

June 4, 2017

Pentecost

“Spirit Moments”

Acts 2:1-21

Fair warning, if you have affection for Pentecostal churches, you may not like this sermon too much. For those of you who aren't familiar with Pentecostal churches, on their most extreme end they hold that if you are a true believer you will have, must have, a Pentecost experience like we heard about in our reading from Acts. You must genuinely have the physical and emotional indwelling of the Holy Spirit resulting in the speaking of this unknown spiritual tongue, and maybe some other spiritual gifts also. You must have “the baptism of the Holy Spirit.”

I bring this up not to bash the Pentecostals. I bring this up because I think a lot of Lutherans want to be Pentecostals. There was a time several decades ago when a bunch of LCMS churches actually started doing the Pentecostal/Charismatic thing. And it's not all that hard to understand why.

It's kind of tough being a poor, miserable sinner all the time, isn't it? We love Jesus. We know He loves us. We know He suffered horribly and died in order to make us His holy, forgiven people. We want to be His holy people in thought, word and deed. We know He will come back to us one day and we want to be a fantastically faithful follower longing for Him on that day. But day after day we're not, or at least it's a real struggle. Our sinful nature just keeps turning us some other way.

So this idea that the Holy Spirit would just come down and “BAM”, fill us up and make us this holy person babbling in some heavenly language and being totally focused on all things spiritual, it's pretty appealing. But that's just not how it is, so let me make a couple points.

Luke writes that *“they were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance”* and *“at the sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language.”*

First off, nobody here is speaking in some weird, incomprehensible spirit-language and they're not parading around saying “Ooooh. Look at me! I'm speaking in tongues!” No. Either these disciples are miraculously speaking foreign languages they didn't know a few minutes ago, or they are speaking their native tongue and miraculously everyone is hearing them in their own language. Either way, the real point is that they are prophesying—speaking the Word of God. And it's not in doubt what that Word is. It's Jesus Christ crucified and risen from the dead! Keep reading and that's exactly what Peter gets at starting in the very next verse!

And after telling all these folks about Jesus in pretty straight up law and gospel fashion, 3000 of them repent and are baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins. And Peter tells them that in doing this, they will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

You know what the text doesn't say. It doesn't say these 3000 people then were filled with the Holy Spirit and started speaking in spiritual tongues and leading holy, holy lives totally dedicated to God. No. You know what they did? They went home. They went to work. They gathered together in homes as the church around the body and blood of Jesus. They listened to God's Word proclaimed by the apostles and later by the pastors ordained to preach. They confessed and received absolution. And sometimes they got bored and weren't “feeling the spirit”. I mean, Holy Scripture itself has an example of a guy going to sleep during a sermon and falling out a window! And, without doubt, they sinned.

That brings me to my second point; Pentecostals sin. The apostles sinned. Every person who had the tongues of flame dance above them and prophesied in a foreign tongue that day still sinned.

I know we all want the big, dramatic spiritual epiphany of faith that changes our lives forever, but even those who get it are poor, miserable sinners. Every Pentecostal who babbles in tongues or interprets those tongues in their worship service, every non-denominational who closes their eyes and holds their hands up and sways back and forth with the praise band because they're "really feeling the Spirit", and every stoic Lutheran who stands up, then sits down, then stands up, then sits down, etcetera, etcetera, still sins.

Because receiving the Holy Spirit is not about you doing the Holy Spirit thing. That's where so many of us Christians go off the rails. When we want that "BAM" moment of the "baptism of the Holy Spirit" or the "BAM" moment of spiritual emotion as the praise music reaches a climax or the "BAM" moment when I make a personal decision for Christ, we're not really looking for the Holy Spirit moment; we're looking for the ME moment. We're kind of saying, "C'mon God! Bowl me over in the powerful way I want so I can know you're God!"

But that's not how the Holy Spirit works faith. St. Paul writes, *"Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ."*

That's exactly what happened at Pentecost. Yes, the disciples received the Holy Spirit in power and prophesied in tongues, but that's not the important part. The important part is what they prophesied and what those words did! They prophesied the word of Christ and with it the Holy Spirit worked faith in the hearts of thousands! The "BAM" moment wasn't the sound of wind, the flame-things resting on them or the speaking in tongues. The "BAM" moment was as the gathered people heard the Word and came to believe. The "BAM" moment was when they were convicted of their sins and pleaded, "What shall we do". The "BAM" moment was when they repented and received the Holy Baptism of water and the Spirit that Christ Himself commanded for the forgiveness of sins. The "BAM" moment was every time after that they gathered to hear the Word more and receive the body and blood of Jesus for strengthening of faith and continued forgiveness of sins. The "BAM" moment is what you and I do in that very same church of Christ today.

We do not need the "BAM" moment that is really just a "ME" moment. We have the God moments, the Holy Spirit moments, again and again and again in our lives. You hear the Words of the Bible, words the world wants to call fairy tales, myths, lunacy wrapped in half-truths, and you know that it is not only the truth, but that it's the truth that saves! That is the work of the Holy Spirit! You have the Holy Spirit! St. Paul wrote pretty clearly, *"The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned."*

We have the Holy Spirit! We have believed and we have been baptized! That's what the Holy Spirit does. We plead mercy from God for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior and again, St. Paul: *"No one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit."*

You want a "BAM" moment? There is one coming up. It's when you kneel at the rail, receive bread and wine into your mouth and know it is really the body and blood of Jesus Christ being delivered for your salvation. As St. Peter wrote, *"Even though you do not see Him now, you believe in Him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy."* "BAM," Holy Spirit at work in you.

If you get spiritually emotional; good for you. That's real nice. If you're blessed with a moment or moments when you just feel really close to God, that's great! If you miraculously start speaking about Jesus in Italian or Farsi, that's pretty impressive. But if you simply hear the Word, believe and are baptized, that's imperative; that's salvation; that's God's Holy Spirit at work in your skin!

Don't think you need more. You know Jesus is your Lord. Therefore through the shedding of His blood, by the power and calling of His Holy Spirit, you are His.

Amen.