

6-4-2017

Feast of Pentecost One Year Series 2017

Phillip L. Brandt
Concordia University - Portland, pbrandt@cu-portland.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.csp.edu/cup_archives_sundaysermon



Part of the [Biblical Studies Commons](#), [Christianity Commons](#), [Liturgy and Worship Commons](#), and the [Practical Theology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Brandt, Phillip L., "Feast of Pentecost One Year Series 2017" (2017). *Sunday's Sermon*. 71.
https://digitalcommons.csp.edu/cup_archives_sundaysermon/71

This Text Resources is brought to you for free and open access by the CUP University Archives at DigitalCommons@CSP. It has been accepted for inclusion in Sunday's Sermon by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@CSP. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@csp.edu.

Festival of Pentecost 1 Year Series

Luther

11. So you should get to know the Holy Spirit, so that you are aware of why He was given and what His office is, namely, to take this treasure – Christ and all He has given and proclaimed to us through the Gospel – and apply and put it into your heart so that He may be your own. When He carries this out and you feel it in your heart, then consequently we must say, “If this means that my works do not help, but the Holy Spirit must do it, then why would I struggle with works and laws?” So all human works and laws, even Moses’ Law, fall to the ground. The Holy Spirit teaches it better than all books, because He understands the Scriptures better than all those who only deal with the Law.

13. Here we should be intelligent and know that all of this does not happen in such a way that there is any person who has the Holy Spirit and is already so perfect that he feels nothing of the Law and sin and is altogether pure. We do not preach about the Holy Spirit and His office as if He had already carried out and completed everything, but rather that He has begun and is now always in motion, so that He works at it more and more and does not cease. Therefore, you will not find such a person who is without sin and without sorrow, full righteousness, full of joy, and serving everyone voluntarily. Scripture certainly states what the Holy Spirit does, namely, that His office is to liberate from sin and fright, but it is not yet completely carried out.

Therefore, a Christian must somewhere in his heart feel his sin and be frightened of death, because everything that afflicts other sinners oppresses him. The unbelievers are so stuck in their sins that they pay no attention to this, but these, the believers, certainly feel it. But then they have a Helper, the Holy Spirit, who comforts and strengthens them until He has completely carried it out and put an end to it; then they will no longer perceive any of those things.

(Luthers Works, Vol. 77. CPH. 2014. Pp. 325-330)

This day brings us to the third great festival of the liturgical year along with Easter and Christmas. Like those two days, it remembers a great mystery: The Church. It is the day of the Third Person of the Trinity. At this point we really must note a tendency our part. We either overemphasize or ignore the Spirit, we rarely get him just right. It is rather the same thing one encounters with Mary, either it is the Catholics who make too much of her or the Protestants who somehow think they demonstrate their superior love for Jesus by ignoring his mother.

With Pentecost and the Holy Spirit, we see another issue. Some would make the Spirit the current manifestation of God and ignore the Christ, almost putting Jesus into a subservient role and certainly into a purely historical or glorified role. Others would run the other way, making

the Spirit into a non-entity, lest we fall into some perceived trap of the Pentecostal, Charismatic, or Montanist groups.

What is the balance? How does one let the Church be the Spirit filled place God wants it to be without falling into the errors of the Schwärmer? (Luther reserved particular venom for those who “swallowed the Spirit, feathers and all!”) It would seem that the best bet is to listen very carefully to the words of John in chapters 14-17, the great discourse which is filled with Holy Spirit promise and language and description. The other place to look is of course the book of Acts which should properly be called the Acts of the Holy Spirit. The struggle in Acts, however, is that we all must wrestle with the distinction between prescription and description. Just because Luke describes something happening in Acts does not mean that it is the way it is always supposed to be or even that it is the best way for it ever to be. Luke is describing the way that it was for the first generation of Christians, especially the Apostle Paul. One should also not discount the Psalter as a great source of Holy Spirit theology. The psalmist is moved by the Spirit and regularly speaks of God’s Spirit.

When we do read a little of John, Psalms, and Acts, what do we learn?

1. The Holy Spirit primarily is here to show us Jesus. In his perfect world he is transparent. I like to think of him as a picture tube or screen on a television. We look at the screen, it is necessary, but we don’t look at the screen for the screen, we look to the image that it conveys. The Spirit seems to be working in that sort of a format. We are given very few admonitions to worship the Spirit, although it does happen. Far more often we are told to worship Jesus in the Spirit (look at the image on the screen.)
2. The manifestations of the Spirit are all subordinated to that first principle. He will not show off to demonstrate his presence, but only to bring glory to Jesus and to bring Jesus into the present. Thus the healings and other miracles of Acts seem to be conveying the idea that Jesus is present among his disciples. (We have to be very careful to distinguish between what Acts describes and what it prescribes for us. It actually prescribes very little. Just because it served to show Jesus in the first century does not make it normative and normal for every century. The same can be said of the psalter. His emotional state is not prescribed as normative for all Christians.)
3. The Spirit is a normally a gentle presence, not given to overt acts of power, although he certainly can do that. This seems to be important to those who insist on God being resistible. He does not normally act in a way that we are overwhelmed and lose the ability to say no, although, again, he can. One has to wonder whether Saul of Tarsus had much of an option when he encountered Christ on that road to Damascus.
4. The gentle Spirit which points us to Christ is a quenchable fire (I Thess 5:19.) He blows where and when he will, not at any control or manipulation of people. Peter would not have wanted him to fall on Cornelius, but he does and we get the sense that

it is important that Peter recognize that Spirit's work. It seems he had a choice. Likewise most Christians would not have wanted him to call a persecutor like Saul. That said, even Paul can be denied access to Bithynia and Asia "by the Spirit" so that he will be open to the dream of the Macedonian man.

5. We also learn that not everything that calls itself a holy spirit is in fact such a spirit. We are admonished to test the spirits. While the Gospels suggest to us that we should be open to the testimony even of an enemy, we also are given stern warnings that we should use our heads too. The deceiver will try to emulate the Spirit.
6. The Spirit creates, empowers, energizes, and enlightens the Church. He steels the Christian facing martyrdom, He comforts the grieving, suffering Christians, and He guides the church through difficult days such as the council of Nicea. He enables our prayers. Many of us have felt his presence in the pulpit. Another illustration of the Spirit might be the white blood cells that rush to the place of injury. He is often shows up most clearly on the darkest of days. He is the essential component, but he would rather we did not talk so much of him. He would much rather we speak of Jesus. But that said, today of all days in the year, we need to talk about this Spirit and his role in the Church. There is a day when you look at the tube on your television, dust the thing off, if nothing else.

How do we celebrate this day?

1. Some focus on the language issue, perhaps reading the Gospel or a verse like John 3:16 in many different languages. But this seemed like a bit contrary to the whole Pentecost thing which is the confusion of Babel undone.
2. This could be a great day to observe baptismal remembrance.
3. Perhaps the service should begin outside the building and recognize that the Spirit is the One who brings us inside the church. Have everyone march in singing a song.
4. Perhaps we should all go out after the service and sing the last hymn on the front steps.
5. Do we break out the candles from the Christmas Eve candlelight service and use them again?
6. Should we sing "Happy Birthday" to the church?
7. Do we do better to talk about the imagined sense of where we would be without the Holy Spirit? We all have the Spirit, do we help people hear the message about the Holy Spirit by pointing out what we would miss if he was not there?

We use the word Spirit in lots of ways. Are there ways to use the word and bring that into the life of the Church? We have spirit week at school, the cheerleaders and the football team all celebrate spirit. Sometimes, and this is especially true in smaller towns, we might have far more

team spirit about the high school than we ever see in Church. We talk about a good spirit at work or something like that. We might even drink spirits. We have spirited conversations, but often this is seen in the context of conflict or contention.

Many folks today are far more comfortable with talking about being spiritual than they are about being religious. For too many this simply means a vague sort of emotion or sentimentality which involves an obedience to and trust in no one but themselves. To be spiritual may not mean anything which we want to say, but the language is out there. How will we account for that?

What do we say to the person who critiques us for a lack of Spirit? This is often based on the fact that our worship is not frenetic, does not involve glossolalia, prophecy, or other sometimes ecstatic activity. Some will say that Lutherans because they don't do these things do not really have the Spirit. What do we say to them?

Perhaps we can point to our cultural longevity (Lutherans have been around for nearly 500 years), prayer, song, the sacraments, and other ways, but those who find the presence of the Spirit only in an emotive state will not be satisfied. They are looking for something emotional.

Collect of the Day

O God, on this day You once taught the hearts of Your faithful people by sending them the light of Your Holy Spirit. Grant us in our day by the same Spirit to have a right understanding in all things and evermore to rejoice in His holy consolation; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

God teaches the hearts of his faithful people. What a strange thing to say. We like to think that teaching involves the mind, and it does. Yet, this prayer has God teaching our hearts. What does it mean to teach a heart? How does one do that? Who has taught your heart? I think of my parents and those who often let me fail so that I could really learn the most valuable lessons in life. I think of the mentors and the folks who cared about what was in my heart, and were not afraid when they saw its darkness as well as its light.

Recent research into the way that people learn and are formed suggests that this is more true than we might imagine. We often imagine that we are thinking machines whose actions are determined by our thoughts. But in fact, our thinking follows our actions and our culture far more than they follow our minds. We are shaped by the culture and environment in which we act, and those actions are also really formative. If I act like a beast in a competitive culture, pretty soon, that will fill my heart.

God taught the hearts of his faithful people by sending them the light of the Holy Spirit. I think we look for the Spirit too often in our minds, but how does one look in the heart, even your own? What does it mean to have the Spirit shining in our hearts? I think this often manifests in the way we approach and solve problems. How we come to a problem may have far more to say about what happens than what we "know" about it mentally. We can come to problems with a totally different attitude and spirit because the Holy Spirit has taught our hearts that no sin is bigger

than Jesus' death and resurrection. But what do you think it means that the Spirit is shining in there?

We wondered if the "heart" is not the whole sense of self. If I am focused wholly on myself – is that a heart sickness? If, on the other hand, I am really focused on Christ and his people, do I have a much healthier heart.

We ask that by the same Spirit to have a right understanding in all things and evermore to rejoice in his holy consolation.

Is this about the will of God? Do we have a right understanding when we know the will of God? What is that will? That all men be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth in Christ? What understanding does God want me to have about global warming, the Boston Marathon bombing or the young women imprisoned for ten years in Cleveland? What is the "right understanding" when I see those situations? What is the right understanding of my family which is in turmoil or my job which is shaky? What is the right understanding when my health fails me or my marriage crumbles?

In one sense, we have to admit I don't have such understanding; I am still a work in progress. My ignorance or lack of understanding is my problem. How often don't I see my enemy as an enemy instead of a person for whom Jesus died? How often don't I see the problem as a problem instead of the opportunity for God to bless?

The right understanding makes sense to me; although, I must admit I fall far short of it. But what about the holy consolation of the Spirit and why would I not rejoice in that? What does it mean to rejoice in that? Can I rejoice in something else? Again, for what it is worth, I think we spend too much time not rejoicing in the consolation of the Spirit but seeking and being quite dissatisfied with the consolation we get elsewhere. This is tragic, the consolation of the Spirit is right there and so sweet. This is why we really need God to answer the prayer and do this. He connects us to Jesus, through the mundane and commonplace things of people, bread, wine, water and Word. Yet, we too often would spurn them, seeking a more "real" experience of Christ in the emotional ecstasy of an event or the false promises of authority or some "new" thing. All the while, he is there with the thing we need most, the balm for our wounded hearts, in the same place he has always been. It is not always exciting, but it is always real.

What is the holy consolation of the Holy Spirit? Is it faith itself, at least faith in a Lutheran sense of a relationship with God established in baptism and nurtured in Word and Sacrament? Is this holy consolation that God is our God and we are His people and we are rescued, precious, redeemed, etc.? is that the holy consolation?

Genesis 11:1-9

¹Now the whole earth had one language and the same words. ²And as people migrated from the east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. ³And they said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly." And they had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar. ⁴Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth." ⁵And the LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of man had built. ⁶And the LORD said, "Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language, and this is only the beginning of what they will do. And nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. ⁷Come, let us go down and there confuse their language, so that they may not understand one another's speech." ⁸So the LORD dispersed them from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city. ⁹Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of all the earth. And from there the LORD dispersed them over the face of all the earth.

This text is just too marvelous for the preacher to ignore on this day when we get such potent texts. The story is bizarre. It comes from the "proto-history" section of the book of Genesis as it lays its groundwork for the call of Abraham. Here we see the people of Babel seeking all the right things in the wrong places. They want community "lest we be dispersed..." and they want significance in their life "let us make a name for ourselves." So they build a tower, an edifice of their own hands.

It has been said that young men join gangs for all the right reasons. They want community, purpose, structure, to be part of something bigger than themselves. They just seek it in the wrong places, often because they feel they have no options. The people of Babel are not that different than we are.

In the next chapter God will come to one of the scattered children of Babel, Abraham, and give him everything they had sought and more. He will make Abraham significant, he will be the father of nations, and he will be a blessing to every family. But God will give this gift, Abraham will not obtain it through his work; it will come through faith, not the building of his hands.

The writer of Genesis laughs at these men and women of Babel. God must stoop down to see their puny little tower. Likewise our attempts to make our happiness, our meaning, our purpose, our community are both comic and more often simply tragic. They don't succeed. God sees that this is the way of humanity and he scatters them, he disrupts their language. And what a job he has done. We have a small international student contingent on campus, mostly here for a few weeks to take English as a second language courses. How I wish I could understand their chattering, laughing, and utterly inscrutable languages as they take a break outside my office. I hear them through the window, communicating with one another and I am totally shut out of these conversations. The most we can usually manage is a "Hi" as we pass one another. They at least are trying to learn my language.

Which of course is why we have this text today. God, in Pentecost undoes this curse, at least for the moment. Peter and the Disciples will preach and be heard in the heart language of every one of their hearers, in the idiom of their childhood, in the language that speaks most clearly to them. Even when we know the same language we struggle to communicate. Sam Nafzger used to comment that his idea of heaven was where everyone used the same words to mean the same things.

This text is about breaking down barriers. I have had the privilege of preaching through translators in Kyrgyzstan and India. It is quite an experience and you always wonder what they are saying when you get done with a sentence. I was preaching on Jacob and Esau in Kyrgyzstan and my translator was speaking Russian. I called Jacob a scoundrel for deceiving his brother and stealing the blessing which Isaac meant for Esau. My translator turned and looked at me and said, "I cannot say that word in Russian in church." Apparently the Russians have a word for scoundrel, but it is not something you might say to little old ladies on Sunday morning.

The Holy Spirit breaks down barriers, in this case even the barriers which God has erected. It takes a Law and Gospel preacher to address that.

Does this text give us the place to start the discussion of the Holy Spirit? The people were trying to seize a name and unity for themselves so they could control it. But God turns around in chapter 12 and gives them all that they sought and more, but the Holy Spirit difference is that this is a gift given to an old man and his old wife, a son.

Do we see here an important distinction between a self-centered "serve us" mentality and the God centered "service" frame of mine?

Psalm 143

- ¹Hear my prayer, O LORD;
give ear to my pleas for mercy!
In your faithfulness answer me, in your righteousness!
- ²Enter not into judgment with your servant,
for no one living is righteous before you.
- ³For the enemy has pursued my soul;
he has crushed my life to the ground;
he has made me sit in darkness like those long dead.
- ⁴Therefore my spirit faints within me;
my heart within me is appalled.
- ⁵ I remember the days of old;
I meditate on all that you have done;

I ponder the work of your hands.
⁶ I stretch out my hands to you;
my soul thirsts for you like a parched land.

Selah

⁷ Answer me quickly, O LORD!
My spirit fails!
Hide not your face from me,
lest I be like those who go down to the pit.
⁸ Let me hear in the morning of your steadfast love,
for in you I trust.
Make me know the way I should go,
for to you I lift up my soul.

⁹ Deliver me from my enemies, O LORD!
I have fled to you for refuge!
¹⁰ Teach me to do your will,
for you are my God!
Let your good Spirit lead me
on level ground!

¹¹ For your name's sake, O LORD, preserve my life!
In your righteousness bring my soul out of trouble!
¹² And in your steadfast love you will cut off my enemies,
and you will destroy all the adversaries of my soul,
for I am your servant.

The psalmist is always the place to go for the emotive content of a feast like this. Look at how he pleads for the help of God. His life is crushed, his spirit fails him, and an enemy has pursued him until he is at the end of his rope. He sits in darkness like one who is dead. What a terrible picture, but it is our picture without the outpoured Spirit of God.

He begs for the Spirit of God to lead him on level ground. God rescues him from the enemies. This Spirit enables the psalmist to call himself servant.

Acts 2:1-21

¹When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. ²And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. ³And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. ⁴And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.

⁵Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. ⁶And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. ⁷And they were amazed and astonished, saying, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? ⁸And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? ⁹Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, ¹¹both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians—we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God." ¹²And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" ¹³But others mocking said, "They are filled with new wine."

¹⁴But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them: "Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words. ¹⁵For these people are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day. ¹⁶But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel:

¹⁷ "'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;

¹⁸even on my male servants and female servants

in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy.

¹⁹And I will show wonders in the heavens above

and signs on the earth below,

blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke;

²⁰ the sun shall be turned to darkness

and the moon to blood,

before the day of the Lord comes, the great and magnificent day.

²¹And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.'

This is quite likely the reading to which the preacher will want to pay attention. It is the story of the first Pentecost, often called the birthday of the Christian Church.

In the first reading, mankind tried to build a tower to heaven to achieve divinity. Here God descends to give back what was lost and to establish the very community and communication which had been lost.

In the past we have wondered about the flames and what that meant. Is the flame a signification of the presence of the Lord along the lines of the pillar of fire in the Exodus event? Is this why we have candles in church on Sunday? We really don't need them for light, but they are a way of making the point that God is here. That, by the way, is how the almost always have functioned in religious settings across religious traditions. They are a marker for the presence of God. What does that tongue of flame on their heads really say to us today?

Joel tells us that God will pour out the Spirit on all and they will prophecy. If we proclaim the outpouring of the Spirit, where is the promised prophecy? Some this revolves around the definition of prophecy. It was not only fore-telling but also forth-telling, to be a prophet was not only to tell the future, it was also speak the present. We prophecy whenever we speak a word of forgiveness, that is an act of prophecy. We speak the truth of God to that situation and person. Prophecy also involved a great deal of social and political commentary. Elijah the prophet confronted Ahab in Naboth's vineyard and uttered a prophecy, in part prediction but also in part a divine condemnation of what Ahab had done.

What is also interesting in this is that the all flesh means that the Spirit is poured out on folks we don't think ought to have him, including the atheist and unbeliever, yes, even deacons. Peter will experience this first hand in chapter 10 of Acts when he encounters Cornelius, but do we encounter it when the rabid unbeliever points out the sin of the church and Christians? Is that also a Spirit driven prophecy of sorts from the outside? If the Spirit is poured out on all flesh, is he also poured out on the scientist in the lab who studies genetics? Are the amazing technological advances of the two millennia since the first Pentecost also a gift of the Spirit? In Jesus' day the numbers of people who were blind, lepers, prematurely dying from communicable diseases was phenomenally high. Do we point to the medical advances which we enjoy and say, "Look, the same Spirit who healed through Peter and John, is healing today!"

Does all flesh only refer to humans? Is it to every creature?

The story which is before us is familiar. The disciples are gathered together in the upper room, it seems their usual place of meeting. There is a sound like a mighty wind, tongues of flame divide and settle on the heads of those gathered. We don't know if this was more than the 12 or not, but it clearly included Matthias who was chosen last week by lot at Peter's behest because it says that Peter is there with the other eleven. I wonder if Joseph Barsabbas, who was called Justus was there too? Did he get a tongue of flame? Did it land on any of the women? Silly questions which should not lead us astray. God doesn't answer any of them. He does say that all of them were there and the tongue of flame rested on each one of them, so perhaps on the non-apostles and the women as well.

They begin to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them. I find that formulation very important. This is a gift, not a right. The Spirit gives to them and they utter at his gift.

There were other men who were dwelling in Jerusalem at the time. Were they there for the feast or did they live there? It doesn't seem to be entirely clear, but it could have been a combination of the two. Remember that Saul of Tarsus was living there at the time, brought there by his father and mother to be educated at the feet of Jewish rabbis. Were there others? Jerusalem has always had a strange attraction to religious people, and it was no different then. It tended to draw the most religiously active of the Jewish faith.

When the sound of the wind was heard people gathered and marveled to hear these men preaching and praising God in their native tongues. Chances are they did not need this, it is unlikely that they would have not understood Aramaic or Greek as the two common tongues of the day. But this has always seemed to me to be something more than that. This is hearing the Gospel in the tongue of your childhood, this is hearing it in the language of your heart. No translation required. I can handle myself in German, and with a German speaker handy, I find that it gets better and better quickly, but the truth is I will never hear that as I hear the English of my youth. I think that these people were hearing with the language their mothers spoke to them when they were children.

That in itself is interesting. The message could be communicated via the Aramaic or Greek they knew, but the Spirit wanted to speak to their hearts. He wanted intimacy with them. He wanted to be heard like a child listens to his or her mother.

If you stand in Jerusalem and turn a complete circle you will be looking at all these countries listed here. This is the Gospel going in all the directions, and some of these languages are really different from one another.

The reaction is also important. They are all amazed, some wonder what God is up to. Others, however, think that this is wine speaking. They must have been an Elamite listening to the Cretan disciple speaking?! Actually this is very important. You would think that with the sound and the tongues of flame and the miraculous gift of tongues that the hearers would never have had a chance to say no to this. But they do. This is a very important element of the Holy Spirit and one which I think Calvin and the Calvinists get terribly wrong. Grace is not irresistible, even on this miraculous day. There were those there who heard and simply said "No." But Calvin would point to double-predestination and assure me that they were never supposed to accept this.

Peter speaks: No, they are not drunk on wine, but are filled with another sort of Spirit entirely. This is the fulfillment of what the prophets saw long ago. This is really important. This is not a new religion. Luke is very careful about this throughout his book. Christianity is not a new thing, but it is a thing which has ancient and Jewish roots. It could be that he simply knows his audience in this regard. The ancient Romans were fascinated with all things old and they considered the Jews and the Egyptians to be especially interesting. But it more likely is a matter of his time spent with Paul. Paul believes that he is far more authentically a son of Abraham than those who oppose him. Luke seems to be making the same argument, that those who reject this event are rejecting the God who inspired Joel and the other prophets. Matthew also makes this important argument. Jesus is the authentic son of Abraham.

The prophecy which Peter chooses is really interesting for its emphasis on the pouring out of the Spirit on all people. The preacher who is faithful to this text will want to bring this point out. The Holy Spirit is not just for the prophet or preacher, for the miracle worker or the saint. This Holy Spirit is for the whole of humanity, great and small, male and female, all of them. Will our people today hear and believe that this same Spirit has been poured out on them? What will that

mean for the way they see themselves, this world and how will that reality change their minds and their lives? In 1520 when Luther started to articulate the priesthood of all believers it was a liberating moment in European history. Do we hear it today with a yawn or the resignation that now we have to do something else?

John 14:23-31

²² Judas (not Iscariot) said to him, "Lord, how is it that you will manifest yourself to us, and not to the world?" ²³ Jesus answered him, "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. ²⁴ Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me.

²⁵ "These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. ²⁶ But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. ²⁷ Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid. ²⁸ You heard me say to you, 'I am going away, and I will come to you.' If you loved me, you would have rejoiced, because I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I. ²⁹ And now I have told you before it takes place, so that when it does take place you may believe. ³⁰ I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming. He has no claim on me, ³¹ but I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father. Rise, let us go from here.

Luther (*Luther's words on this reading are voluminous. I have opted to excise only a brief portion – the reader is encouraged to avail yourself of the entire passage in Luther's postil notes.*)

"Peace I leave you; My peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives."

83. That is a friendly "good night." Christ wanted to speak most sweetly with His disciples, and He was able to do so. "Well, I must be gone," he says, "and cannot speak with you any longer. Therefore, I bid you a 'good night.' And may it be well with you! I wish and give you nothing else than peace, that is, that it may be well with you." According to the Hebrew language, "Peace" means nothing else than to give and leave them everything good. "This shall be My departure and farewell, which I will leave with you. You will have no harm or lack from My departure. I will abundantly compensate you for it. In place of it you will have from Me the best that you can desire, the peace and good that you have a gracious God in My Father, who loves you with a fatherly love and heart. In Me you have a good and faithful Savior who will do all good for you and not forsake you in any need, but protect and help you against the devil, the

world, and every evil. In addition, I will give you the Holy Spirit, who will rule your hearts so that you have true comfort, peace, and joy in Me.”

84. That is what it meant by the words “My peace I give to you and leave to you, not as the world gives peace.” The world cannot give such peace and goodness, since all its peace and goodness is not only transitory but also fluctuating and changing each hour. The world bases peace and comfort only on temporal money and goods, power, honor, human friendship, etc.; when that is gone, then peace, heart, and courage are gone. Even if it were in its power to give and preserve all of that, it still does not have, and cannot have, the only peace that is true and eternal peace, that the heart has a good standing with God and is certain of His grace and of eternal life.

85. However, because this is not the world’s peace, the holy cross is once again laid on it. In plain speech (that is, according to reason and our feelings), it is called not “peace,” but “hostility, anxiety, fright, fear, and trepidation,” as He says elsewhere: “In the world you will have distress. But take comfort; I have overcome the world (Jo. 16:33).

(Luther’s Works, Vol. 77. CPH, 2014. Pp. 331-363.)

I thought the question of Judas was important here. This is one of his only speaking lines in the whole NT and being so close to it, I would not have it omitted entirely. What is more, I never like to start a reading with “He answered him,...”

The passage immediately before this uses a most interesting metaphor to describe what is going on here. Jesus says that he is not leaving his disciples as orphans. They will be better than children, not less than children.

Here we read that love will keep the word, and the Father will love the one who loves Jesus and the Father and Jesus will come and make a home with that one who loves Jesus. I think we blow by those words too quickly. God comes and makes his home with us. He calls our hearts, our lives, ourselves his home. Do we understand that incarnationally? Do we understand that another way? It seems that it is about a relationship with Jesus. What does it mean to keep the word of Jesus? Does it mean to obey it? Does it mean to do something right? What? Does it mean we cherish it, “gladly hear and learn it” as Luther exhorts us? I think the one who keeps the word of Jesus is the one to whom it continues to speak. I can only gladly hear and learn it because the Spirit gives us that joy. There is a great mystery here that we might with the Psalmist say, “I love your Law.” I think that to keep the word of Jesus is a description of relationship, a relationship which God has established in Christ and my baptism, it is not a deed I do as much as it is a thing that I am. The failure to love is a failure to keep the words of Jesus, and those are not just his words, they are the words of the Father as well who sent Jesus.

Jesus speaks words to these disciples while he is with them, but soon the presence of Jesus will be via the Holy Spirit. He will teach them much more and cause them to remember the forgotten

things which Jesus has said. He has given peace to us, Jesus' peace. This is not the worldly peace, so don't let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. (This is my confirmation verse, one of my favorites in all the Scripture.)

Jesus has told them he is going away, and they should be glad, this means that the Spirit will come, and that will actually be better. Jesus loves the Father and this is where he belongs. This is a good thing.

Notice all the things which are associated with the outpouring of the Spirit here:

- 1. The love that manifests Christ and his kingdom.*
- 2. That love results then in the presence of Christ and the Father.*
- 3. Peace from the Father himself.*
- 4. The word of Jesus – he will teach us and cause us to remember what Jesus has said.*
- 5. The empowerment to do the things that the Father commands.*
- 6. Joy*
- 7. Faith*

Important to note that folks who are not Christians can sometimes experience some of these things. Joy is hardly something that only Christians can experience.

Law

1. I am cut off from God by my human nature. I cannot understand what he says. I am tone deaf to the celestial harmonies.
2. Jesus has come, but that was so long ago. It seems so distant from my problems and my fears.
3. I don't see the miracles just like they seemed to be in the ancient world. They were speaking in tongues and healing and casting out demons. I sit with the same old folks, sing the same old songs, walk through the same old doors that still need repainting. It seems so mundane. Surely this is not the same Church to which Peter preached those many years ago.
4. My lack of connection to God bears bitter fruit in my life, bitterness, division, and hatred. I am separated from him and from the people who around me. They don't understand me, I don't understand them.
5. This reality only gets worse as I get outside my immediate family and household. I find that people from other places speak gibberish to me, and I to them. Worse, my Bible tells me this is a curse God has laid upon us all for our pride and sin and rebellion.

Gospel

1. God has poured out his Spirit on the Disciples at Pentecost. He really cares that people can hear and understand. He could have communicated through the common languages of Peter's day, but he wants this message heard in the language of the heart.
2. That concern and gift is not a thing of the past only. This same Spirit is at work today. The outpouring of the Spirit is not like some pitcher of water that is quickly exhausted, but a mighty waterfall which we can visit year after year, and be amazed at its mighty flow. It does not end.
3. The mundaneness of my experience of Christ is a great gift. The miracles distract me from Jesus, but the simplicity of bread and wine, of water and word, of preachers and parishioners opens my mind to the Jesus who lies behind and within all these things. I don't need miracles, I have faith.
4. This gift of Spirit has real effect on my life. The forgiveness with which I am empowered gives me peace, a peace which the world cannot give, but which God gives in Jesus and through this Spirit. Sins are forgiven, life is restored, tears are dried, we are all God's children and beloved.
5. This gift goes far beyond the circle of my family and friends. Today, because God's people are driven by the Spirit, many labor to bring the Word of God to people in the language of their heart. Missionaries preach and better yet, the people of that language and people group speak God's love to them.

Sermon Ideas

1. To the Heart (That the hearer would believe and rejoice that God has broken every barrier and today speaks to him/her in the amazing language of his relationship. We are each loved and in turn love, and the Father and Son live with us. Alleluia!)

This sermon really focuses on that line in the second reading that says that they heard in their own language, in their own idiom. But also notice the connection to the Gospel reading. Jesus makes his home in our hearts. Really, as a preacher, this is what we are doing. We are called upon to be the one who brings this ancient document, this Bible, into the idiom of the people before me. More than that, we are the living voice of Christ to these people. We proclaim Christ, not a book. Perhaps what is most amazing is that God loves them so much he sent me! This is really interesting if you think about the fact that the men and women who listened to Peter's sermon could have understood the message in Aramaic and Greek, if they were really Jewish guys in Jerusalem at that time.

But the Spirit is not content with simply an intellectual understanding, he wants to speak and teach their hearts. So he gifts the disciples to speak in the language of their hearts.

This would go really well, of course, with the first lesson and the confusion of languages. Every curse has been undone in Jesus, even the odd curse of Babel. If you seek a fun statement of this, have the congregation look up “Joy the World” in their hymnals. The third verse speaks of Jesus causing blessings to flow “far as the curse is found.” When God wants to restore his creation to right relationship with himself, he lifts every curse and every consequence. He opens their ears and hearts to hear his message of love. The curse lifted today is the curse of Babel.

This also moves forward into the Gospel lesson as well. This is about love. The Spirit wants to speak to their hearts because he is interested in the relationship. Jesus says that the one who loves Him, is loved by the Father and He and the Father will live with that person. God moves in with you, bringing amazing gifts. It is all about relationship, you see.

The trick, the law, in all this is that we tend to see this historically, as if it happened long ago, or we think of God’s salvation as a future event, but it is a now event as well. This same Spirit is poured out on us because God desires that same relationship. Speaking in tongues is not necessary for us, because he has a whole cadre of English speakers, but he is interested in your heart just as much as he was interested in the hearts of the folks long ago. We tend to think this needs the flash of the miracle, but in fact he works even better through the mundane things. The miracles tend to distract us from Jesus, but the mundane forces us to rely on the promises.

Missionally, this has tremendous implications for us as Christians. The Holy Spirit is very interested in the person who hears your words, and he in fact makes it work, even when we are occasionally idiotic. How often haven’t I had a parishioner who tells me that my message spoke so meaningfully to them? I ask them, and I hear them say that I said something I don’t really remember saying! For us as Christians this means that I don’t have to convince anyone, I can simply love them, be the presence of Christ to them, care about them, and speak as God gives me occasion, but trust that God will make this work because he cares very much about this message and the person you are loving.

2. Peace I Leave with You (That the hearer would realize and rejoice that God’s gift of Spirit has equipped them to speak what their loved ones need to hear, the love of God and the forgiveness of sins, including the sin you just did to me!)

Jesus promises a great gift to his followers today, the gift of peace. Jesus probably said something like Shalom that day, for he most likely spoke Aramaic. But you might also be interested to know that the Greek word is related to the woman’s name “Irene.” If you have an Irene in your congregation, it might just be an interesting time to bring that up.

Shalom is a fascinating word study. It is much more than simply the peace which we think of as an absence of war, it was a harmony of self and environment, relationship and religion. Jesus offered a peace which was very multi-dimensional and which extended between the sinner and God, the human being and his/her family and community as well as with this broken and sinful world in which we live. It was very holistic. Jesus is concerned for the whole of our existence when he says this.

Of course, we often experience this in the peace which follows forgiveness, but the promise of Jesus and his resurrection means that we come to our environment, to our politics, to our Church differently than the world would have us do so. No matter how sharp the disagreement, whether we are on opposite sides of the emigration debate, democrat/republican, capitalist/socialist, red carpet or blue in the Church remodel, the fight we had with our spouse last weekend, etc., we start that conversation from the perspective of Christ's abiding love for all people. And that reality tempers our discussions. We come to them from the perspective of peace. God has established peace with us in Christ. The God question is answered, the human questions, for all their complexity are rendered into their proper perspective.

Jesus ends this little verse with the admonition, "don't let your hearts be troubled, and do not be afraid." We have peace, you see, a peace which transcends our understanding (Philippians) and the peace which the world cannot take away from us. The economy might be going down the tubes, the world may hate us and rail against us, they may even come to seek our very life, but we have peace, a peace which we can live right now in the way we treat those whom God has led into our lives.

3. Filled with the Spirit of God (That the Spirit of God would inspire the hearer to joy-filled, courageous service and testimony to the Kingdom of Christ.)

This sermon is really intended for the congregation which seems lethargic or sleepy. The reports from the folks who keep such statistics is that too many of our congregations have not seen an adult confirmation or baptism in decades. Somehow the passionate love which God has for this world has not "caught" with too many. This sermon would label that as a sin/Law and offer up the Gospel of Pentecost – the same Spirit poured out those many years ago is being poured out today.

What are the folks in this situation feeling/thinking? They probably are overwhelmed by the situation. They feel like they have tried lots of things that have not worked. They are likely weary and somewhat flustered and dispirited. It is that last adjective we really want to focus on. It is likely the one that most accurately describes our Christian life, testimony and emotion.

In his sermon, Peter uses a text from Joel as his text upon which he preaches. Joel had seen a day when the Spirit of God would be poured out on all humanity regardless of

place or status in society or the home, men and women, slave and free, young and old. There is no escaping this Spirit's work or sitting on the sidelines while others are moved. It is a universal. Just as sin has visited every life with death and sorrow, God has poured out his joyful Spirit on every life and the result is that all who call upon the name of the Lord are saved.

But Peter's words seem pretty far from our experience in this day and age. But is that a problem of the Spirit or is that our problem? Paul tells us that the Spirit of God is quenchable, and John speaks a peaceable Spirit who teaches and reminds, not one who forces and compels. It is quite possible that our listless congregations are in fact the result of a constrained Spirit who blows and blows, but we will not be moved by him. The wind of the spirit is blowing, but our sails are reefed and our ship is anchored. But God knows some good tent-makers, sail makers, and he is strong to lift that anchor.

Luther spoke of the Spirit abandoning the people of Germany and going to another place. It is a frightening thought and not one we should simply dismiss, lest we sound like the people of Jerusalem who insisted that Jeremiah could not be right because they had the temple. Nebuchadnezzar would shatter that misbelief and shuttered congregations may well be what will disabuse us of our misbelief. We imagine that God loves our congregations and institutions as much as we do. But God loves people. Love them and he will show himself (Gospel lesson).

But the exile ended in a promise restored, a temple rebuilt and eventually the long anticipated Messiah born. Likewise the Spirit of God is an ever-flowing stream. He may be gentle, but he is also very persistent! We can point to the presence of the Spirit right now. He is the one who empowers the forgiveness we enjoy, the sacramental touch and taste of God himself. If all we want is that God leave us alone and let us minister to one another until this place is another empty church on the American landscape, he will carefully and lovingly attend to those things. Much good will happen and many quiet and simple acts of courage and community will mark our life together because he will inspire them.

But make no mistake about it. He loves this whole community, this entire town or city. He will be afoot in this place because the Love of God is that strong. Today these words of Acts are spoken to us, inviting us to be a part of God's love for this world and especially this corner of the world. I cannot predict exactly what that will look like here or even the role that this parish will play, if any. Peter clearly was surprised by what happened at Cornelius' house a couple weeks ago. God himself knocked Saul of Tarsus off his horse and sent him in the other direction where he met Lydia of all people last week. The disciples mostly met grisly martyrdoms according to tradition. I don't mean to say that this will be easy, but it will be an adventure. God is calling us to this adventure of joy and courage.

Here the preacher will want to speak of the ways the Spirit has blown in that place. Be ready with a story of God doing something good. Could this be something that God is doing out there? What is God doing in this community? Find that and join him. Don't expect him to do what we want. Steve was reminded of the amazing work done by the Lutheran comfort dogs in the wake of Newtown and Boston. Who would have thought of that in the Northeast a year ago?

This could simply also be a reassessment of all the good things that are happening inside the parish right now. Quite often we imagine that nothing is happening here when in fact God is already doing some excellent things in our midst.

The pastor should be ready also to point to some things that may not be generally known. If there are five women who are doing something amazing in your parish. Tell them about it. If there is someone who is volunteering at the homeless shelter, this might be the moment to tell that story. You might see some folks who are outside the church doing something really good too. Tell that story too.

4. I am going away and I will come to you (That the hearer's eyes would be opened to see the Spirit mediated presence of Christ in his/her life.)

Jesus seems to speak nonsense here. He goes and comes at the same time. But really this is so. It appears from his description of events that the outpouring of the Holy Spirit was waiting for the ascension/departure of Jesus. But the outpouring of the Spirit does bring us the Jesus who is now closer to us right now. The disciples as they walked along the shores of Galilee are always depicted as rather obtuse about Jesus. It is always after the Pentecost event that the disciples actually get Jesus right. Just look at Peter's first epistle to see what I mean or just read his sermons in Acts.

But this is still true today. We know Jesus much better than they did. Jesus has kept his word, he has come to dwell in us with the Father. God has "taught our hearts" to quote the Collect of the Day. We are in the presence of Christ right now because the Holy Spirit's outpouring did not stop on Pentecost, as though he was a bucket of water poured out on the world. No, he is a waterfall that continues to fall upon us. This first Pentecost is simply the moment when some great cataract has broken through and now comes tumbling down upon the earth. Its first falling was marked by dramatic events, but its thunderous roar is still seen in every baptism, every confession, every time a person embodies Christ for another human being in the world.

The law for this sermon would really be the life/attitude which operates as if Jesus is absent. We live as if our real goal is to go and see him some day, likely after we die, instead of living in the relationship right now he has established through the Spirit. The Gospel is that Jesus has poured the Spirit out, and like standing under a waterfall, it is pretty hard not to get wet. He doesn't wait for us to figure this out, he just does it. He

comes, he entered our lives in Baptism, he addresses us right now in this word, he feeds us with himself in this sacrament, he is right here, whether we admit it or not. His shepherd's voice calls and his sheep hear and are known to him. There is no tower to build to heaven. He has smashed those pretensions but given us all our hearts could desire: Jesus and the Father too, dwelling in us, more intimately known than anyone who stood in awe of some leper cleansed or blind man seeing in the days of Jesus' ministry. We have it better!