

SCRIPTURE READINGS AND SERMON

Pentecost Sunday

May 23, 2021

Psalm 143:1–12 (ESV):

1 Hear my prayer, O LORD;

give ear to my pleas for mercy!

In your faithfulness answer me, in your righteousness!

2 Enter not into judgment with your servant,

for no one living is righteous before you.

3 For the enemy has pursued my soul;

he has crushed my life to the ground;

he has made me sit in darkness like those long dead.

4 Therefore my spirit faints within me;

my heart within me is appalled.

5 I remember the days of old;

I meditate on all that you have done;

I ponder the work of your hands.

6 I stretch out my hands to you;

my soul thirsts for you like a parched land. Selah

7 Answer me quickly, O LORD!

My spirit fails!

Hide not your face from me,

lest I be like those who go down to the pit.

8 Let me hear in the morning of your steadfast love,

for in you I trust.

Make me know the way I should go,

for to you I lift up my soul.

9 Deliver me from my enemies, O LORD!

I have fled to you for refuge.

10 Teach me to do your will,
for you are my God!
Let your good Spirit lead me
on level ground!

11 For your name's sake, O LORD, preserve my life!
In your righteousness bring my soul out of trouble!
12 And in your steadfast love you will cut off my enemies,
and you will destroy all the adversaries of my soul,
for I am your servant.

First Reading: Genesis 11:1–9 (ESV):

The Tower of Babel

11 Now the whole earth had one language and the same words. 2 And as people migrated from the east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. 3 And they said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly." And they had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar. 4 Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth." 5 And the LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of man had built. 6 And the LORD said, "Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language, and this is only the beginning of what they will do. And nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. 7 Come, let us go down and there confuse their language, so that they may not understand one another's speech." 8 So the LORD dispersed them from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city. 9 Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of all the earth. And from there the LORD dispersed them over the face of all the earth.

EPISTLE: Acts 2:1–21 (ESV):

The Coming of the Holy Spirit

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."

Peter's Sermon at Pentecost

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.'

THE GOSPEL - John 14:23–31 (ESV):

23 Jesus answered him, "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. **24** Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me.

25 "These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. **26** 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. **27** Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid. **28** You heard me say to you, 'I am going away, and I will come to you.' If you loved me, you would have rejoiced, because I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I. **29** And now I have told you before it takes place, so that when it does take place you may believe. **30** I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming. He has no claim on me, **31** but I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father. Rise, let us go from here.

Sermon 21 – Pentecost

"Pentecost Envy"

Acts 2:1-21

Dear friends,

The gift of the Holy Spirit is at work today, and this what the readings tell us and this is what our eyes tell us. It is a great gift of God to be able to see what He does, to see how He fulfills His promises, because God spends so much time telling us through words,

and we don't always get to see Him at work. But you can today, while you hear, I urge you to see, and we'll talk about what I'm on about when we get there. Pentecost is the beginning of the Christian church, and in its beginning we see its future, we see ourselves and our future. Jesus began the church with His words and His works, His crucifixion and His resurrection, everything He taught the disciples, but it is the Holy Spirit that makes these things do, it is the Holy Spirit that transforms the Christian from sinner to saint, by linking us to Jesus. We may be all about Jesus here in the church, and we should be, but it is the work of the Holy Spirit that makes us see things that way. You can see this in Pentecost, and you can see it right now among you.

This is Acts, which means this is the early days. The church isn't even a thing yet, though its about to be. Right now you have maybe 200 Christians if that, the twelve disciples haven't hardly done a thing publicly. They've devoted themselves to the Word of God and to prayer. Christ has ascended with the promise that He will never leave them or forsake them, and for the disciples Jesus has told them to stay in Jerusalem until they are clothed with power from on high. That's what happens here.

“ 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.” Pentecost is a Jewish

festival, so you get a lot of traffic into Jerusalem at this time. This kind of thing is what people think of when they think of the Holy Spirit. Flashy, impressive. Tongues of fire divided, mighty rushing wind. That fits our preconceptions of what the Holy Spirit should be like. Miracles are impressive, they should be, because they defy the laws of nature that God has built the world around. The speaking in tongues is noted because they were not able to take the time to learn these human languages, they weren't just babbling, they just miraculously understood all these different languages all at once. This is like the Tower of Babel in reverse. Instead of a language barrier dividing mankind, now you have God's miraculous work *uniting* mankind, breaking down the division caused by language.

It isn't just the miracle, though. The fire and the wind was just the introduction, the real meat of what the Holy Spirit does here is found next, in verse 5. **“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... telling the mighty works of God.”**

That is what the Spirit is trying to do. Fiery tongues are great and all but this is the whole reason for it. Jews from everywhere are hearing the disciples speak, not in a babble, but they're hearing them preach about the mighty works of God. That means that they're preaching about Jesus, they're preaching about sin, the Old Testament, forgiveness, everything you all hear when you open God's Word or come to this church. This miracle

is intended to draw people in to hear the words, and it is intended to make sure that those words are understood.

You can see our heritage here. How do Christians begin, they begin by being drawn to the words of the apostles, the very same words that we have in the Holy Scriptures. They begin by hearing the Gospel, the very same Jesus that we worship here today. Those words are talking about that Jesus, that God, and all that He has done to forgive and renew sinners throughout time. It is the Holy Spirit that pours out on these folks, and it is that same Holy Spirit that is taking those words and making them powerful. It is the same among us. We Christians begin by hearing the Word of God, that Word tells us about Jesus, and it is the Holy Spirit that takes those simple words and uses them to change our hearts, change our minds, change the very essence of who we are.

Sinners need change. They crave it on their own terms, but God is stubborn in setting the terms for what change sinners need. We always think the circumstances have to change, or we need more money, or more time, or this person needs to change, or that person needs to change. God tells us the much more uncomfortable truth that *who we are* is what needs to change most. It is God speaking to us, it is the Holy Spirit working in us, that makes this change happen, and the Holy Scriptures are key to that. The words of the apostles, the words of the prophets, this is what makes a sinner into a saint. This is what raises us from death to life. This is what makes us who we are as church and as Christians. God's Word brings us here, God's Word keeps us here. You are who you are

because and only because the Spirit is at work in you, behind the scenes, always tinkering, rearranging, fixing the broken stuff inside of you.

The Holy Spirit, Jesus. They are a chain, they are a matched pair. Jesus brings forgiveness and promises to send the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit brings Jesus to you, each and every one of you, in the Baptismal font to make you Christian. Then, every Sunday when you confess your sins, the Holy Spirit is right there with you, stirring you to do this, inspiring you to do this. When you receive forgiveness, it is Jesus that you are getting, it is everything Jesus did on the cross that you are getting, but it is the Holy Spirit who is giving it to you. They work in tandem, quite beautifully with the whole three-in-one thing God has going on.

Pentecost is an easy thing, incredibly straightforward. You have a miracle, you have God's Word, you have the apostles, and you have this neat tied up little result. That was then, this is now. Things rarely seem so clear-cut these days. Making this even worse, the end of Pentecost, after Peter preaches his sermon, thousands come to faith in Jesus. Peter builds what we would call a megachurch with one little sermon. It's a remarkable achievement.

But it isn't Peter's achievement. Peter is just a man, a man who weeks ago was cringing so hard away from the authorities that he denied knowing Jesus when asked offhandedly by a slave girl. Peter isn't the one making faith happen here, these people are not converted because Peter was such a good speaker. He probably had a little charisma,

but his sermon is a little stiff, quite to the point, and exceedingly blunt about who was responsible for the crucifixion of Jesus. Peter basically tells people that they killed God and that's kind of a big deal, not the way to win friends and influence people. Peter isn't doing this, it's God. The Holy Spirit isn't just the tongues of fire, the Holy Spirit is also the words of Peter that are cutting their hearts, hitting them with God's Word, and making them believe.

It is God who makes faith. It is God who keeps faith. Men cannot do this, we are too sinful. All this, though, begs the question: Why doesn't God do it anymore? Two thousand people at minimum were saved on this day alone, and more thousands are added with every week that passes, this thing is spreading like hotcakes. What ever happened to days like Pentecost? It's easy to ask that question with envy, with frustration. God, why don't you do this anymore? He wants all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth, so why doesn't He darn well get on with it?

Look at what Peter says, starting with him quoting the prophet Joel in verse 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." This is happening right now. Are there tongues of fire? No. Can I speak in French? No, I cannot, nor can I speak Spanish or any other language that might be out there. Are thousands of people coming to faith with every gathering of the church? No, they are not. Does any of that matter? No, it doesn't. Pentecost is still happening, and Peter tells you that today. He says that male and female servants will prophesy. He says that He will pour out His Spirit on all flesh. God is still doing this. How can I say that? Because all of you are here with me, and you are hearing God's Word, eating His flesh, drinking His blood, and believing what He says. That is exactly what Peter tells you is at the heart of Pentecost. It isn't about tongues of fire. It isn't about speaking in other languages. It isn't about miracles at all, and it certainly, God forbid, is not about numbers. This is about human sinners seeking to hear words from God, coming to hear them, and being changed by hearing those words. This is about calling on the name of the Lord, and that is exactly what you are here to do. You are here to ask Him for mercy, to bring Him your needs, and to receive the things that He has to say to you today. Pentecost is still happening. It just isn't as flashy. The Lord continues to gather His flock, bringing people into our midst to hear about Jesus. The Lord continues to reach out to pour out His Spirit on all flesh, and there's a lot of flesh out there. Would we like there to be more fleshes, more people? Sure. But that's up to God. The point is, we are here now, you and I, together, no matter what has happened or how

things used to be, we're here, and God is the reason that we are. What God offers is still for us here. Pentecost is new for you every day, just like Easter is, just like Christ's forgiveness is. The Holy Spirit pours Himself upon you through the ears that you hear His words with. He gets in you that way, and He changes you, and you can call upon God and expect to be heard, expect to be understood, and expect Him to be with you 'till the end of the age.

Amen.