

PROCLAIMING THE GREAT THINGS OF GOD

Hear again the Word of God for this Pentecost Feast:

We continue hearing them speaking in the different tongues the great things of God!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 is:

The people the Spirit calls through God's Word into His Church continue hearing and proclaiming His great things.

Since we celebrated the greatest High Feast of the Church – the Resurrection of Jesus the Christ from the dead, fifty days have passed. They were following the pattern established for them by God Himself. , we are gathered today, on account of His calling through His Word, to rejoice in His outpouring of His Spirit on all flesh. Ours is God's New Covenant celebration which traces its roots back to a Pentecost (fifty days) feast in the early – mid – first century AD.

That day, almost 2,000 years ago, found Jews and converts to Judaism had gathered together in Jerusalem to offer freewill tribute offerings to God. It is likely that many of the people from the known world gathered on that first New Testament Pentecost, had stayed over from the first New Covenant Passover. That was the one where God had offered Himself, in Jesus, as the Final "Lamb" of Sacrifice for all sin, and for all sinners. Seven weeks plus one day had passed for them, "after the wave offering of the barley sheaf during the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Lev. 23:15-16). It was also called the

¹ Acts 2:11b.

Feast of Harvest (Ex. 23:16; cf. 34:22) and, “the day of firstfruits” (Num. 28:26).² Through that feast, and their first-fruits gifts back to God from His bounty in the Promised Land,

the people the Spirit called through God’s Word into His Church continued hearing and proclaiming His great things.

By the time God gave the great gift of pouring out His Spirit on all flesh, ancient Jewish tradition held that the “Feast of Fifty Days” was tied to the day that God gave Moses the Torah (His Law and Gospel) on Mount Sinai. God had commanded the Israelites to attend this third of the great feasts He established for them. This was so that they would have an annual remembrance that God had delivered them from slavery in Egypt and had continued to provide for all their needs of this body and life. This memorial day had been taking place from generation – to – generation until God began to show them how He truly provided His deliverance for His people.

In time, the ancient faithful had begun to remember the Feast of Pentecost as a time of Covenant renewal. For couple of centuries before the first Pentecost of the New Covenant, all those who were in the nation of Israel were to be in Jerusalem to rejoice in this feast. (Remember, there were then three large gatherings each year around the Old Covenant Temple – the Feasts of Tabernacles, Passover, and Pentecost). Israelite men, those born of Jewish mothers and those who had converted to Judaism, in particular, were called to the Holy City. To their numbers were to be added their children, their male and female servants, any travelers, orphans, and widows who were among them at

²Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. 1983-c1985. *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures.* Victor Books: Wheaton, IL

feast time (cf. *Deut.* 16:11). They all were to eat in the Lord's Presence with joy and thanksgiving. It appears that many of them would have stayed over in Jerusalem from the Feasts of Unleavened Bread and the Passover.

Therefore, as we turn deeper into today's Word of God, we are again aware that there were multitudes still in Jerusalem and at and near Herod's Temple that day of the first New Covenant Pentecost. The Book of Acts names where they had come from to attend the feast. We are not going to head through an ancient biblical ethnography and geography lesson today. Suffice it to say that the multitudes were there who represented all the parts of the then known world. They had been drawn to the Feast from the lands into which the Israelites had been scattered, on account of Israel's sinfulness, from the eighth century B.C. to that day.

Among those gathered were the closest followers of Jesus. They were, as our text proclaims, *all together in one place* (*Acts* 2:1b). We have images that depict that which happened next at that first Feast of the New Covenant Pentecost. On the Altar Table frontal, on the pulpit side banner, on the stoles, in the stained glass hanging in the southwest window of this ship of the New Covenant Church, we may behold tongues of fire. They remind us that God, in establishing His Divine Presence in the Church sealed in Jesus' blood, He appeared to His people as He did when he established His Covenants of old. From the promise to Abraham, with a Covenant sealed in blood and accompanied by a divine burning torch, God has displayed His Gracious Presence with fire (*Gen.* 15:17). You should know that event is recorded in God's Holy Word in the

section immediately after the account of the multiplication of tongues as you heard about it in today's Old Testament reading.

As God called Moses to lead His people free from slavery in Egypt, God appeared in a bush that burned without being consumed (*Exodus 3:2ff*). When God led the Israelites out, when He handed His Law and Gospel to Moses, His Real Presence was shown in fire and smoke (*Exodus 14:21; 19:18*). When God entered the Tabernacle in the wilderness, He appeared as a shining pillar of fire (*Exodus 40:34f*). (Those texts were from *Exodus*. It seems to be no coincidence that this year our Adult Bible class chose to study *Exodus* and *Leviticus* in preparation for God's raising up a new Church for this community). Then, centuries later, when God came into the First Temple (Solomon's) He was beheld as bright, shining fire (*I Kings 8:10-11*).

Are you surprised then, to hear on this annual celebration of God's choosing to dwell in His New Temple – that built of living stones – that He appeared in fire?

That one – time event was to show to the Lord's Church of His New Covenant that He was choosing to dwell in her midst. This time, He would not locate Himself in one particular Holy Place. Rather, He would, by His Word poured out, reside and abide in those who hear and continue to believe His eternal New Covenant promises. Remember this year's Pentecost theme:

The people the Spirit calls through God's Word into His Church continue hearing and proclaiming His great things.

Now, if that which you have been hearing about God's dwelling His people through cleansing fire is not familiar to you, repent of not spending enough time in His Word each day! He is calling you to turn from neglecting His Word, through which He has bound His Spirit to work. He desires to give you that Spirit in full measure, that you might be built up into the New Covenant Church He is building for Himself in our age. Know that God understands there will be some - many at times - who hear of His Real Presence and doubt.

It is no coincidence that among those long ago to whom God's Real Presence was proclaimed exclaimed: *Then how do we continue to hear, each by his own dialect, their continual speaking?*³ And, *we continue hearing them speaking in the different tongues the great things of God!*⁴ Their reactions, that *they were beside themselves, and also they wondered... and they were beside themselves and all also were at a loss, one to another saying, "What does this mean?"* (Yep, the first New Testament Lutherans....) (Acts 2:7a, 12).

Seriously, that is a great question. They hearing of the great things of God. What, from the context of all that you have heard today, are those great things?

From the rest of the text of the divine record of the New Testament Pentecost establishment, those great things are the fulfillment of prophecy in Jesus the Christ. Later in Acts, St. Peter, speaking of that first New Covenant Fifty Days Feast, named it the day in which the Spirit fell on those who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ on account

³ Acts 2:8.

⁴ Acts 2:11b.

of the preaching of God's Word.⁵ That Word, at its center, proclaims Christ – crucified for the forgiveness of sins for the whole world, and most especially for those who continue to keep and guard His Word in and through the Faith of Jesus.

That means that the New Pentecost, the third of the Early Church High Feast Days (following Resurrection and Ascension), is an annual day given by God. This red day is God's gift to His Church. In it, we are called to hear about His unconditional love and grace in calling sinners into repentance that He might name them, you, saints.

Through today's proclaimed Word, God reaches out to you to remember that His Pentecosts are not actually about thank – offerings and first – fruit giving. Those are responses He works in His hearers. Such God's people, you, give to Him because He has worked in you to move you to such acts which show your trust in Him.

God's Pentecosts are about His declaring us holy through His Church and the forgiveness of our sins. He, from the one – time image of fire as He established His enduring Presence in the New Covenant Temple He builds through His declared Word, He continues to grant power to His people tell of His mighty deeds. Remember, the texts for the day illumine the fact that God, without any merit or work on the part of the disciples gathered that day long ago, fulfilled His promise to give them His Spirit of power and proclamation. From that day on, His Word has gone out into the world, in many dialects, which actually speak in a unified language. What is that *one language and few words* that are return, in grace to the time before the descendants of Noah decided to

⁵ Acts 11:15-16; 15:7-9

make a divine Name for themselves?

It is heard in the proclamation, throughout the world, fulfilled on that first New Covenant Pentecost Day. It has continuing since. It is simply this:

*We continue hearing them speaking in the different tongues the great things of God!*⁶

The few words God has given to His Church illumined with the cleansing fire of His Law and Gospel is the Word of God that declares Christ-crucified for sins, for your sins. The language of the New Pentecost Church, is given by God to be proclaimed in every tongue, every dialect, to all peoples, is His language of sin and grace, eternal separation from God the Source of Life to those who reject His Word, and blessed everlasting life to you who hear His Word, guard and keep it in grateful hearts. With that in mind, hear again this day's theme:

The people the Spirit calls through God's Word into His Church continue hearing and proclaiming His great things.

Hear this clearly, God's unconditional gift of the Third Person of the Holy Trinity, brings with Him the Voice to prophesy. The first disciples of Jesus the Christ Who died, rose from the dead, and ascended to heaven (you know the Creeds and the *Te Deum*) proclaimed His mighty works through showing God's fulfillment of prophecy in Him. The Church that grew from the apostolic preaching until their last man died - apparently John who had been exiled after having been poisoned and boiled in oil (do you ever wish you had been there among the Twelve? Think again)!

⁶ Acts 2:11b.

Since then, God continued, to this day, to grow His Church, around the world, in many languages, through apostolic preaching. Through the recorded words of the Apostles and Evangelists of the first century, God the Spirit has worked Christ's faith in every generation. That Spirit fills the world. A fourth century Christian preacher long ago declared of the Holy Spirit:

He is the course of holiness, the light of our understanding, for to every mind he offers his own light for the discovery of truth.⁷

That means that, wherever God's Word, specifically the great things He has done in delivering Christ into death for the forgiveness of sins, and raising Him to life to declare us sinners right with the Father the Spirit wills to work Faith and eternal life. Such enables and moves new members received into congregations of our fellowship to answer, after having promised to live according the Word of God and remain true to the Triune God, *I do, by the grace of God, to answer this question: Do you intend to continue steadfast in this confession and Church and to suffer all, even death, rather than fall away from it?*

That is a weighty promise. It is one that can only be fulfilled unto mortal death by us who continue to hear and believe God's Word of forgiveness, life, and salvation in Christ Jesus. Such promises are offered before God, angelic and human witnesses in many tongues, by those who hear, believe, and confess Christ-crucified for the forgiveness of their sins. May those promises continue to live in us, in you, that we all shall be found faithful in proclaiming the great things of God.

⁷ Basil the Great of Caesarea. *For All the Saints: A Prayer Book for and by the Church*, v.3, Frederick J. Schumacher and Dorothy A. Zelenko eds, Delhi, NY: American Lutheran Publicity Bureau, 1995, 1276.

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

Pentecost (*LSB* One-year series)

Genesis 11:1-9; Acts 2:1-21; John 14:23-31

May 15, 2016

Pastor Michael H. Merhouse

Soli Deo Gloria