

May 20, 2018
Pentecost Sunday
John 15:26-27; 16:4b-15

The Pentecost event in Acts 2 has really caused a stir in the Christian church for the past 100-plus years. It was around the turn of the last century that Charles Fox Parham began preaching about speaking in tongues as evidence of the baptism of the Holy Spirit and the Pentecostal movement was born. However, he most certainly wasn't the first to claim direct revelation from the Holy Spirit. Martin Luther had to deal with the Zwickau prophets right from the beginning of the Reformation.

Why is it that people seek this kind of uber-spiritual experience? I think part of it is simple jealousy. I remember the cafeteria in grade school at Trinity Lutheran in Illinois, this was back in the days when you brought your own lunch to school. I'd open my brown bag and pull out my PBJ sandwich, a fruit cup, maybe some butter cookies if I was lucky. Then Eric Stienhardt would sit down with his brand new James Bond "Diamonds are Forever" lunch box. He'd pull out a bevy of delights: left over pizza, potato chips, snack pack pudding, Hershey bars, jelly beans and who knows what else. Sometimes he'd grace me with his celery and carrot strips. Do I sound bitter? Darn tootin'! I saw what Eric had, and my lunch seemed miserable by comparison.

I think maybe some Christians get this way about their faith. They read their Bible and what is there? Miracles. Revelations to prophets. The Holy Spirit coming upon the apostles with power and flamey thingies, giving them gifts of healing, prophesy and speaking in foreign languages. Folks read that and they don't have those things and they want them. They get jealous, and the faith they have seems miserable by comparison.

That's very worrisome. I mean, the faith we have been given is the truth of Christ, His death and resurrection for us, and believing in that is salvation. Turning towards something more because that's just not good enough...that's awful close to disbelieving the truth that saves really saves.

True, Jesus says, *“But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me. And you also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning,”* and *“When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come.”*

But He says this to the Apostles who were with Him from the beginning of His ministry. He isn't saying this to all believers of all time. And on the day of Pentecost, whether it was just the 12 who received the flames or a larger group of 120 followers of Christ, it doesn't really matter. They received this gift to proclaim the message and baptize.

This is exactly what they do—proclaim the message and baptize. Sure, they do it miraculously speaking in foreign tongues but what's the result? About 3000 people came to believe in Jesus that day and were baptized. 3000 people with no flames, no flash and flair, just faith and Baptism surely followed later by a gathering around the bread and wine in the Lord's Supper. They receive the exact same gifts of Word and Sacrament received in faith that you receive today. The same gifts that have been saving souls for nearly 2000 years now.

The grand work of the Holy Spirit that day was not in the flamey thingys and the speaking in tongues! The grand work of the Holy Spirit was in the words Peter spoke to the crowd, the words the others spoke in foreign tongues so that people heard the Gospel in a language they understood. This is the same exact work of the Holy Spirit done upon you when the

same Gospel good news is conveyed to you in the English language. You have nothing to be jealous of. You received the same thing they all got, the resurrection from death in Ezekiel's vision of the dry bones.

I remind you of this today because one of Satan's ploys is to try and convince you that this isn't enough. When you're sick or in pain he tempts you to believe it's not enough—you need healing. When you're poor and in need he tempts you to believe it's not enough—you need wealth. When you're persecuted, abused and downtrodden he tempts you to believe it's not enough—you need justice. When you're a poor, miserable sinner he tempts you to believe it's not enough—you need to do better.

And when all these things and more weigh on you and the doubts about your faith gnaw at the edge of your mind, he tempts you to believe this faith is not enough—that you need something bigger and better, a flamey thingy above your head, a revelation, a miracle, some spiritual metamorphosis to hoist you into that perfect, undoubting and unwavering faith that shines so bright you can't even feel the darkness anymore. And when it doesn't come, or when the spiritual high fades, he tempts you to believe it is because you are deficient; because there is something wrong with your faith and that it falls short of salvation.

Jesus told His apostles, "*When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth.*" That Spirit came at Pentecost and what was the truth they immediately started proclaiming? It was that Jesus Christ did all that was necessary for salvation. It was that the benefit of His death and resurrection for the forgiveness is delivered to you in Holy Baptism, in the Word, in the Supper if you will only receive it by faith. Not by your perfect faith, for you are broken beyond any perfection of yourself. Received by a faith perfected by the cross and tomb of

Christ in which all that is righteous about Him, including His perfect faith, is accounted to you in the forgiveness of sins.

You want direct revelation from the Holy Spirit? You're getting it all the time. When the full counsel of God's Law and Gospel from the Bible is read, heard, preached from the pulpit, sung in the hymns or pondered in the heart and received in faith, that's the Holy Spirit at work! When in repentance you call to mind the comfort of your Holy Baptism washing away your sins and ushering you through the gates of death with Christ and into His life everlasting, that's the Holy Spirit's doing! When you taste your Savior's very body and blood in the Holy Supper and walk away know the truth, that it is "for you for the forgiveness of sins," you are accepting that truth by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Saint Paul writes quite clearly, "No one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit." What have you been saying all morning?

So don't be jealous of the faith of the apostles, or your perception of great faith in the Christians around you. You are not deficient, cannot be deficient, because the power that saves you isn't from you, isn't from your faith; it's from the cross of Christ. And Christ promises that it is delivered to you daily by the Comforter He sent to deliver it, the Holy Spirit.

Amen.