

THE LANGUAGE OF THE CHURCH IS CHRIST-CRUCIFIED

Hear again the Word of God for this Festival of the Pentecost:

They were perplexed because each one heard, in his own dialect, them continually speaking to them.¹

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ

The theme for this week's celebration of the third great feast of the Church

Year of the ancient New Testament Church is:

The one language of the Church is Christ-crucified for the forgiveness of the sins of the whole world.

There was, today, a hymn sung between the reading of the Old Testament and Epistle readings. In the transition of the Word from God's declaration of man's sin which brought God's punishment, meted out in the division of languages, and God's proclamation of His grace, mercy, and peace shown in His giving His gift of the Holy Spirit to unite His people in His common language of salvation, the hymn was placed to step the hearers up from hearing of sin to receiving grace. For six centuries, in various human languages, accompanied by multitudes of different instruments, that hymn has continued to declare the gift of the Holy Spirit, He who proceeds from the Father and the Son to be continually poured out upon the people of God. That sacred music, which invokes the Holy Spirit into the ears, hearts, and minds of people united by God around the Word, proclaims God's truths. We who were attentive to that which we sang, heard again of God's gift, His reaching down to us with His love. We prayed that His Holy Spirit would unite His Church. This hymn is countercultural in the churches in our age,

¹ Acts 2:6b.

many of which declare the non-scriptural thought that congregations are simply free human associations comprised of free individuals who choose among any number of denominations. The hymn declares the biblical truth that the Church is assembled by God out of those whom He has called, gathered, enlightened, and sanctifies with His gifts. In the hymn, we implored God the Holy Spirit to let us know the God of our fathers in the Faith, the Heavenly Father, First Person of the only True God, rightly. To show that we grasp how the Father's children are to know Him, we beseeched the Holy Spirit to show us Christ as our Master. All of that was summed up in the Collect printed on the page following the end of the hymn, which reads in part:

Almighty and ever-living God, You fulfilled Your promise by sending the gift of the Holy Spirit to unite disciples of all nations in the cross and resurrection of Your Son, Jesus Christ.²

All that means, even in the Hymn of the Day, the Holy Spirit, working through the Word of God teaches His people to confess that:

The one language of the Church is Christ-crucified for the forgiveness of the sins of the whole world.

Today, again, it is the Church's confession that the Holy Spirit declares that God has bridged the chasm between Him and us. That was ripped open by the sin of Adam and deepened with every sin we have each added thereunto. In effect, God has built a Tower of Clarity from Heaven to Earth, a Tower of Life: Jesus, God in our flesh. That which the ancients tried to do for themselves, to make a name for themselves to link

² *Lutheran Service Book*, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006, 497.

heaven and earth without calling upon God, God has done for all who call continue to upon the Name of the Lord in the Faith. The Holy Spirit makes it clear through the readings selected centuries ago for the Church's annual remembrance of Pentecost that His work is to empower God's chosen people to declare God's signs and wonders, the foremost of which is the death and resurrection of Jesus, God's only-begotten Son.

Today is the day when the readings which began to be heard in the Church on the Feast of Christ's Ascension come into fulfillment. Many of us will recall hearing Jesus tell the Eleven to wait in Jerusalem until they received power from on high. You will likely remember that they did not understand all Jesus said and did, yet waited patiently in prayer. We know ten days have elapsed from Christ's Ascension. Yet, long ago, the faithful remnant from the Jewish nation did not know how long they would have to wait from the time when they had received the Promise from Jesus. As the disciples of the Ascended Lord waited for the Son and the Father to provide them with the Promise from heaven, they remained in the Word of the Old Covenant. They recalled Jesus' Word of the New Covenant. They attended to the prayers. Out of their regular hearing of God's Word, they chose a man who had been with Jesus from the beginning of His earthly ministry until His ascension to replace Judas.

That was the setting in which the young Church of Christ's New Testament found itself fifty days after Jesus had risen from the dead, ten days after the cloud of the Presence of the Lord obscured Jesus from their sight. All of that means that the first New

Testament faithful were found waiting on God to fulfill His promises, His purposes, His will, by remaining in the Lord's Services. The Twelve, perhaps with others – around 120 souls were in that lone congregation of the Lord at that moment in history – had been called by God, gathered by Him in one place. They were assembled that Pentecost morning, sometime between the sunrise and 9:00 AM (as we reckon time), before breakfast according to the Jewish practice of that era. Since they were all devout Jews, or converts to Judaism, they would have been spiritually, mentally, and physically preparing themselves for the Feast Day's public worship services, the Divine Liturgies of the Old Covenant. That is, beginning with the sunrise, the sounds, smells, and sights of the morning sacrifices would have been coming to them from the Temple in Jerusalem. The faithful would be preparing for a holy convocation, a day without work. Time would be set aside to recall God's grace and mercy through Scripture chant, hymn, and sacrifices/offerings.

What happened then, as the Lord's people, gathered as His Word was enacted about them, before them, in them? God came with His gift. He still gives the gift of the Holy Spirit, the Helper, the Comforter, the Consoler into the midst of those whom He has called, gathered, and enlightened through His Word of Christ-crucified for the whole world, and particularly for those who are being saved.

Having declared what happened, what do you think is reasonable to surmise that the faithful of old expected to happen that Feast Day? Likely, they anticipated the

same things which devout Jews had experienced on Pentecost Days for centuries. Since the 15th century BC at the Feast of Pentecost these things were done, heard, seen, and smelled: the giving of an offering of two loaves of bread from each dwelling of the faithful; a public sacrifice as burnt offerings of seven lambs of the first year, one young bull, and two rams. In addition, one kid from the goats would be sacrificed as a sin offering, and two male lambs were to be slain as offerings for peace.³

There is no indication that those sacrifices did not take place in the Temple that morning. The Jews would have given back to God that Pentecost day out of all that He had given to them over the past year. It appears from biblical records that many Jews of the era believed that was what worship primarily was: man reaching up to God, to sacrifice to Him in thanks, that He might continue to give them good things. That is the same manner in which people approach God in the Lord's services in so-called Christian churches today. They come to church to praise God, to give Him thanks, and offerings. Many, I fear, do so in the hope that they can please God with their good gifts, so that He might reward them for good behavior, thoughts, words, and deeds. In that way, both the misunderstanding Jews of the first century and the misunderstanding Christians of the twenty-first century are repeating that which our forefathers did at the Tower of Babel – trying through human efforts to bridge the gulf between man and God.

Yet, that is not true worship of God, in either the Old or New Covenants. True worship begins, continues, and ends with God reaching down to lost sinners, most

³ cf. *Leviticus* 23:15-21.

clearly in the gift of His Son, proclaimed and believed through His gift of the Holy Spirit. It is God touching us with the Presence of Christ in Word, and in the Sacrament of the Altar, and, once over each sinner who is to be saved, in Holy Baptism. Divine Worship, rightly confessed, of the Old and New Testaments, is a memorial of that which God has done and continues to do in, for, and through His people. Worship of the Faithful is centered in hearing of God's promises, how He has chosen to fulfill some, and will, in His time, according to His ways, complete all. And, then, it is the public confession of our firm, steadfast, and immovable faith in Christ-crucified for the forgiveness of all of our sins. That is worked in us by the Holy Spirit, and that through Christ, leads us into a right relationship with the Father.

What is your attitude toward worship in the Church? Have you come first to give or to receive? Do you wish to appease an angry God by your presence in the Divine Service, or do you desire to hear how He has chosen to take away His wrath from you? If your inclination toward worship is found in the first half of those questions, repent. Turn and believe that which God the Holy Spirit is teaching. God's Service means He comes to you, in the means He has chosen, to bring you forgiveness, life, and salvation.

God's Word brings His gifts to His faithful people. That is how He has chosen to give. That is what the record of Acts for today declares. On the first Pentecost Feast of the New Testament, God gave His gifts as Luke declares, not as the faithful likely expected:

Then it happened suddenly from the heaven, (a) sound just as (a) continually violent wind borne along, and the whole house in which they were sitting was filled; and there were seen by them, parting and distributing themselves, tongues as of fire, and one sat upon each of them, and all were filled of (the) Holy Spirit, and they began to speak in different tongues just as the Spirit gave to them to continue to utter.⁴

The people of God received a great gift that day. The text makes it clear that God's emphasis in giving the gift of the Holy Spirit that Pentecost Day was that each one who had been exposed to the Word of God – all those present were Jews or converting to Judaism – would hear the restoration of the unity of confession lost on the Plain of Shinar, at the Tower of Babel. The Word of the Lord emphasizes not the simple speaking of different human languages, but the incredible hearing of the wonders of the Lord in the hearer's own native tongues. Just so our text declares their response to the gift: *we hear them speaking in the different tongues the great things of God...* It is the hearing of the Word of God which the Spirit brings, as He was poured out that day on the faithful who had been waiting in the Word, in prayer, in the liturgies of the Old Covenant. The Spirit, to work Faith in Christ-crucified came once in the sound of rushing wind, and the image of tongues of fire – all of which is recalled in art on that stained glass hanging there during most seasons of the Church...

The miracle of the First Pentecost is declared most fully in that the hearers that day began to hear of the *great things of God*. That is, the Holy Spirit, beginning with this occasion of the Feast, was poured out so that people from all nations – into which all had been scattered at least 2,000 years before – that all people who heard the Word may

⁴ *Acts of the Apostles 2:1-4.*

come to a right relationship with our heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ our Lord. In the outpouring of the Holy Spirit to a few, the Kingdom of God had come, first to the Jews, as God through the prophets had long foretold.

From them, the Good News of Jesus Christ, that for the sake of His passion and death, sins' wages have been paid, the Father's wrath taken away, and those who have been separated from God may be united with Him. The Good News of Jesus Christ brings with it the reality that His resurrection means that those who so believe, through the work of the Holy Spirit through the Word, that Jesus is our Savior, are now right, for His sake, with the Father. That promise is given to sustain us in these Last Days, which began as Jesus hung lifeless on the Cross. It stands until the day, perhaps another Feast Day in the Church, *the great and splendid Day of the Lord*, when that same crucified, risen, and ascended Jesus returns on the clouds in glory and might to gather for Himself, and present to the Father, we whom the Holy Spirit has kept faithful, having called throughout our lives *upon the Name of the Lord*. In Him, in His confession, in the Holy Spirit, we will be saved. That is our confession that we are bold to declare with those who join God's assembly in this place today through the rites of Confirmation, by Transfer or Profession of the Faith

The peace which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus

The Feast of Pentecost (LSB One-year series) Genesis 11:1-9; Acts 2:1-21; John 14:23-31
May 27, 2012

Pastor Michael A. Morehouse

SOLI DEO GLORIA