

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Fifty days after the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread, there was the harvest festival called Pentecost. The number '5' is in the name. Like the 5-sided military headquarters in DC thus named the Pentagon. The festival of Pentecost was an ingathering of the winter wheat, and the celebration of God's teachings given to Moses on the mountain of Sinai. On that mountain there was wind and fire. Fifty days after Jesus' 'Passover' from death to life, comes a harvest festival Pentecost with its ingathering of the firstfruits. This time, however, the fruit is a crop of three thousand baptized people added to the number of the disciples in one day. And again, there is wind and fire. The wind is heard. The fire is seen.

The wind is the breath of the crucified, risen, and now reigning Lord Jesus blowing out over His Church by the Spirit. And through His breath He delivers His Word through the mouth of simple Galileans. These men had never taken a language course before, but now everyone was hearing the "Good News of Jesus Christ" in their own language and dialect. The Gospel was custom-tailored for each individual hearer.

The fire was the flame seen resting on each of the 120 gathered disciples . . . including Mary, the mother of Jesus. John the Baptizer had told them, "I baptize you with water, but the One who is coming, who is greater than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to untie, He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire." And this now is the completion of their baptism with the promised fire of the Holy Spirit.

Remember, fire goes back to Moses and the burning bush. There Christ appeared to Moses in a bush that was on fire but was not consumed. A Gospel fire. So also here at Pentecost. Tongues of fire rested on each one of the believers – a visible sign of the presence of the Holy Spirit, and they in turn spoke in tongues as the Spirit enabled them. They were, like Moses' bush, with fire, but not burned to ashes.

Those who heard it were bewildered, amazed, astonished, and even perplexed. “What does this mean?” they wondered. Good question. It’s not every day that you get wind and fire from heaven. In fact, this is the only day this has ever happened.

Now, some were less charitable and mocked the disciples, saying, “They are filled with new wine” ... a rather illogical remark. Your language skills tend to get worse when you drink a lot of alcohol, not improve.

Peter didn’t have much to say by the fire in the High priest’s courtyard when a servant girl fingered him as one of Jesus’ disciples. Now, fifty days later, Peter explains all these happenings by boldly quoting from the prophet Joel to thousands of perplexed listeners.

What caused the change in Peter? Well, there were two things. First, Peter had seen the risen Lord on at least several occasions. Second, he had received the promised Holy Spirit. “These are the last days,” Peter says, quoting Joel, “when God will pour out His Spirit upon all flesh.” Did you catch it? The Holy Spirit’s days are the *last days*. And so, Pentecost ushers in the end times. The time of the Holy Spirit. What began with the Father’s love at Christmas . . . “sending forth His Son born of a virgin”; continued with the Son through Holy Week and Easter . . . “the Lamb of God taking away the sin of the world”; and now carries on with the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

What’s important about all this wind and fire and Spirit? Jesus Himself answers: “He will convict the world of sin.” The Holy Spirit is not some celestial cop who pulls you over and writes a ticket when you do something wrong. That’s not the way He deals with sin. Symptoms are one thing, but diagnosing the disease is quite another. Our human nature has been corrupted and as a result everything we think, do, and say, no matter how beautiful, wonderful, and nice, is tainted and corrupted by sin. And the sting of sin is death. And that’s what we and the world need convicting of. And constantly so! Otherwise, we will forget our complete need for Jesus to save us from our sins.

The Holy Spirit will also “convict the world of righteousness.” Jesus ascends to the Father, glorifying our humanity at the Father’s right hand. But we can’t follow Him. We have sin aplenty. But not the righteousness or goodness. Not the way we

are by nature. We need to get that righteousness from somewhere else. Like if you've been in a fire and all your clothes are smoky and burnt. You need to go to the relief truck and get some clean ones. In order to enjoy the company of our heavenly Father, we need a change of clothing. There is a dress code. We must look perfect. We can't just come the way we are, as is the style of our times. Jesus told the parable of the wedding banquet for the king's son. A fellow appeared without the proper wedding attire and was thrown out. We cannot appear before God the way we are. We aren't properly dressed. God makes a fashion statement on how he rates our clothes. He says they are filthy rags no one would want to touch with a 10 foot pole.

Adam and Eve tried to cover their nakedness with fig leaves. It's about the best they could do. It probably never occurred to them that it would take not the death of a living plant to cover them, but rather, the death of another person. God pointed them in the right direction by promising the Savior that would come, and then covering them with skins from animals whose lives were taken to provide a covering that would last. Now, with the once-for-all sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, we are covered in his righteousness, his perfection, his cleanness. That's what the Father sees when he takes a look at us.

To be baptized into Christ is to be clothed with Christ. And that's the Spirit's work as well, as we see at the end of the account of Pentecost. 3,000 souls were baptized and added to the number of believers, clothed with the robe of Christ's righteousness. And only dressed in this manner can you, too, appear before the Father. Not your righteousness, but Christ's righteousness. Not your so-called good deeds, but Christ's good deed on the cross and at the empty tomb. Like Jacob of old, who disguised himself to feel and smell like his brother Esau to obtain the blessing from his father Isaac, so we are now covered with Christ and obtain the blessing of our heavenly Father. But this time it's not a trick. It's the grace and salvation God invites us to receive.

There is one more thing about which Jesus says that the Holy Spirit will convict the world. That one last thing concerns judgement day. This is the inevitable result of the collision of sin and righteousness. And the Spirit testifies that the ruler of this world – Satan - has already been judged. He was judged when Christ became our sin on the cross, suffering and dying for that sin. Baptized into Him, we have become like him and wear his clothes, his righteousness. Any other

clothing in which we are presented before the Father will result in us being cast out into the outer darkness. The Holy Spirit is hard at work convicting us of our sin, the coming judgement, and our need for the grace of God in Jesus. This is the necessary and needed work of the Holy Spirit. Thank God that he is busy convicting the world of sin, righteousness, and judgement!

We don't hear a mighty wind blowing through our church buildings on this Day of Pentecost unless we have the ceiling fans turned up all the way. Nor do we see tongues of fire resting on anyone. Hopefully. We've had a few close calls with the pew candles. But we do hear the Word of God and especially the Gospel. We're not called to try and re-create that first Pentecost. Instead, we are to listen to the Holy Spirit who testifies about Christ and points us to Him. That means the ongoing work of Pentecost is not in wind or fire or suddenly speaking in other languages, but rather, in the Word and Baptism and the Holy Supper. At the close of his account of that first Pentecost, St. Luke notes that those first Christians simply "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the Breaking of the Bread and the prayers." That means they frequently gathered together for what we would call worship and fellowship.

Pentecost. Fifty days. The ingathering of the harvest of souls. The Word. The Church. You are a part of it as Luther says in his Small Catechism that we are "called, gathered, enlightened, sanctified, kept in the faith" by the Holy Spirit. We ask the Father to send us his Spirit to warm our cold hearts and weaken spirits. We pray the Spirit would rattle our dry and dusty bones on the last day and make us live forever.

And now God bless you with your personal Pentecost, that convinced of sin, righteousness, and judgement, you belong to the Lord now and forever. Amen.

**The peace of God guard your hearts and minds as you believe and trust in him.
Amen.**

Pastor Ron Breight

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