longer. It’s hard down here on earth for us human beings in so many aspects of our lives to draw the lines between our beginnings and ends.**

**I’m not going to get caught up in apples and oranges, nor try to directly compare their experience with our unusual, unprecedented, and unpredictable last couple of months. But some of our experiences and emotions might be better tuned this Pentecost not just to try to feel what they felt, but to receive what they received, yes!**

***When the Day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place.* Pentecost was for the Jews also one of the three great festivals on their annual church calendar. The Festival of Tabernacles or Booths was observed in the fall and remembered the Forty Days in the Wilderness. Passover came in the spring during the first month of the Jewish year, Nisan; it was the chief festival and remembered the deliverance and exodus of Israel and celebrated forgiveness and salvation. And Pentecost came fifty days after Passover, and celebrated the first-fruits of the harvest. Christians have Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost, celebrating the incarnation and birth of the Son of God, the resurrection and salvation of Christ, and the institution of Christ’s New Testament Church.**

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**The verb “arrived” in the Greek original is important, and we must first pay some attention to it to understand the whole meaning of this day. It is what is called a present tense infinitive and it is in passive voice. So it has the sense of not just any ordinary arrival but *when the day of Pentecost was being fulfilled*. First this day had nothing to do with human designs, performances, or even wishes; the passive voice means this day belonged totally to the divine will. Also his day, by coming, was filling up completely a measure of time that before was beginning and being added to. The thing promised was now due to occur. But was the Pentecost story an ending? Or were new chapters just beginning?**

**We also need to really see the truth and important meaning in the little word “*all*.” *All* refers back to its antecedent in Acts 1:12-15: it includes the eleven—who are named there in a specific order in pairs. Peter and John, and James and Andrew, and Philip and Thomas, and Bartholomew (whose other name was Nathaniel) and Matthew, and another James the son of Alphaeus and another Simon identified by his former membership in a revolutionary group called the Zealots, and then the eleventh, without a partner because of the defection of Judas Iscariot is another Judas the son of James. Yes, the apostles hand-chosen by Jesus. But the roster also included *the women,* referring to those relatives and believers of the fairer gender who traveled with Jesus and His apostles as assistants. Jesus’ mother Mary being one of those women is named along with her other sons, Jesus’ own brothers (named in Mark 6:3 as James, Joses, Jude, and Simon). And then a count of the roster *the company of persons in all was about 120.* *All* the believers were present on this appointed time that only God knew and that Jesus had described at the time of His ascension as *not many days from now.* (And boy, do we all know how ten days goes by very quickly when you are busy and focused and we have more to do than for which there is time, but for those who are confined to suspend normal schedules and duties and wait for something only God knows what and when, ten days can feel like ten months.)**

**The story of Pentecost in Acts 2 would still make for a wonderful movie today. Get the best producer with a good script faithful to the text and a special effects genius.**

**The first century Middle East scene is set: a large assembly room with 120 actors and actresses *sitting.* There’s a big clue.Jews stood while they prayed, sat when they were teaching and learning. They are listening to a presentation by perhaps Peter or John, dimly heard in the background. It is morning, but they are together in this *one place.* The scene shifts outside into the city, once again crowded with pilgrims from all over the Jewish world, who’ve come for the festival.**

**And then the drama explodes onto the screen. It comes *suddenly from heaven.***

**First, a *sound like a mighty rushing wind filling the entire house where they were sitting* Just sound, not an actual wind, as if a strong, violent wind that gathered itself and rushed just into the room—from the outside to the inside. People in the streets confused, hearing a powerful roar, but not a leaf stirring on a tree, following the strange noise as it seemed to funnel to a particular building, where its noise was concentrated inside! A quick divine way to assemble a large audience for an event.**

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**Second, a visual from another dimension inside the house to get the believers’ attention and awe: *divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each of them; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit.*  It was a visible sign to them that the invisible Holy Spirit was present as promised. What they were about to become, speak, and do had arrived to enable and empower them to be God’s chosen, to speak God’s Word, to do God’s works of ministry and mission—what Peter would later describe as the priesthood of all believers. Someone among them remembers and shares aloud the words of Jesus Himself and John the Baptist, *he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.* Portions of this “heavenly fire” rested individually on each of them. No biggest fire on Peter’s head anointing him the Holy Father. No bishops’ fire hats for the other ten apostles. No more radiant hat for the men over the women. No special ranking measures for the old over the young, for the intelligent over the simple, for the wealthy over the poor, for one ethnic group over another. The Holy Spirit filled every believer in the house, raised every person present with the same gift, in order to use every member of the Church in the blessed enterprise and work that began on this Day One, the “Birth-Day of the holy Christian Church.”**

**And third, *they began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.***

**The word *tongues* here does not refer to the “unknown tongue-speaking going on decades later in the church located in the Greek city of Corinth. It’s a different word. Let me say for the sake of time, if an interpreter of Acts 2 turns Pentecost into a 19th/20th century American Pentecostal, neo-Pentecostal, or charismatic movement event, that interpreter has ignored the Biblical word, and what the Scriptures say here have been run right off the tracks. In other words, caution, don’t stay on that train, the engineer has lost the focus and crashed. The Pentecost Day *tongues* are clearly defined and listed by name in Acts 2—they are the various languages and dialects of the pilgrims gathered in Jerusalem for the feast. Like the strange tornado-like sound, without the stirring of a single leaf on a tree, led crowds to where the disciples had gathered, the 120 became bilingual so the message God was bringing to Jerusalem that day could be heard clearly by foreigners.**

**A lot of action for the opening scenes, do you agree?**

**Here is where the movie producer meets a challenge. With such high drama at the beginning of the Pentecost story, how can the director bring out the main plot, the big news of the day? You see, for the next hour, what we have is a sermon. A man stands up, a big, strong-looking fellow, and these Jesus people all look to him as if he is a leader. It is Peter, and all eyes and ears are focused on him to explain what is going on. And so he preaches the first sermon of the Christian Church era. He reads his text from the Bible, from the Book of Joel, uses other Scripture references, and proclaims the Gospel of Jesus. How will this play in Jerusalem, much less in Peoria?**

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**Peter reminds the crowd that this man that many in the crowd saw with their own eyes and heard with their own ears, a man who was *attested to them by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through Him in their midst,* this man Jesus of Nazareth was and is the Messiah of YHWH. The Jesus they crucified and murdered was the Son of God. But their rejection and ultimate crime against their own Creator and Heavenly Father does not have to condemn them and leave them as outcasts without hope. For in His innocent death, Jesus was taking the sinner’s place by taking upon himself the divine wrath and punishment for them and for us—for rebellion, for idolatry, for immorality, and even for ignorance. Peter assures them the proof in the pudding is that God raised His Son Jesus from the dead and received Him back into heaven, where together they continue to rule the universe. This message is Good News and is nothing more and nothing less than the New Covenant promised in their own Scriptures. On this Day of Pentecost, fifty days after Jesus’ resurrection, they have an undeserved second chance to repent, turn back to their God, and be joined to their Savior by the gift and power of the Spirit. Not all of the crowd listens, but thousands do and ask, “What must we do to be saved?” Peter’s answer is endless: *Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord God calls to Himself.***

**Since this first Christian Pentecost sermon, millions upon millions have followed in every language on every place on this planet. And for those based on the truth and on the actual text from the Word, those that are Christ-centered, Gospel-centered, and with a proper distinction of God’s Law Gospel promises, the Holy Spirit continues His work of calling sinners to faith to enlighten them with His gifts, and preserving them in faith. As I pray that the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart have been truly guided and captured by Jesus, have been acceptable in His sight; and that He will in your minds and hearts separate the wheat from the weeds so that as we have finally gathered again in one place for His Divine Service, you will inwardly digest and be nourished in His truths, that His Word will now takes its measure within each of you, fill you with His grace and power, and use you as His witnesses. Amen.**

[Reverend William R. Marler, Pentecost 2020, First Sunday of the Divine Service in the Sanctuary following the COVID-19 pandemic quarantine; and Marler’s final Pentecost sermon at Trinity]

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