

Sermon on **Acts 2:1-21** – Pentecost – 5.28.23
St. Paul's Lutheran – New Ulm, MN – Pastor N. Scharf

My godmother, Aunt Char, (along with Uncle Paul) has always been a good gift-giver. She paid attention to what the trends were, the useful trends, and what was needed. She always found a way to give a nice gift, and a useful one. Sometimes it was for fun – like a nice beach towel, not the one I had used at the cabin the year before that was threadbare from being handed down through a few older siblings, but a nice big one that covered her big-boned godchild she loved. Sometimes it was preparatory considering the field I was studying in and the books I'd be having – a nice clock for the shelf, and some book ends with crosses if I remember correctly. Somehow she had the feeling I would accumulate books. Good and useful gifts given out of love – gifts to enjoy and at the same time perfectly timed useful gifts. While Aunt Char and Uncle Paul are good, the Holy Spirit does it best. As the Holy Spirit is the gift and gives gifts to me and to all.

God the Holy Spirit is the Gift that keeps Giving.

That day in Jerusalem the faithful and devout Jews streamed in for the next in line of the three harvest festivals. God told them to return and bring an offering of thanks. At this festival of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came as the perfect gift at the perfect time, promised by Jesus, given generously by the Father. **God the Holy Spirit is the Gift that keeps Giving.**

We might think wrapping paper commands attention in a sea of gifts, or maybe it's the bow, or maybe it's the name written in bold letters on the present itself, but this day in Jerusalem it was three miraculous wonders and sign – first, *the sound of violent wind* without the breeze, that brought a crowd to its attention in a busy city, a miracle to make them look and.

Into this room where the disciples and any followers of Jesus who might have been there were gathered, *what looked like tongues of fire* came and separated and came to rest on each of the disciples. A sign, a symbol, a miraculous wonder, which brought attention to each one of Jesus' followers. These were people to watch. These were people to listen to. And these were people who should say something.

Then what was miraculous on the outside was overshadowed by what happened on the inside. Each was *filled with the Holy Spirit* and spoke in languages that all the crowds could understand – not just the lingua franca of Greek or maybe Aramaic, but each disciple spoke in the language of someone gathered – in the language of the place of their birth – not just smushing words together like first year language students butchering grammar and syntax, but clearly, intelligibly, so that these Jews in Jerusalem understood the message from these Galilean followers of Jesus proclaiming the wonders of God!

Miracle upon miracle being poured out at the right time in the right place – **God the Holy Spirit is the Gift that keeps Giving.** And the crowd gathered, astonished and marveling that these Galileans could speak their native tongue and they listed off the languages of these people who were gathered – and as you look at a map it was like watching Bob Ross paint happy trees all over a canvass, except these were people from all over the map – here in Jerusalem hearing the disciples bring this message.

“And they were all amazed and greatly perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?” This is the great question, isn't it. Like opening presents from Aunt Char and Uncle Paul, while automatically saying, “Thank you!” and giving a hug in the early years and a handshake in the later years, I would wonder why this gift at this time and think. And there are two responses a person might have. One is to not think highly of it, or to want to brush it off and move on not thinking it's needed or necessary like the time I opened up a gift of women's iso-toner gloves that clearly did not fit my fat hands, and I thought, why would someone give me these?!? (only to realize it didn't say “Nate” on the wrapping, but “Net” which is my mom's nickname in my grandma's wiggly writing).

And so *“some, however, made fun of them and said, “They have had too much wine.”* It wasn't true. It was a baseless accusation from the start – a throw away excuse because they were outright rejecting what was happening and God's intervention, or God's activity among them made them uncomfortable and they gave into their sinful nature. Filling up on wine does not make you intelligibly fluent in another language even if the drunk person might think they are. At first we laugh at the ridiculousness of this accusation in order to downplay the Spirit's work. But at closer pondering, I have to confess I've used dumb excuses to ignore time in God's Word or God's house or putting it into practice in my life – trying to keep the Spirit's work through Word and Sacrament at arm's length. Telling myself I'm too tired, or not in the mood, but then failing to set a time the next day or morning when I should plan to be. Blaming the

presentation or presenter as a reason I don't need it – I don't connect with that teacher as much, or I'm not interested in that subject, so I'm not going to pay attention or I could just skip and do something else productive, but often don't make up that time I missed with God's Word.

And while I don't want church or time in God's Word to be just another thing I have to do, or a box to check, or feel like it's something someone's making me do, I also have to pause and ask what is going on in my heart that I feel going to God's house regularly for worship and Bible study is just checking a box, or time in his Word at home is a chore, or God's Word is something for the kids, and not for me too? While there might be temporary, rarer than not excuses or reason, to bypass opportunities to worship together, learn together, or dig into God's Word alone, more often than not a look within reveals – I'm a lazy, selfish, sinner, and I have need to repent. Instead of the humble example of Mary sitting at Jesus' feet, too often I resemble busy Martha, or judgmental Martha finding "better" things to do or "more necessary things." And I need to pray, "God, forgive me."

And that's what Peter had come to tell me, and you, and all those people back that day in Jerusalem so we don't scoff but treasure what Jesus has done! *"Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd...this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: 'In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy. I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord. And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.'"*

Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, was a different man. Forgiven by Jesus, reinstated by Jesus as one of his disciples, where previously he had run and denied to save his own skin, he takes his stand and preaches – no fear or fainting. This is God's work. This is the fulfillment of God's Word through his prophet Joel. The last days begin with Jesus' taking on flesh, purchasing us by his blood, and ascending into heaven, and are shown too now as the Holy Spirit fulfills this word and blesses believers in a showy special way on Pentecost to proclaim *the wonders of God*. Signs accompanied Jesus' death and resurrection. Many of the signs of the end times happen all around us in the world, and no doubt some are yet to come. And Jesus' return draws near. But the comforting word Peter preaches is this, *"Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."*

The right gift at the right time. Some mock, but by God's grace we marvel. **God the Holy Spirit is the Gift that keeps Giving.** Peter shared with them the good news that Jesus Christ is the Messiah who was to come, who was unjustly and sinfully crucified by the Jewish leaders and Pilate, but in so doing, paid the debt we owed God and suffered the just punishment of hell on that cross paying for price of our redemption – not with gold or silver, but with his holy precious blood and with his innocent suffering and death. And he rose from the grave, rose to prove all this is done. He ascended.

And the Holy Spirit, promised by Jesus, delivered by the Father on Pentecost shows that this message is for all, that Jesus did this so that we should be his own and live under him in his kingdom and serve him in everlasting righteousness, innocence and blessedness, just as he has risen from death lives and rules eternally.

They were all given the message to share on that day. And **God the Holy Spirit is the Gift that keeps on Giving** – he has given us faith. He has given us His Word – the Word of God, for us to continue to share in our homes, in our conversations, publicly in worship and in classrooms as our roles and callings direct, and privately, all of us as God has given this message to all of us, and he provides the abilities opportunities he knows we need to speak, and to support the spread locally and globally like happy trees all over the map. The Pentecost blessings keep coming.

You have this gift. Paul reminded the Corinthians, *"Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body"* (1 Corinthians 6:19). The Holy Spirit is a gift, *"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"* (Acts 2:38). You have been given the Holy Spirit through the means of Grace, the Gospel in Word and Sacrament. This is the perfect gift – that **keeps giving** as you are fed by God's Word and receive his sacrament, you grow in your faith, in your desire for living a godly life to bring glory to God and to truly serve your fellow mankind. You learn more and more about God's love and forgiveness for you, and all that he did to save you, and why we have every reason to look forward to his return on that great and glorious day, and the joy we have in doing his work, sharing and living his message until he returns. Give thanks for the perfect gift and the perfect time, **God the Holy Spirit is the Gift that keeps Giving.** Amen.