

## **Pentecost Sunday Pouring out Living Water May 31 2020**

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be pleasing unto You, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer. Amen!

Pouring out Living Water. We are celebrating the pouring out of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples and upon all nations. It is in essence, the Birthday of the Church. But, the festival of Pentecost is something of a stepchild in our calendars. We get a day off for Christmas. We at least we get some recognition of Easter by the local merchants who will fill an aisle with baskets, bunnies, and candy. Pentecost, the third great feast of the church's calendar, is almost completely ignored, lost amid the graduations, Mother's Day, Father's Day, and Memorial Day, at least in America. In Germany on the feast of Pentecost you stand a chance of being offered up a happy Pfingstenfest. I have a hard time imagining such a greeting at the local Denny's, if it ever re-opens for me to chat with a waitress.

I am not sure that the Holy Spirit really minds that we do not make a big deal about this. I am not sure that He would like a spiritual version of Santa Clause or the Easter Bunny attached to this day. My Systematic Theology professor used to say that the Spirit was actually quite shy. He was unwilling to draw attention to himself at the expense of Christ. The Spirit's self-defined task is to teach us about Jesus, not Himself.

That said, the Christian who neglects the Spirit does so at some risk. On one hand, we have a natural tendency to take credit for things which in truth belong to God. Without the Spirit we are spiritually helpless, infantile, and weak. The Christian who forgets the Spirit's role in the whole conversion process and the sustenance of faith is liable to take credit for his or her own Spiritual life. Whether it is putting faith in a decision process, some acceptance of Christ, or perhaps thinking that we have simply gotten it right, this is dangerous ground for the Christian. When push comes to shove, our own decision is a very shaky thing on which to place our confidence. How do we know that any decision on our part is genuine? We cannot. I believe that Satan has in fact let a lot of folks think that what separates them from the lost is that they have made a decision for Jesus. When they face the accuser, this will not suffice.

On the other hand, if we don't pay attention to the Spirit, we can also fall off the horse on the other side, making too much of the Spirit, in effect replacing Christ with the Spirit. One sees this in some Pentecostal groups whose focus on the Spirit is such that the salvific work of Christ is obscured.

Fortunately, in the middle of all this is a great broad expanse of healthy expression. Most Pentecostals in fact manage to keep this somewhat straight and confess the second person of the Trinity rather well. Many of those who use decision language in truth understand that God gave them the decision to make. I may regret their sloppy language, but I cannot deny their faith. A healthy Christian faith suggests that a Christian does well to pay some attention to the Spirit here, because the Spirit is essential to show us Christ. The role of the Spirit can be compared to that of an extension cord. It is Christ whom the Father raised from that dead that saves us on the cross. The Spirit did not die, and he did not rise on Easter. Those events are the events through which God saves the world. A lamp which is not connected to the outlet, however, cannot light, even though the power is right there. It needs the cord to convey the energy to the bulb. That is the Spirit's job. He connects us to the work of Christ. Without the Spirit we are half the world away and two thousand years late for salvation. With the Spirit, however, we are connected to Christ's work and are saved. It is through the Spirit that when we extend our hands and the pastor says, "Take and eat," that we are in an upper room in Jerusalem those many years ago with Peter, James, John, and the rest of Christendom and we are partaking of God in the flesh. Without the Spirit we are eating tasteless crackers with our 21<sup>st</sup> century brethren and that is it.

We also see the Spirit working in a number of ways in the life of a Christian. What sets the great liturgical/sacramental traditions apart from most Christians is that we understand that this Spirit of God uses the creation as a means of communication. We know the love of God because the Spirit has touched us with that love in our Baptism. We have Christ inside of us because the Spirit has put him there in the Holy Supper in which we have eaten his body and blood. This Spirit uses the broken vessels of human beings to convey a great treasure, the very forgiveness of sins. Sermons, Bible Studies, and hospital visits are just a few of the places that Spirit work happens.

So, what makes it tough to see the Spirit in our midst? Are our eyes obscured by Voters meetings, turf wars, and anxiety? Are they veiled by people who manipulate processes to get their way? Are they darkened by the hypocrisy of people who say one thing but do something else? Unforgiving attitudes and bitterness – strife that never goes away. All the works of the flesh which Paul contrasts against the fruits of the Spirit. All these things tend to blind us to the work of the Spirit.

Declining congregations and church attendance breeds fear of the future. Resource deficits, when they become constrictive to our ministry, make us doubt our mission. If we are always saying we cannot do something because we don't have any money it is hard to see the Spirit. Pandemics cause us to huddle out of sight as if we **had** no Redeemer. Do we pay more attention to our smart phones than we do to our God?

In John 14, Jesus says that we will do even greater things than He did. But we do those greater things empowered by the Spirit and in the name of Christ. Here an illustration will be helpful. One day Jesus, amazingly, fed 5000 people. A great and mighty work of God. But today, through an equally mighty work of God, Christian people are feeding millions. If you think this is not a miracle, think of how hard it is to get money out of people's wallets, yet most of this food is donated.

One could run through a whole list of options here. There are countless hospitals which are named Good Samaritan, Emanuel, Trinity, etc. Jesus healed many in his ministry before his death and resurrection, but nothing like the countless millions whom he has touched and healed through the ministry of His Christian people in these places of healing. Jesus is glorified in this outpouring of the Holy Spirit and we see this before our very eyes.

But Jesus is also glorified specifically in this place as that Spirit blows among us. We operate a preschool. We feed the hungry. We pray for our neighbors and support missionaries. We welcome sinners and comfort the bereaved. We visit the sick and the homebound and write them letters and cards. This is done in Jesus name and is an out pouring of the Holy Spirit and of Living Water; a continuation of the first Pentecost.

And the Pentecost event is intricately connected to the Cross event. In fact, they are almost a singular event in the mind of Luke. Without one, the other doesn't work at all. If Jesus died and rose again but I have no Spirit, that death and resurrection are meaningless to me. But the Spirit which does not connect me to the salvation won on cross and in empty tomb is also and equally devoid of life for me.

The Spirit's work is always bound up closely with the revelation of the incarnate Christ, who lived, suffered, died and rose again for us. Jesus says of Him, "But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me" (John 15:26, emphasis mine). The Spirit is not some "force" to experience but the Third Person of the Holy Trinity, who speaks to us an unchanging, undivided, consistent message: the eternal Gospel of Jesus Christ crucified and risen for us.

If the Holy Spirit seems unconcerned about whether we feel an emotional high during Sunday worship or receive divine guidance about whether to buy a Ford or a Chevy, it's doubtless because He wants to give us something even better: "a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead ... an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you" (1 Peter 1:3-4).

The Bible asserts that same Spirit is given to us today, He touched us in our Baptism. He gently and carefully calls, gathers, enlightens, sanctifies and keeps the whole Christian church on earth in the one true faith. He calms our fears and opens our mouths to be witnesses to the resurrection of Christ and the ongoing care which Christ works for this world.

Let that Holy Spirit pour out on you through Word and Sacrament. Let Him call, gather, enlighten and sanctify you. And let Truth of the Living Water of Jesus Christ crucified died and resurrected pour out from your mouth like living water. Amen!

May the love of God and the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit abide in you to life everlasting. Amen!