

SCRIPTURE READINGS AND SERMON

Day of Pentecost

May 31, 2020

Psalm 25:1–15

- 1 To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul.
- 2 O my God, in you I trust;
let me not be put to shame;
let not my enemies exult over me.
- 3 Indeed, none who wait for you shall be put to shame;
they shall be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous.
- 4 Make me to know your ways, O Lord;
teach me your paths.
- 5 Lead me in your truth and teach me,
for you are the God of my salvation;
for you I wait all the day long.
- 6 Remember your mercy, O Lord, and your steadfast love,
for they have been from of old.
- 7 Remember not the sins of my youth or my transgressions;
according to your steadfast love remember me,
for the sake of your goodness, O Lord!
- 8 Good and upright is the Lord;
therefore he instructs sinners in the way.
- 9 He leads the humble in what is right,
and teaches the humble his way.
- 10 All the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness,
for those who keep his covenant and his testimonies.
- 11 For your name's sake, O Lord,
pardon my guilt, for it is great.
- 12 Who is the man who fears the Lord?
Him will he instruct in the way that he should choose.
- 13 His soul shall abide in well-being,
and his offspring shall inherit the land.
- 14 The friendship of the Lord is for those who fear him,
and he makes known to them his covenant.
- 15 My eyes are ever toward the Lord,
for he will pluck my feet out of the net.

FIRST READING: Numbers 11:24-30 (ESV)

²⁴ So Moses went out and told the people the words of the LORD. And he gathered seventy men of the elders of the people and placed them around the tent. ²⁵ Then the LORD came down in the cloud and spoke to him, and took some of the Spirit that was on him and put it on the seventy elders. And as soon as the Spirit rested on them, they prophesied. But they did not continue doing it.

²⁶ Now two men remained in the camp, one named Eldad, and the other named Medad, and the Spirit rested on them. They were among those registered, but they had not gone out to the tent, and so they prophesied in the camp. ²⁷ And a young man ran and told Moses, "Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp." ²⁸ And Joshua the son of Nun, the assistant of Moses from his youth, said, "My lord Moses, stop them." ²⁹ But Moses said to him, "Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the LORD's people were prophets, that the LORD would put his Spirit on them!" ³⁰ And Moses and the elders of Israel returned to the camp.

EPISTLE: Acts 2:1-21 (ESV)

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

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

¹⁴ But 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. ¹⁵ For these people are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day. ¹⁶ But 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;

¹⁸ even on my male servants and female servants
in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy.

¹⁹ And 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.
²¹ And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.'

HOLY GOSPEL: John 7:37-39 (ESV)

³⁷ On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. ³⁸ Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'" ³⁹ Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

Sermon 22 – Pentecost

"Miracle What?"

Acts 2:1-20

Dear friends,

The Day of Pentecost celebrates the coming of the Holy Spirit, this is entirely straightforward, wonderful, and full of hope for us. This is commonly thought to be the start of the modern Christian church, the transition from the Old Covenant to New Covenant, Judaism to Christianity. Pentecost is where it starts. The Lord's Supper. Sermons. Baptism. Church. The whole idea and structure of nourishing our faith by gathering around God's Word and His promises to return and take us to be with Him, it all begins here. In more ways than one. Learning from beginnings is a good thing, so let's see what we can learn from this.

The twelve disciples and the others that followed Jesus have been awaiting this day with great anticipation and not a little mixed emotion. Jesus has ascended into heaven, and the disciples have been

meeting together around the Word of God, waiting for this. When it comes, it hits like a truck, which is very appropriate for God. It also sounds like wind, which is also not entirely out of the ordinary for God.

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

So God comes down to men, and He does so in wind and fire. God sounds like wind, looks like fire, and feels like fear in the Bible. Fear is the most common reaction when God gets up close and personal, and those other two manifestations are how their respective senses perceive it. Divided tongues of fire are how Luke describes what he sees, and this sounds like something familiar to those who know the Old Testament. When God sets aside an individual, like a king or a prophet, part of the ceremony that's involved with that is anointing. Messiah means anointed one, after all, and so these disciples are being anointed for their task of building the church. Jesus has spelled out that responsibility Himself in the Gospels, particularly the latter part, but this is where the power to do so comes. You don't arrest anyone in the name of the law without a badge. You don't drive a tank without a rank in the army. These disciples haven't begun really publicly missioning or preaching until the Holy Spirit anoints them for the task, and now that the Holy Spirit does that, they begin to do in earnest.

Again, this is where the church starts. It starts with preaching, telling the news. The preaching is in the tongues of men, miraculously granted, which is very much a miracle. That is the miracle that we often fixate on when we think of Pentecost, the speaking in the tongues. Whole churches have built themselves on the echoes of this concept, these misguided Christians look at Pentecost and think we have to do this all the time. You know better, of course, this is a one-time miracle for the inauguration of the

church, but what I want to do is question what the miracle really is here. Is it the speaking in tongues? That's pretty impressive, but is that the real focus of the occasion? I don't think so.

Here's the miracle. It comes in verse 14. **“Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words. 15 For these people are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day. 16 But 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; 18 even on my male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy. 19 And 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. 21 And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.”**

Speaking in tongues, the display of fire and windy noise, that's all very striking to our senses, but I think what Peter is talking about is the miracle. More to the point, who Peter is talking *to* is the miracle, and I'll discuss both right now. Peter's first Christian sermon, and this is only a part of it, is wonderfully basic and exceedingly blunt. Peter goes to the little prophet Joel, quotes him, God pouring out His spirit on all flesh, and says to the assembled masses, you're seeing this happen right in front of you. This prophecy is being fulfilled right now. He'll go on to discuss why this is happening, talking about how we humans crucified the Lord of glory, but Peter's focus in this part is that prophecy Joel made. God will pour out his Spirit on all flesh. That, my friends, is the miracle.

Why? Well, we are sinners, for one. We deserve to have God's wrath poured out on us, not His spirit. Two, this is a very remarkable change on how God has distributed His Word, His blessings, to people from before. Before, you had to go to and through Israel to interact with God. A lot of people did that, so

it worked, but God was accessed through Israel, the nation, the people. That's why they were there, to be a kingdom of priests, a holy nation. Everybody had access to it, but it was limited to those who could teach and that meant, most likely, Israelites. Now God is doing something different, Peter shows us. Now Israel isn't the point at all, they're just part of something much bigger, much greater. Now, instead of a nation or an ethnic group in a specific place, God is going to pour out His Spirit on all flesh, everywhere. What a big change! Now, the church is going to be among all nations, not just Israel. All nations are going to hear about this God, receive His forgiveness, have access to His promises. We should be grateful for this. Most of us are of northern European descent, and our ancestors were still making fancy swords and worshipping Donar and Freya, so this is why the faith eventually came to us.

God is fulfilling His promise to come to His people Himself, and anoint them with His spirit. That is the real miracle here. God is going to come to you, sinner that you are, across the face of the world, regardless of bloodline, parentage, nation, or location, and pour out His spirit on you. He's going to do this to you to make you His child, bring you into His kingdom, and make good things come from you. Those good things will then overflow out of you, often without your consent, and benefit those around you. This is an entirely new way of working, and while He's been doing it with us for a couple thousand years, never forget that God didn't used to do it this way. That this is God being gracious and just opening the floodgates on His mercy and letting it pour over the whole world.

He still uses the church to do it, so it isn't completely different than before. The circumstances are different, but the gift of the Spirit is still the same. The means of receiving it have to be different in these days, but Peter's sermon still rings true for the church. I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh. That's not something that happens when you're saved, when you believe, it something that starts to happen when you're saved and believe and keeps happening. You folks going about your day-to-day in some rather depressing isolation probably have a hard time seeing it that way, but circumstances are beside the point for what Peter says. God continues pouring out His Spirit upon you. He does in your daily devotions, He

does as you listen to me, He pours that Spirit through you into others as you do what little you can do. The gift never changes. It is Jesus, Jesus crucified, Jesus risen. The need never changes. The delivery vehicle never changes. It's words. Whether you hear them in person with your brothers and sisters in Christ, or remotely, or read them in private, those words are God's Spirit, they breathe His faith into you, they nourish your hearts.

Amen.