

Festival of Pentecost, June 4

The festival of Pentecost is something of a stepchild in the calendar. 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 flag day, at least in America. I remember being in Germany some years ago on the feast of Pentecost and having the waitress offer up a happy Pfingstenfest. I have a hard time imagine such a greeting at the local Denny's. I am not sure that the Holy Spirit really minds that we don't 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 Systematics professor used to say that the Spirit was actually quite shy. He was loathe 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 he/she has simply gotten it right enough, this is dangerous for the Christian. When push comes to shove, even my own decision is a very shaky place to place confidence. How do I know that any decision on my 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. I like to think of the role of the Spirit a little like 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 I am half the world away and two thousand years late for salvation. With the Spirit, however, I am

connected to Christ's work and am saved. It is through the Spirit that when I extend my hand and the pastor says, "Take and eat," that I am in an upper room in Jerusalem those many years ago with Peter, James, John, and the rest of Christendom and I am partaking of God in the flesh. Without the Spirit I am eating a tasteless cracker with 21st century folk 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 this Spirit of God to use the creation as a means of communication. I know the love of God because the Spirit has touched me with that love in my baptism. I have Christ inside of me because the Spirit has put him there in the holy supper in which I 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.

If we were to point to the work of the Spirit of God in our midst, to what would we point? Here were a few ideas we came up with in the past.

1. People are in church – the Spirit calls and gathers us.
2. The Word – proclaimed and taught to the needs and understanding of people. The Holy Spirit is behind this and in the hearts of the hearers. We need to be able to point to the Word doing something in our midst, lives changed/improved.
3. Some successful ministry – one church sees over ten times as many children in VBS as are in the parish.
4. Dynamic worship – people are enjoying themselves and doing this authentically. We don't want to equate emotion with the Spirit, but there are also times and moments when people "lean in" and there is a sense of the holy about this place. This can be traditional or non-traditional, liturgical or low-church.
5. People are doing things that don't come naturally – we forgive, we care for the undeserving, and we talk about Jesus.
6. Galatians 5 – the fruits of the Spirit are found here.
7. Confirmation – young people are confessing their faith.
8. Something totally unexpected – a hymn suddenly connects to the sermon in an unintended way, the person who is touched by the sermon in a way the pastor never intended.
9. Offerings – people support this ministry with free gifts of treasure, time, and talents.

What makes it tough to see the Spirit in our midst?

1. Voters meetings, turf wars, and anxiety. Folks who manipulate processes to get their way.
2. Hypocrisy folks who say one thing but do something else.

3. Unforgiving attitudes and bitterness – strife that never goes away. All the works of the flesh which Paul contrasts against the fruits of the Spirit.
4. Declining congregation – people not attending church – especially hard in a parish which has a large building.
5. People who are really or effectively bowing to an idol of some sort under the name of Christian. Do we pay more attention to our smart phones than we do to our God?
6. Resource deficits, especially if they become constrictive to our ministry. If we are always saying we cannot do something because we don't have any money it is hard to see the Spirit.

The congregation without the Spirit will be dry and dead and lifeless. The little parish in the Spirit will be driven by a mission, lively and generous. It may not have much, it may be in a barn or a building, but such a gathering of people, no matter how small will always be a lively place. Without the Spirit, no matter how beautiful the building, no matter how large the assembly, it will be different.

Collect of the Day

O God, on this day You once taught the hearts of Your faithful people by sending them the light of your Holy Spirit, Grant us in our day by the same Spirit to have a right understanding in all things and evermore to rejoice in His holy consolation; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

“On this day...” This is the birthday of the Church. God’s people celebrate this day in much the same way we celebrate anniversaries and birthdays as individuals and institutions. A couple who has been married for many years can hardly imagine, and probably doesn’t want to imagine, what life would have been like if they had not met their spouse and said “I do” so many years before. The Church cannot imagine life without the Spirit, the Spirit is our life!

“God taught the hearts of his faithful people by sending them the light of the Spirit.” This language is largely lost on people of North America where we have almost made a cultural icon of the Jr High student who hates his or her teacher. For most of world history and still in many places today teachers are revered and honored, just consider Asia. We don’t hear the teaching ministry of Christ or the Spirit’s work as a teacher in quite the same way as the Bible intends or as this prayer intends us to hear this. But if you think about it, teaching really is a miraculous event. The impartation of knowledge and the development of a human being is a truly marvelous thing to see. It really is like a light bulb going on inside the head of the person who learns. It is not just a matter of conveyance either, if that were the case knowledge would decrease with every generation in a sort of intellectual entropy. But it doesn’t. In truth, in many fields it grows. Knowledge is created. How does that happen?

What is the content of that teaching of our hearts? Heart teaching would seem to be relational. One teaches a heart to love, to trust, to care. We are husbands and wives, children and parents, students and teachers, even when we are not thinking about it. Sometimes I think we have so intellectualized faith that we come to believe that God is only present when I am thinking about him. But God is my Father and Savior even when we are not thinking about him. There are things that are true about me whether I am conscious of them or not, we are always the children of God, forgiven by Christ. The habits of heart and behaviors of what we do as Christians might make for a good sermon today. The Spirit has taught us to love and be the children of God.

We pray for a right understanding and eternal joy in the consolation which the Spirit brings. Right understanding always has a different sound when a LCMS Lutheran says it. Most of our fights over the past couple of decades have been over right understandings or a lack thereof, particularly in the field of hermeneutics, but this is not really that sort of a right understanding. This is the joy of what we confess in creed, this is the understanding that is much more about the Gospel itself. This right understanding is the “aha” of that moment when we first become a Christian and realize this is not about our doing, but about God’s doing.

The eternal consolation then makes a lot more sense. The consolation the Spirit brings is really the Gospel. I think this prayer is on one hand a word against those who would look for another consolation, even that old sinful man who would seek to manipulate God for his own ends. On the other hand, it is also an earnest prayer for the consolation which the Gospel brings. The sinner is hungry for that peace which the world cannot understand or give.

Readings

Numbers 11:24-30

²⁴ So Moses went out and told the people the words of the LORD. And he gathered seventy men of the elders of the people and placed them around the tent. ²⁵ Then the LORD came down in the cloud and spoke to him, and took some of the Spirit that was on him and put it on the seventy elders. And as soon as the Spirit rested on them, they prophesied. But they did not continue doing it.

²⁶ Now two men remained in the camp, one named Eldad, and the other named Medad, and the Spirit rested on them. They were among those registered, but they had not gone out to the tent, and so they prophesied in the camp. ²⁷ And a young man ran and told Moses, “Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp.” ²⁸ And Joshua the son of Nun, the assistant of Moses from his youth, said, “My lord Moses, stop them.” ²⁹ But Moses said to him, “Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the LORD's people were prophets, that the LORD would put his Spirit on them!” ³⁰ And Moses and the elders of Israel returned to the camp.

This is a strange story which only gets stranger when you read it in its immediate context. In the passage just before this the people of Israel have been complaining about the lack of meat.

Manna, for all its wonderful qualities was apparently growing wearisome. After all, I get tired of miracles every morning myself. If the people of God are being inexplicably obtuse, God is no less bizarre. He hears the complaint of the people and Moses' own complaint and calls forth a wind which drives quail and drops them on the camp in order that they might have meat, not one day, not two days, but for a whole month until they loathe and it is coming out of their nostrils. Moses had complained that the job was too big for him, so God commanded him to gather seventy elders of Israel upon whom the Spirit would be poured and who would share the burden. Our text picks up that element.

After this little episode which we have here, the people dig into their feast of quail but while the meat is in their teeth the Bible records that God's anger lashed out at them and struck them with a terrible plague. So they moved on. Can anyone make any sense of this for me?

From this strange chapter, the pericope editors have chosen this account of the seventy elders and the outpouring of the Spirit. The emphasis is on the words of Moses here. Of course Moses' wish would be granted on Pentecost, when Babel's confusion would be undone and all people would become prophets, speaking for God the words of love and forgiveness that he wants all to hear. The preacher might just make that the sermon today. We tend to think of a prophet as someone who tells the future, and this is right, but only half right. I can tell you the future in which this sin for which Jesus has died and now is forgiven does not keep you out of heaven. I can tell the future of Christ's appearing in glory. I can tell the future of what happens when you die. But that is only part of the prophetic job. Prophets also were about "forth-telling" or explaining the present. We also do that. I can forgive the sin right now, speaking for God. I can baptize the child, bestowing God's name on the child. I can do all sorts of things that are prophetic if you think about it.

When we considered this text in the past we wondered how can the Spirit be less or more? It seems like the Spirit is all or nothing. It may be a matter of capacity on the part of the elders. A pint jar and a quart jar can both be full, but hold different amounts. If I pour the quart jar's water into a pint, it doesn't hold more, it simply runs over and onto the floor.

Another biblical connection we note is that this text seems to be echoed in Jesus discussion with Nicodemus in chapter 3 where Jesus says the Spirit blows where it wants to. Joshua wants to contain it, but Moses will not have that. Where and when do we want to contain the Spirit? Where do we chaff to see him blow today? Is the Spirit blowing in strange places that we find difficult? Does the Spirit sometimes even blow outside the Lutheran Church? What does that look like? Can we point to that? Dare we?

Notice how Moses is not jealous for himself, especially for glory. He sees the Spirit as gift, not as possession. Some things don't diminish when they are shared, they may even abound in sharing them. Love is one of those things, so is the Spirit. You do not have less love when you love more people, in fact, I find more love in those situations. Likewise we do not lose Holy Spirit when

more people have him. Moses understands that, Joshua does not. Are we more like Moses or Joshua do you suppose?

Psalm 25:1-15

- To you, O LORD, I lift up my soul.
² O my God, in you I trust;
let me not be put to shame;
let not my enemies exult over me.
³ Indeed, none who wait for you shall be put to shame;
they shall be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous.
⁴ Make me to know your ways, O LORD;
teach me your paths.
⁵ Lead me in your truth and teach me,
for you are the God of my salvation;
for you I wait all the day long.
⁶ Remember your mercy, O LORD, and your steadfast love,
for they have been from of old.
⁷ Remember not the sins of my youth or my transgressions;
according to your steadfast love remember me,
for the sake of your goodness, O LORD!
⁸ Good and upright is the LORD;
therefore he instructs sinners in the way.
⁹ He leads the humble in what is right,
and teaches the humble his way.
¹⁰ All the paths of the LORD are steadfast love and faithfulness,
for those who keep his covenant and his testimonies.
¹¹ For your name's sake, O LORD,
pardon my guilt, for it is great.
¹² Who is the man who fears the LORD?
Him will he instruct in the way that he should choose.
¹³ His soul shall abide in well-being,
and his offspring shall inherit the land.
¹⁴ The friendship of the LORD is for those who fear him,
and he makes known to them his covenant.
¹⁵ My eyes are ever toward the LORD,
for he will pluck my feet out of the net.

Acts 2:1-21

When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. ² And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. ³ And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. ⁴ And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.

⁵ Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. ⁶ And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. ⁷ And they were amazed and astonished, saying, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? ⁸ And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? ⁹ Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰ Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, ¹¹ both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians—we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God.” ¹² And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?” ¹³ But others mocking said, “They are filled with new wine.”

¹⁴ But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them: “Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words. ¹⁵ For these people are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day. ¹⁶ But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel:

¹⁷ “And in the last days it shall be, God declares,
that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh,
and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
and your young men shall see visions,
and your old men shall dream dreams;

¹⁸ even on my male servants and female servants
in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy.

¹⁹ And I will show wonders in the heavens above
and signs on the earth below,
blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke;

²⁰ the sun shall be turned to darkness
and the moon to blood,
before the day of the Lord comes, the great and magnificent day.

²¹ And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.’

Pentecost is not originally a Christian holiday, but a Jewish holiday. What is not as well known is that 50 days after Moses led them out of Egypt (Passover) he climbed up and God the Law amid flame and loud sounds. When he came down, they had set up a golden calf as an idol and when that hit the fan 3,000 people died. One could read the Pentecost event as a parallel

and reverse fulfillment of sorts. This the new Sinai event, but instead of a new Law coming down and thousands dying, it is the Gospel coming down and thousands, 3,000 to be precise, come to new life. Is that just a coincidence? Perhaps. Could it preach? Perhaps.

Is this the fulfillment of John the Baptist's prophecy? He had said that one who came after him would baptize them with fire. That sounded like grim and terrible judgment when John said it, but is this the surprising fulfillment? Peter seems to be making similar connections in the OT prophecy that he is quoting here.

This is likely the text that you will preach on this day, after all the Pentecost account is really an extension of the Gospel lesson for the day. In truth, I think this reading ought to be the Gospel reading for the day. The initial chapters of Acts are a continuation of the deeds of Jesus more than the deeds of the disciples. This is an act of Jesus as he pours out the Holy Spirit on people. This is as much the Gospel story as the account of Jesus death and resurrection. There, I said it. This is a salvation event too.

A couple of notes: Luke has a very geographic motif running through his book. If you take all the place names of the folks who are present at Jerusalem that day and look them up on a map, you will notice that they are describing a circle around Jerusalem. These people are coming from all directions. I think this is significant. The Gospel, the good news, will flow out of Jerusalem to the far corners of the earth. This might be a good day to talk about the Jerusalem cross, which makes an appearance on many Christmas trees as a crismon. I have included one on the right. The four crosses which form the larger cross are each equal in length, suggesting that the message goes out equally to all people. The four smaller crosses are variously interpreted, but most take them to be the four evangelists. The general idea is clear. The good news goes out to all.



The other interesting thing about the text is that Peter and Luke are very concerned to describe this event in continuity with the Old Testament. This is a very substantive quotation by Luke from the prophet Joel. Clearly Peter does not see himself as making a break from his Old Testament roots, but interestingly Luke does not try to downplay the OT roots of this either. He includes the whole quote by Peter.

The temptation will be to continue the sermon by Peter, don't do that because next week we pick this up at verse 22. Today we simply preach the fact of Pentecost. Next week we will interpret it.

Peter's words tell us that this is clearly the gift that Jesus told them to anticipate. What does this account tell us about the work of Jesus? I always find that the most interesting question to ask.

- 1. Jesus works mightily here through the Spirit. The disciples hear a mighty wind, tongues of flame, it is an evident event which staggers the imagination.*

2. *Jesus works toward understanding and communication. He wants people to hear and understand the message. This is not a “zap” experience which circumvents the mind and the hearing, but the disciples are given to speak in words which are intelligible to the audience and which the audience clearly can understand and grasp.*
3. *This event is clearly a divine event. It is the mighty works of God which occupy the conversation. While the subsequent sermon would indeed convict them of sin and offer forgiveness to these men, what attracted them and what they noticed was the Disciples praising God. Do we let people see us praising God? Or do they only encounter us confronting them in their sin?*
4. *The disciples are still disciples. The crowds are amazed because they are Galileans which suggests that they don't stop being the fishermen they were when they woke up that morning. Jesus does not change them into angels or make them glow in the dark. They keep their hillbilly accents and fishermen ways.*
5. *Jesus works resistibly. The crowds are able to listen, understand and reject the message of the disciples. The mighty working of the Spirit seems to be to draw attention to the message; it is not the message itself. That message remains the spoken word of a broken humanity. There are those there that day who can doubt, disbelieve and reject the message of the disciples.*
6. *Jesus does open the hearts of some. He gives them occasion to ask and seek answers to important questions. (This is another place where you can find Lutherans in the Bible because they ask “what does this mean?” in this passage – they must have been thinking about their catechism.) Later of course we read that some 3,000 new believers came to faith that day. Just a chapter earlier the number of believers had been reckoned as about 120, so that is pretty statistically significant growth. It would certainly get the attention of the local district mission executive and the pastor of this congregation would soon be on the lecture circuit telling others how they could replicate it.*
7. *Peter clearly connects this to the OT. The events which are witnessed today are the fulfillment of ancient prophecies. The Church is not a new thing, but a completion/fulfillment of a very old promise/covenant. We have ancient roots.*

I would think this might give us some things to chew on for a sermon today. Pentecost can be a tough day to preach because the issues are so big they almost elude our grasp. How do we connect this to our human experience? Are we the disciples who experience God? Are we the people who ask, “What does this mean?” Are we the people who witness something and wonder if it is alcohol or God? Where do we fit into this event? Should we turn to the seed parables (Sower, Mustard Seed, and the Seed that grows automatically – Mark 4) for some handle to interpret this?

But if you break it down into smaller bites, and realize that one does not have to preach the whole of the Pentecost theology because this day and theme does come up every year and on other days, then it gets a little more manageable.

Three years ago we noticed the profound changes which came over people this day. The presence of the Spirit radically transformed the disciples and the folks who heard them that day. The disciples had been more or less sitting in a room. They were not out there preaching, but they were sitting there waiting. In this do they look a little like us? Now, quite suddenly, they have a message to speak, a language to speak in, and they are bold about it. We all have gotten the same Spirit in Baptism, and He is slowly, sometimes quickly, but surely transforming us too.

We also noticed the communication piece. God is interested in talking to them in a way which enables them to “get it.” These men from all over the world would have known how to speak the basic Greek or Aramaic which was common in Palestine in the day, but God has the disciples speak to them in the language of their heart. In terms of communication, they did not need the tongues to get the content, yet God wanted to talk their hearts, in the language which their mother used when they were little children playing in Phrygia or Pamphylia or Mesopotamia. God wanted to communicate to them on that level. God is speaking “to” these men, not “at” them. This is why God’s methods have remained so consistent. Yes, we send missionaries to distant lands, but the best evangelists will always be the men and women who grew up speaking that language and who can speak to the hearts of the folks in that place.

John 7:37-39

³⁷ On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. ³⁸ Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’” ³⁹ Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

This could be the shortest Gospel lesson in the whole year!

John is a very intricate writer. The reference to living water and spirit here needs to be heard in the context of what he has already said. In chapter 3 he noted the Spirit’s unexpected actions. But in chapter 4 he offered the woman at the well a source of living water which would never run dry. Here he combines the two, Spirit and living water. Just to make things even more confusing, in chapter 6 he insists that he is the living bread and drink which people need to live.

But John is not only riffing on his earlier work, he is also echoing and playing off of Old Testament themes here. Ezekiel 47 may be the most obvious one. There Ezekiel sees a strange vision of water flowing out of the temple turning the land of Israel into a fresh water sea teeming with life. Jeremiah in chapter 17 also uses water imagery in his famous and dangerous temple sermon.

The connection to the feast may be much more than simply a temporal marker for John. When Jesus speaks these words in the temple this it is important for the message and the meaning of this text. Earlier in the chapter we learn that this is actually the feast of Booths in which the Jewish nation was supposed to remember their wandering in the wilderness by living in a tent for a week. Orthodox Jews still do this. On the last day, apparently, they pour out water from a stone jar, remembering the water from the rock. Jesus takes this as an occasion to proclaim that out of the hearts of men God will cause rivers of flowing water to flow. John notes that this is indeed what happened in the outpouring of the Spirit.

As we noted above this idea that water flows out of the hearts of men is not new in John, Jesus has spoken this way in John 4 when he addressed the woman at the well. Ezekiel saw a great river of water flowing out of the temple of God. Do we hear Paul then connecting this for us in Ephesians 2 when he says that we are the temple of God? But that is a little stretch. You might also enjoy reading the I Corinthians 10 passage, the first verses, in which Paul compares Jesus to the rock which followed them in the wilderness and from which flowed the water they drank. Does anyone know where the OT talks about the living water out of the hearts of God's people in OT Scripture? Jeremiah calls God the living water of the people (Jer 2:13, 17:13) and Zechariah 14:8 also calls God living water. The closest I got was and I found most intriguing is that Song of Solomon 4:14-15 suggests that the beloved is a garden from which flows living water.

So what is the living water that the outpouring of the Spirit brings to us? How will we define it? Is it the gospel message we have to proclaim? That certainly works if you understand it in terms of the woman at the well in John 4. She came and told the story of Jesus to her village and they came to believe in him, and they lived. Are we a fountain or a trickle? Is it the authoritative forgiveness we may speak? Do we believe that? We are the brothers of Christ, we are the baptized children of God, and we are his ambassadors. We have the authority to forgive sins because the Spirit has come to us too. Is this living water the love which we may share with the world because Christ dwells in us? What words will we use to describe and define this living water today? To what shall we point?

Absolution – Love – Relationship – Communion – more? The Spirit causes this to flow out of us like a river. But we don't see this. What does that mean? Are we not really Christians? If our church is in conflict does that mean we don't have the river flowing from us to one another? What stops up this river? What dams it and does that damn us?

We confront our sins and the sins of the neighbor, often against us. I cannot deal with my own sins, I can deal even less with the other's sin. But in Christ, I may say about any sin, my own, my neighbor's sin, all sin, that Jesus died for that. I can say that authoritatively because the Spirit has given this to me to say. I am a prophet in that sense.

While we may want to preach the Acts text today, and that only makes sense, this text could be another very interesting sermon.

Law

1. We are weak and helpless beings, cursed by sin and death and devil to lives of meaningless misery. (How's that for a cheery outlook on life?!)
2. Like the disciples, we find that our neighbors often speak a different language than we do, they are from distant lands, either geographically or philosophically. (My own block has folks from Jamaica and Japan, there are atheists, Catholics, 4Square, AME, Evangelicals, and goodness only knows what else.)
3. Our own pain, anger, frustration, and/or grief can leave us dry and withered with little desire to reach out and love a neighbor or feeling like we have nothing to give, in fact we probably feel needy.
4. Religion is a terrible topic in North America today, considered inappropriate in many workplaces and schools. We encounter hostility or apathy wherever we turn, perhaps even within our own home.
5. Our house is not in order, many look at us and do not assume drunkenness but a lack of Spirit and a lack of Christ. We are spiritual teetotalers.
6. Our own pride gets in the way. We want to put God squarely on our side, on our team against everyone else. When he does not act at our desire we get frustrated with him and would turn from him or worse, try and fix things ourselves.

Gospel

1. God does not see our lives as meaningless. He does not promise us that they will be suffering free, but he does promise us that in the end we will turn to see that our lives have been occasions for his Spirit to have worked and our suffering will be suffering for the kingdom of God, worthy of his praise.
2. God is intensely interested in our communication with all these neighbors of ours. Long ago he gave the gift of tongues and hearing to the people of Pentecost, he promises likewise to work miracles with our speech. The problem is not the hearing of our neighbors or the language we speak, but the faith which opens the mouth. Even this is the gift of God.
3. The Spirit poured out is the source of our blessings, not the way we feel or the good that resides in us. He has a penchant for taking the withered husks and bringing them back to life, of turning the most terrible of situations into an occasion for the living water to flow out of his people. Can you think of a great illustration of when the people of God really shone?

4. Christianity grew by leaps and bounds in the first centuries when it was the most vigorously opposed. The opposition of the world is not an occasion for us to be silenced but to wait in eager expectation for the mighty deeds of the Spirit of God.
5. The disciples long ago were not exactly what you might think would be suitable instruments for the kingdom of God to come. They were ill-educated, sometimes quarreled, they did not always listen very closely to Jesus and apparently were just as human as any of us. Yet they became the instruments of God to a whole generation of people. Again, the outpouring of the Spirit is what really matters here, not the problems that we see out there or in here.
6. This is not about me, but it is about God. That is much better than if it is about me. With Moses I can lay aside my pride and my self-centeredness and simply look about me and be amazed at the work of God in this place and this time. He opens my eyes to see the world, including myself very differently.

Sermon Ideas:

1. Glorified (Gospel: that the Spirit of God would glorify Jesus in the life and words of the hearer.)

So what is the deal the Holy Spirit here? He connects us to Christ. A week or so ago a group of pilgrims in Egypt were marched off a bus and because they refused to confess Islam they were butchered. They did not stand up to that fate because they had a historical knowledge of Jesus, like we can know MLK or JFK or Martin Luther or another person. They knew Jesus. They counted on the promise which he had personally made do them that he is the resurrection and life. It was the Spirit who brought that Jesus to them.

I realize that this language is alien to a Lutheran who has spent as much time as all of us have combatting the theology of glory, but in this case I think we have to be able to preach this. The bible uses the language, but what I will change here are the subjects of the verbs. I do not glorify Jesus, but the Father does, yes, contrary to expectation, through me. At the end of the Gospel lesson John steps back and tells us that Jesus was speaking about the Spirit, which had not yet been given because Jesus had not yet been glorified.

Clearly, now that the Spirit has been given, we can talk about Jesus in his glory. This will take a strange turn for us because John uses this term in ways which are not normal for us. To begin with, in chapter 3, Jesus is speaking of his crucifixion as his glorification. This is not Jesus looking glorious in the most obvious way we usually think about this, but it is reflective of what that word means. Hebrew's term for glory "chabod" means "heavy." Jesus was heaviest when he hung on that cross, suspended between heaven and earth.

But of course, glory also refers to Jesus in his brilliant magnificence, his heavenly glory which causes the angels to cover their faces. John also tells us that when Jesus appears again on the last day we will be able to see him as he is, for we will be transformed.

This sermon, wants to note that the glorification of Jesus by the Father is somehow connected to the outpouring of the Spirit and so we will want to look at what the Spirit is doing today which glorifies Christ. That will be most evident in the lives of the people upon whom the Spirit has been outpoured. In John 14 Jesus says that we will do even greater things than Jesus 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 object that this is not a miracle, just think of how hard it is to get money out of people's wallets and realize that 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.

We conclude that 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. Do you operate a preschool or elementary school? Do you feed the hungry? Do you pray for the neighbor or support a missionary? Do you welcome the sinner and comfort the bereaved? Get specific here. The ladies aide society who makes the sandwiches for the funeral lunches are the fruit of that outpoured Spirit who glorifies Christ. Name that, speak of the good that Jesus does through these acts whether they are great or humble. This sermon wants to connect the ministry of these to the event of Pentecost.

That connection inspires us to see what we are doing already in a new light, to rejoice in this opportunity, even to lose ourselves in this good work. This recasting of what we do as a parish and a community of faith may even suggest that we are compelled to do more. The Spirit is a restless Spirit. Eldad and Medad in the OT lesson were unwilling, but the Spirit was willing and they joined the ministry of the 70.

2. Jesus pours out the Spirit on us (That the hearer would believe he/she is the recipient of the same empowering and life-giving Spirit of Jesus who came upon the first disciples in this story.)

The law here might be the words of a faithful man I met in Germany many years ago. We were walking near the canal which ran through his little village in northern Germany. He sadly looked at me and said that the Holy Spirit had left his community. It was simply not working there anymore. This sermon would address that claim which may lie lurking in the hearts and minds of many of our hearers. We have a perception that the Holy Spirit is not at work in our midst. Do we doubt his work in our midst?

This would likely be denied by most folks but do we confess it through the way we conduct our ministry? Are we careful and guarded when we should be bold? Are we thinking small when the Spirit calls us to think large? Have we gotten the flame on our head in baptism and stayed in the room and peered out through the blinds at all these strange people standing out in the street, afraid of them? Does all this really suggest that we are alone, the Spirit is not out there empowering our words?

Simply having the Spirit is not really enough, is it? The Spirit is always given purposefully. We have the Spirit to be the people of God in this place, to be the living invitations to Him and His Kingdom. Jesus pours out that Spirit on us in order to be about his Kingdom's business. The Spirit's job is to point people to Jesus – not necessarily to himself. To have the Spirit is to be about that work – the sermon needs to connect those two things.

In one sense, this sermon needs to be didactic. The unfortunate division of the book of Luke-Acts into two volumes, separated by the Gospel of John in our canon has meant that many believers don't make an important connection. 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.

But the teaching is not the end of the story. Simply knowing that fact is not enough. Too often we think that the account of the Pentecost in Acts is really talking about other people, people who lived long ago. This is not about us. The fact also speaks of my empowerment in the same Spirit of Jesus. For the Spirit poured out on the first disciples radically transformed them and set them on a bold mission. Jesus says a river of living water flows out of me. A few weeks ago we saw these same men huddled in an upper room for fear of the Jews. Interestingly, a week after Jesus appeared, they were still huddled. It is the outpouring of the Spirit which changes them and which changes us.

The sermon 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.

You might also hit the heart language motif we developed in the discussion of the second reading you might also look at sermon 4 below. God is very interested in the communication, he is ready to help us, he wants this to hit home. Relax. He will take care of the hard stuff. He is using you, you are not using him nor is this hanging on you. He is using you.

This sermon will need to work the tension of the reality of our lives, often lived in fear and temerity, which is really contrary to the empowerment and courage which the Spirit works. The very nature of the Spirit is that He is gentle and subtle. Paul tells us that we can quench His fire, we can resist as some did on that first Pentecost. And hence this sermon also becomes an exhortation to live in the Spirit, under His guidance, in His love and boldness.

We have a great gift – how can we not share it? Like Moses, we realize that this gift does not diminish in the sharing, but like love it grows in the sharing. Compare a family with many children and one that has only one child. It is not the case that the family with many children divides their love among their many children and the only child gets more love. Indeed, ask a family with lots of kids, they will often tell you that they had more love. So it is with the Spirit of God. Giving really is getting. Sharing the Spirit simply pours more out.

3. Rejoicing in Christ (That the Spirit of God would put Jesus in the center of the hearer's life – removing the self-centered pride and opening up their hearts, minds, and mouths to be witnesses to Christ and his salvation.)

This sermon looks at several of the characters in the stories we have today and listens carefully to the words of Jesus. Moses' assistant Joshua wants the prophet to guard his honor and position. Unauthorized prophets are prophesying and he wants it to stop, but Moses is much more magnanimous about this. He prays that God would pour his spirit upon all flesh.

Peter, recently fearful Peter, is changed into the bold, even fearless witness of the resurrection. You might want to remind them of some of the stories we have heard earlier in the Easter season. They had taken no classes in witnessing, they had taken no positive step on their own to be great and bold witnesses. God came through in this situation and he made them to be what they were that day. That same God is at work in us.

Both of these men had their pride and fear taken away not by some dint of effort on their part, but because the Spirit of God had radically reoriented their lives around Jesus and the salvation which God works. This divine action means that this story is no longer about me and my glory (Moses). And it is no longer about avoiding the attention of those

who would do me harm, either through physical harm or ridicule (Peter). My life is all about Jesus.

But listen as well to the claim that Jesus makes today. The Jews gathered for the feast of Booths would pour out water to remind them of the water from the rock when Moses led them through the wilderness. Jesus and the rest of the New Testament simply cannot let that be. Jesus is the rock, Jesus is the water of life, indeed, Jesus is everything. He essentially hijacks a memorial to a past event and says, “It’s all about me!”

We would label him a pathetic self-promoter if it wasn’t true that it is all about him. Our folks in fact have probably lost a little of the shock value of all this. They are so used to hearing these radically assertions Jesus makes that they are greeted with a yawn instead of the stunned looks of surprise that they demand.

Likewise Jesus is making his claims upon our lives today. Our money is not ours. Our time is not ours. I cannot have a nice day unless he gives that day to me. He is always “what is up.” I am never lucky, always blessed. He simply demands, seizes, and occupies the center of my universe.

And I love it. It makes me really, really, happy.

So much so, that my heart and mind and mouth and life are all transformed by him. I rejoice in him, I cannot be quiet about him, I find that his love and deeds show up in strange places in my life, in my patterns of speech, in the decisions I make, in the words I say, in the friends I make, and in the ways I elect to spend my time. It is all rejoicing in Christ.

4. The Spirit Teaches our Hearts (Collect: That the Holy Spirit would teach the hearts of the hearers to live in love and community.)

This sermon wants to teach the life lessons of the Spirit of God. It might just use the Galatians 5 passage of the fruits of the Spirit as a subtext for the sermon. Another option might be Romans 12:2 in which Paul enjoins them not be conformed to the world but to renewal of the mind in the Spirit.

This sermon was envisioned for a community which is profoundly broken – a place where people are struggling and life regularly falls apart for these folks.

From another resource we found five helpful things we thought the Spirit might teach such a community.

- A. Learning to think for ourselves – not dependent on someone else telling us what to think
- B. Take responsibility for life actions and choices
- C. Learn to solve problems and deal with obstacles in life –

D. Learn how to negotiate conflict – forgiveness.

E. Find a way to make a contribution in life.

This is not a works righteousness – it is a fruit of the Spirit in our lives. The sermon will preach this good work of God in us.