

St. Luke's Evangelical Lutheran Church -- Watertown, WI
Pastor Mark Gartner
Sermon for Pentecost -- June 5th and 8th, 2014

Joel 2:28, 29

And afterward, will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days.

Dear children of God,

It's always better to have things planned out. You plan out a vacation. You plan out a budget, as our church does each year. You plan out projects – like home repairs. Not only does a plan make things run smoothly. It also allows us to have a sense of anticipation. We look forward to our trip. We look forward to all the things our budget will allow. We look forward to finally getting all these things finished. It's good to be a planner.

God is very much a planner, too. As we went through the first half of our church year, from Advent to Epiphany, through Lent, Christ's death, resurrection, and ascension, how many times did we hear that these were all things God had planned out ahead of time? He told us a child would be born. He told us that the Christ would have to suffer, die, and rise again. Jesus told His disciples so they would not lose heart. He told us so that we would know that no matter how wrong everything seemed, this was exactly what He wanted to have happen, as He carried out the work of our salvation. And now looking back, we know that we are saved and rejoice.

Have you ever had something so big and important that you just couldn't see past it? You plan and you prepare, and once it's done, you sit back and try to regroup, trying to figure out what to do next. Well our God is not like that. On this Pentecost Sunday, as we consider the words from the prophet Joel, quoted by Peter on that famous day, we see that Pentecost was not some last minute idea. God planned Pentecost. God promised Pentecost. The "when" and the "why" of Pentecost were no mistake at all. For it is a day on which God powerfully begins to bring the blessings of Good Friday, Easter, and Ascension to the people of this world as we get to see the Holy Spirit go to work.

Sermon Theme: God Promised Pentecost

- 1. He promised it to be powerful**
- 2. He promised it with a purpose**

We see that it was promised ahead of time when we listen to Peter's Pentecost sermon. We know all of the amazing things that the Holy Spirit did on that day to mark His presence. There was the sound of a rushing wind. Tongues of fire came and rested on the heads of the disciples. Each of them began to speak in different tongues, as the Spirit enabled them. The signs were undeniable. But wicked men tried to discount what they saw. What did they say was really going on? Some of them said that these men had too much wine. They said they were drunk. They weren't drunk. No, this was the fulfillment of Scripture.

In other words, God planned and promised this day. It wasn't on the spur of the moment. We already know that Jesus was looking forward to this day. On the night of His death, He kept telling them that He had to go away so that He could ask His Father to send another Comforter. That was about two months out – pretty good, right? Be way before that, hundreds of years before that, God was planning Pentecost. Like I said before, we get caught up in planning for our big events so much that sometimes we have trouble seeing past that. God didn't get caught twiddling His thumbs after accomplishing the most important event in our history. Now He was going to pour out His Spirit on His people. On Pentecost, they saw that. And the planning that God put into it ought to let us know that it was going to be something great.

God gave a general idea of when this outpouring of the Holy Spirit would happen. He gives us a timeline in Joel. Now what do you know about Joel? There is one word that pops into my head when I think about the book of Joel. That word is “locusts.” He is famous for his prophecy about a swarm of locusts from the north that would devastate Judah. Underneath that image of the locust plague that would come, it’s hard not to also see the armies from the north that would carry Judah away for her people’s impenitence. Behind all of that, Joel also lifts our eyes to the great and gloomy Day of Judgment upon the world. As people continue to reject God, there is still a judgment in store for them.

But then God promises a restoration for Judah. Crops would grow again. The people would be restored to their land in Judah. Things would be right once more, and everyone would know that the LORD is God. Now, God says, **“Afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days.”** God’s people were restored, but it was never quite as perfect or peaceful as they would have liked. It had been half a century since that restoration took place. But now look at the events surrounding the fulfillment of this prophecy. Jesus has just pulled off the greatest restoration of all time. He has restored sinners – those who were despicable and unworthy in the eyes of God – to a beautiful relationship with that God. Coming back to a homeland or having crops grow once again is nothing compared to having our sins washed away, new life given to us, citizenship in heaven being handed to us for free, and an eternity with our Father promised to us. That’s an amazing restoration! And now, God promises to do even more.

He promised Pentecost to be powerful. Notice what He says. **“I will pour out my Spirit.”** That word “to pour” has some force behind it. God doesn’t promise to give His Spirit in little dribbles and squirts. When Pentecost comes, those who experience the power of the Spirit don’t only have part of what could have been. The Spirit gushes forth in what He comes to accomplish, and it gets the people’s attention. They noticed that day. They crowded around. All the city of Jerusalem was buzzing about it. It was also powerful in the degree that the Spirit is poured out. It was poured out on everyone. Young, old, men, women, even servants, both menservants and maidservants – the scope of what would happen was amazing. A few Bible commentators refer to a time when a select handful were summoned to the Tent of Meeting – 70 men in all. There, they prophesied by the power of the Holy Spirit. A report came that two men who should have come but didn’t were also prophesying in the camp. The others complained. What was Moses’ response? **“I wish that all the LORD’s people were prophets and that the LORD would put His Spirit on them!”** On Pentecost, Moses’ wish came true. There was nothing like this ever before.

But what does it actually mean that the Spirit was poured out on them? Is it found in the signs and wonders? Was it found in speaking in different languages? That’s what a lot of people love about that day. They want that. They want to be able to talk in tongues, but not just in different languages. No, that’s too ordinary. They want to have some heavenly language that, when spoken, all people of all languages will instantly be able to understand it. Or they wish they had some other unique language that no one else knows, and must be interpreted by someone with a special spiritual gift of interpretation. They want to have the supernatural. They want to be surrounded by miracles. And even if they may not ask to have tongues of fire separate and land on their heads, I don’t think they would turn it down if it happened.

Why do people want that? Why might we covet that a bit for ourselves? Because it gives us proof that we’re on the right path. The Holy Spirit wasn’t over at the gathering place for the Sanhedrin or the Pharisees. He was performing miracles for these simple fishermen and tax collectors who had been with that Jesus fellow who died and reportedly rose again. Would God give such Pentecostal gifts to people who don’t follow Him? And so people want the visions, the miracles, the speaking in tongues to validate their own teachings. And to be honest, who wouldn’t want that? Even while we are confident that we teach rightly, a lot of people tell us that we’re wrong. Wouldn’t it be great if God showed us that we at least have the right teaching?

But that’s not what Pentecost is really about. Our God is not so petty or puny to prophesy and promise a day hundreds of years in advance just to show off. There was a purpose in planning Pentecost.

It was to show that, though Christ's great work was accomplished in His life, death, resurrection, and ascension, that doesn't mean God is done working.

There is one gift that was bestowed upon people by the Holy Spirit that is more valuable and more important than all other spiritual gifts combined. That is the gift of faith. I wish that the people who assembled our list of readings that we follow had extended the verse list for today, both in Joel and in Acts. I can understand why they stopped with just two verses in Joel. The next verses go on and talk about things that are definitely associated with the End Times, and they thought that it just didn't fit on Pentecost. It goes on, **"I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and billows of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD."** But Peter goes on and quotes all of this, and ends with what I think is the most significant verse from Joel. **"And everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved."**

Do you call on the name of the LORD? Do you believe in Him? Do you trust in Him for salvation? Do you believe that He has forgiven all your sins for Christ's sake? Do you believe that you will not go to hell, but instead go to be with God forever, and that there, sin and pain and death will no longer be able to touch you? Do you proclaim that fact to others who ask and who don't ask? Do you profess with all of your heart that He has made you His own? Then there is only one reason why that can be true. God has powerfully poured out His Holy Spirit on you.

Peter would go on past the verses you heard read this morning. He would preach against the people, that they had killed the LORD of life. And just as Jesus said He would, the Holy Spirit convicted their hearts. When they ask what they must do to be saved, Peter responded, **"Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."** What is the gift of the Holy Spirit?

It is faith to believe that this forgiveness is yours. It is the gift to know that your sins are washed away. It is to let you know that you don't need some supernatural gifts to prove that you belong to God. Christ's death and resurrection already prove that for you. Without the Holy Spirit, we would never know about or believe in what Jesus accomplished in all of those things that God had planned.

And so God planned and promised that the Spirit would bring those blessings home to us, to let them find a place within our hearts. Long ago, hundreds of years in the past, God said, **"afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people."** Pentecost was just one day on which we get to see the Holy Spirit do it, yes with special signs attached to it. But His work still goes on today. Through the preaching of the Gospel, He makes the Gospel ours. Our God planned for the day in which the Holy Spirit would come to you, through Baptism, through preaching, through Bible Class. He planned to make you His own. In Christ, He established it. Through the Spirit, He applied it. Now when that great and dreadful day comes, we will finally fully and completely experience it. You have the gift of the Holy Spirit. You are a child of God. Amen.