

June 8, 2025
Pentecost Sunday

“Great Faith”

John 14:23-31

We get jealous of that group of followers of Christ at Pentecost we earlier read about in the book of Acts. They get the roaring sound of the rushing wind. They get the mysterious flames of fire over their heads. They get the miraculous speaking in different tongues. They get the Holy Spirit in power. Here we sit 2000 years later and we don't seem to get any of that. We'd like some of that stuff. We look at them and then consider our doubts and struggles in the faith and we desire that flashy, inspiring power of the Spirit. Not so much the power to perform miraculous signs and wonders, although that would be pretty cool, but just the power to believe and not doubt; to be always steadfast and sure in our Christian faith, to be so filled with the Holy Spirit that, well, we just do faith well; follow Christ powerfully.

But we shouldn't feel jealous. We have exactly what Christ promises to give by the Holy Spirit. He tells His disciples in the upper room before His arrest: *“These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. 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.”*

The main gift the Holy Spirit brings and works through isn't what the world sees as miraculous and powerful. The Holy Spirit brings the Word of Christ; the Gospel. The Holy Spirit works through the Word of Christ; the Gospel. The Holy Spirit gives to you the Word of Christ; the Gospel—the gift Jesus promised and the gift you need.

What Jesus promised has taken place. Yes, the apostles and others received the Holy Spirit in power that day at the Jewish festival of Pentecost. And yes, they spoke in tongues, prophesied, performed miraculous healings and exorcisms as did other believers in the early church. But all that served a singular mission and that mission continued long after those flamboyant spiritual gifts faded away. The mission was the proclamation of the Gospel. The mission was to speak what they had been taught by Christ which the Holy Spirit brought to their remembrance—this sacred word of God that they also wrote down on paper that has been passed down through history that the greatest gifts would also come to us. This mission continues now.

You know these gifts: forgiveness of sin, peace with God, resurrection from the dead and life everlasting. You receive them in the same manner those early Christians did—Baptism into Christ's death and resurrection, the proclamation of forgiveness to the penitent, the body and blood of Jesus in, with and under the bread and wine. This hasn't changed; same gifts, same mission, same Holy Spirit.

But what about that gift of steadfastness and sureness in the Christian faith? Again, we have no need to be jealous.

The epistles of the New Testament are written to the churches wherein dwelled many of these children of God who had received the flashy gifts of the Holy Spirit in power. But what are the apostles very often saying in these letters? “You've got problems with your practice of faith.” These early believers had the same spiritual struggles as you do. The indwelling of the Holy Spirit did not remove all their doubts and it most certainly didn't stop them from falling to temptations to sin. St. Paul in First Corinthians seems to have had to somewhat admonish believers about the misuse or misunderstandings about the very spiritual gifts they had received in power!

And where do the apostles continually point for correction? To Christ. To the Gospel. To the very same Word and the very same promises that you and I have received. We lack nothing. I've preached this same simple message on past Pentecost Sundays. You lack nothing. Christ gives you this day the greatest gifts—those He died and rose in order that they would be yours.

Yet we still have this yearning that our faith would be...what? Healed? Made solid? Made powerful? Now on the one hand I want to say that's a good and holy desire. You want to better be the holy child of God that Christ's mercy and grace has declared you to be.

But on the other hand I say beware of that desire. A desire that something of you be great plays into the selfish, prideful fallen nature. It's very easy for us to desire to have a powerful faith in God so that we have a bit of glory of our own to hold up before God. That's not good. I once officiated a wedding and later at the reception a man came up to me and started talking about Christian faith. He told me with great pride that he spoke in tongues, and that pride of his was not in Jesus. I think whenever we desire something great of God we should ask ourself, "Do I want this for God's glory or for my own?"

If you long for stronger faith or any of the spiritual gifts, remember Jesus' words: "*Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you.*" You don't find peace in YOUR faith. You don't find peace in YOUR gifts. Peace comes from Christ. All the greater gifts are given by Christ. If you are looking for any of this from and of yourself, you're looking in the wrong direction. Look to Christ.

You want to see a great faith? Look to Christ. He was faithful to the holy law of God. He was faithful to the will of God that the Son be crucified and die. He was faithful to the true promise that He would be raised from death to eternal life. He is faithful to you; to give His gifts out of divine grace because you were powerless and dead in your trespasses and HE would not let that situation stand!

So is the quality of your faith the determining factor of whether you receive God's grace, or is it the quality of God's grace in Christ? It is Christ. He is the One who is great, not you. He is the One who has done the work of salvation, not you. He is the God of steadfast love who is faithful to His wonderful promises, not you.

St. Paul assures us that "*No one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except in the Holy Spirit.*" You say "Jesus is Lord" even if you do so desperately struggling in the faith begging that He forgive your spiritual failings. It's the Holy Spirit that has led you to this frantic plea for mercy, but it is the mighty and merciful Christ who answers it in steadfast love and divine mercy, establishing peace between you and the Father.

So don't be jealous. The means of grace, Christ's Word and Sacraments, have been handed down to you through the centuries by the saints who came before you, who struggled with temptation and sin, who struggled with doubts, saints who wished the Holy Spirit would come upon them in power because their faith just seemed not up to the task.

But therein lies the truth of the matter: YOUR faith is not up to the task. It never can be because your faith is of you. Christ is the giver. Your peace is in Him. And He has proved He is up to the task by rising from the dead to the glory of the Father. So long as your faith, whatever the quality, is aimed at Him and seeking the greater gifts, it receives them because it is faith gifted of the Holy Spirit of God and points you to the all-sufficient Savior.

Quite frankly, if you're jealous of those Pentecost spiritual gifts, you're looking at the wrong gifts. Look to your Savior. Look at the Gospel He has given you. Then know that, in Christ, the greatest gifts are indeed now and forever yours.

Amen.

