

St Paul's Lutheran Church (Latimer, IA)
Pentecost – May 19, 2024
John 14:23-31 – Confirmation
Rev Peter Wagner

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and the risen Lord, Jesus Christ! Amen.

Pentecost is the eighth and crowning Sunday of the Easter season. It brings to the church all the results of our Savior's victory, when Jesus rose and stood triumphant. On Pentecost, the church receives the fruits and benefits of Easter. We receive the Holy Spirit.

But where does Pentecost come from? Pentecost means fifty, the fiftieth day. In the Old Testament, it was also called the Feast of Weeks, instituted by God seven weeks after the Passover, when he brought Israel to Mount Sinai and gave them the Ten Commandments.

So the ancient feast of Weeks was seven weeks after Passover, just as our Pentecost is seven weeks after Easter. At the ancient Passover in Egypt, the blood of the lambs on the doorposts made the destroying angel pass over and spare the firstborn sons. But on Easter, seven weeks ago, we celebrated a far better blood, the blood of our Passover Lamb, Christ Jesus. His blood frees us from the bondage of the slavery and tyranny of the devil. He redeems us from sin and eternal death. His resurrection brings eternal life.

And now, fifty days after the ancient Passover, the children of Israel have come from Egypt to Mount Sinai, the holy mountain of God, with roaring trumpets and an earthquake and terrifying lightning and fire and smoke. There God reveals his holy will from heaven, showing his people exactly what pleases and displeases him. The Ten Commandments.

These commandments are a great blessing, because in them we learn everything God requires of us. There's no need to wonder what God wants. In the Law we learn exactly what to do to please our God. So God instructed his people to keep holy the fiftieth day after the Passover, so they would learn to value the blessing of his Commandments, and they would remember all the good promises he offers to those who keep them.

God also instituted the Old Testament Pentecost as a feast of firstfruits, a time to present a yearly offering to the Lord of the first harvest. For on Mount Sinai, God chose the children of Israel for himself as his first harvest, his holy nation. He made a covenant with them to take them as the firstfruits of the harvest of righteousness from the whole world.

But for all the blessings of the ancient Pentecost, it seemed like a curse. The Law came with terror. The whole mountain smoked and quaked, the people were terrified.

Because although the Ten Commandments are a good revelation of God's will, the Law only makes us greater sinners. It always accuses us for our constant failure. So to know what God demands of us and to know we fail, what could be more awful? For God threatens to punish those who break his commandments. Sinners will get nothing but eternal death and misery.

The Jews were so horrified by the first Pentecost on Mount Sinai that they pleaded with Moses, "You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, lest we die."

But Mount Sinai and the Passover and everything that happened in the Old Testament were examples of what was to come. We live in the time of grace. The ancient Passover brought earthly release from slavery; our Easter Passover Lamb brings eternal freedom. The ancient Pentecost brought fear and consciousness of sin; our Pentecost brings joy and grace.

Our Pentecost holds no more terror. It's full of joy and glory. When the day of Pentecost came in Acts 2, while the Jews gathered in Jerusalem were busy thanking God for the Ten Commandments, a sound of rushing wind came from heaven, filling the house of the terrified apostles. Divided flames of fire from the Holy Spirit appeared on their heads, just as Jesus had promised, "You will be baptized with fire and the Holy Spirit."

And immediately, filled with the Spirit, the apostles who once cowered indoors came out, their fear replaced by courage. Filled with the Holy Spirit, they boldly and miraculously preached the Gospel in many languages to all the pilgrims in Jerusalem. And so what formerly was a feast of the firstfruits of the wheat harvest became a feast of firstfruits of the church, the first believers of the harvest of the kingdom of God. That day, when they heard Peter's sermon, when he confronted them with the Law, that they crucified the Messiah, the people were cut to the heart. They repented and cried out, "Brothers, what shall we do?"

And Peter said, "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.” So about three thousand new Christians from all nations were baptized that day. The nations heard the saving word of God in their own languages, the curse and confusion of Babel was undone. On a single day, the Christian church was born, by the powerful work of the Holy Spirit.

How glorious is our new Pentecost, far better than the terrifying old one of the Law! Today we have the Gospel. Today all fear is gone. We have the Holy Spirit, sent from the Father and the Son, to teach us all things and bring us the perfect peace of Jesus. We need not fear God’s wrath, for Christ is our Savior. In him we have courage in the presence of God. For his sake we are ready to endure all suffering, like the apostles who boldly went forth as martyrs for Christ.

And how appropriate, on this new Pentecost, that today we will hear the faithful confession and of six young Christians. For no one can say, “Jesus is Lord,” except by the Holy Spirit. And today they will confess that Jesus is their Lord, that he has redeemed them, lost and condemned sinners, by his holy precious blood and his bitter suffering and death, to gather them as fruits of his harvest, so they live under him in his kingdom and serve him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, just as he is risen from the dead, lives and reigns to all eternity.

These six young men and women have already been baptized, they already believe and have the Holy Spirit. But in a few minutes, by the Holy Spirit, they will boldly confess the Gospel before us all, just as the apostles confessed it on the day of Pentecost.

In their confirmation vows, these young Christians will confess the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. They will confess our God’s work to create, redeem and sanctify them in the precious blood of Jesus. They will confess the creeds and sacraments: baptism, absolution, and the Lord’s Supper, the means of grace by which the Holy Spirit forgives and rescues them from the terrifying consequences of sin, from their failure to keep the Law.

They will also vow to regularly hear God’s word and receive his sacraments, and to remain faithful to the doctrine of the evangelical church, no matter what, even to the point of death.

No one can say these things, except by the Holy Spirit. So we pray, dear Father, send your Spirit on these young men and women. Let them take their confirmation vows sincerely. Keep them faithful all their lives. For confirmation is good, but it’s only a start. So strengthen them by the forgiveness of sins in your body and blood. Give them faith to receive this sacrament worthily. And above all, keep them firmly grounded to their dying day on the rock foundation of Jesus Christ, who said, “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.”

By the light of the gospel, O Holy Spirit, teach them to live before you in holiness, to do the good works of the Ten Commandments, pleasing works you have prepared for them before the foundation of the world. Take away the terror of your commandments. Give them to us as a guide. You have set these children free by the blood of Jesus, so teach them to live out the Ten Commandments, to serve you and their neighbor in love, and do what is pleasing in your sight.

Give them your Holy Spirit, because they can do none of this on their own. They do not have the strength to resist even the softest of Satan’s temptations. The devil and the world are hungry for your souls, eager to drag you out of the church. And your sinful flesh is very weak. It’s happy to comply. But hold them tightly. Never let them go, not them or any of your dear sheep.

In the years to come, the world will tell you that the church has brainwashed you, that you’re missing out on many pleasures. The world will scoff at your outdated priorities. Besides that, your own sinful nature will say you already know everything the Bible has to teach. Then the world will drag you down with busy schedules and stressful jobs, so you feel you hardly have time for church. Maybe later, when things settle down, but not yet.

Expose all these lies, dear Father. Call these children to repentance when they wander away. Absolve and restore them in your church. Comfort them with your tender word and your holy body and blood. And keep them, Lord. Keep us all. Keep us steadfast in your word, so that on the glorious day we hear the precious words of our righteous judge. “Your sin is atoned for by my blood. Well done, good and faithful servant. Receive the crown of life.” Amen.

Now may the peace of God which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, unto life everlasting. Amen.