

Festival of Pentecost May 20

Fifty days have sped by since we gathered to proclaim the Resurrection on Easter morning, thus the name Pentecost. In the Jewish calendar, fifty days after the Feast of Passover the Jews were invited to return to the temple for the festival of Weeks, or Pentecost. Thus, we appropriate that name for this day. And it is a proper thing to do. In the Jewish sacred calendar, Pentecost was a harvest festival. The first of the spring wheat would have been harvested about now in that climate. It was the first moment of plenty after the winter fasting.

We also gather for a harvest festival of sorts, but not the wheat of which we make bread, but the harvest which Christ saw ripe and ready and to which he sent out his first disciples and us, his disciples today. Now, harvest is a great deal of work. The Jews of old brought a lamb to these festivals, to sacrifice, remembering that it was by the sweat of their brow that they harvested their grain. Their aching muscles and weary bodies were a reminder of the fall into sin and how grievously that had wounded this whole world. But harvest is not only about hard work. It is also a time of feasting, a time for weddings and celebrations of every sort. There may have been a few pulled muscles in the crowd, an occasionally sleepy farmer nodding off during the sermon, but as long as this was still a harvest festival, it was also a time of joy and plenty. There were smiles among that crowd too.

Thus also we gather for a harvest festival. The work of the kingdom is work. There is no denying it. The preacher knows the midnight call from the hospital that drags him out of bed to comfort a family for whom our words seem so empty and without effect as they stand by the bed and the mangled body of their loved one who did not make it home. It is hard to leave the warmth of that bed and pleasure of sleep. It is hard to grind out the sermons for congregations and the devotions for meetings that don't seem to accomplish much. It is hard for our people too. They confront a world which quite often doesn't think much of their faith or what they do. That world sees only power and its manipulation. To them, the Christian who loves with Christ's love is simply another door-mat to be walked upon.

But there is also joy, is there not, and it is the joy that keeps us going in this. There is the joy of a child's embrace after a service, a widow who thanks you with tears in her eyes, the eager service of a young man or woman who finds peace for their troubled soul in the fellowship of believers who welcome them despite what they have done. There is joy in watching something grow and succeed. There is even joy in the ministry to the family at the hospital bedside I mentioned above and the quiet satisfaction of looking back on a summer's worth of sermons and seeing them all lie straight and true. I think of a mason who has built a wall and who turns to see it and admire his handiwork. His back might ache, but his heart is glad.

Most of all there is another joy, a joy which comes when the Spirit works among us and we see the Word of God take root, flourish, and bear much fruit in the lives of sinners. There is a joy which is an alien joy, not found in the thin native soil of sinful humanity, but brought there by God when he takes His place in my and your hearts. This electric joy has empowered martyrs to sing on the way to their death, has given hope to slaves under the lash of cruel masters, sustained

women in hopeless situations, and even kept an occasional preacher going when the voters' meetings got ugly and the budget was not going to be met.

We have come to Pentecost, the day we remember and rejoice because God's Spirit is poured out. But what is that? This Feast properly celebrates the mystery of the Church. Like a mustard seed a little group of people (those first disciples) is cast into the ground. It doesn't look like it should work, but it sprouts and grows into a big shrub. Cut it down and destroy it and you are simply planting it anew, to sprout and grow again. The Romans found that out when they tried to kill the church through persecution. But again and again Christianity has been declared dead, but it just doesn't happen that way. Some time ago I came across another article in which Christianity was declared dead. A recent Pew Research (ironic) suggested that more and more Americans are describing themselves as "nones." But they ignore the massive growth of Christianity worldwide and they assume that nones are not Christian. I am not sure that is a safe assumption. The persistence of the Christian movement is a great mystery, it is the mystery of God. The communists of Russia and China and Eastern Europe tried to do the same.

Even in the west, where to many eyes the church looks moribund, there are signs of great hope. I am sure that my grandchildren will go to church, or at least be able to go to church. It might not be the LCMS, it might not even go by the name Lutheran, but Christianity will be there with the presence of Jesus, the Holy Spirit, baptism and sacrament. The church is not going away. In the last 60 years the Christian population of China has grown from 3 million to over 120 million. Most of that time under a brutally repressive communist regime which actively persecuted it.

There is much more to the outpouring of the Spirit. We might reject the demand for some ecstatic or miraculous spiritual gift, but we cannot neglect the gifts of the Spirit, for the Spirit empowers and engenders our love, our service, our works, our whole Christian life. Too often Lutherans have reacted to Pentecostalism by refusing to talk at all about the Spirit, but that is a terrible mistake. The Holy Spirit is a message of great hope and joy for Christians. His presence makes our lives holy and good, it changes us, He causes us to constantly be renewed and reborn in Christ.

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...I wonder what the sense of sacred time is for our people. Is this just another Sunday like all the others? We have a sense that Christmas is a special day, we will close a few stores for that. Easter also has a special sense for folks but even businesses and the rest are simply ignoring Holy Week. I even had to remind my colleagues in the faculty that Good Friday might not be the best time for a meeting over beer. But Pentecost is the real stepchild here. I

remember in Germany a number of years ago being pleasantly surprised when the waitress wished me a “freulich Pfingstfest.” What do we offer people in English for this day? “Have a happy Pentecost” or “Have an uplifting Pentecost”? What is the proper greeting for today? (My brother once proposed “spiffy Epiphany” for that other much neglected holiday.)

I think we could nuance this rather well. Of all the holidays, Pentecost is the one that begs us not to change what we are doing just for the day. Because the Spirit permeates the whole of creation, all our doings in life may please God and all may become spiritual, whether that is spending some time with our kids, or buying groceries, sleeping, yes, even sex with your spouse. God has redeemed them all and poured out his Spirit on the whole of creation that he might reconcile the whole broken world to himself. The trick is whether we perceive or acknowledge that Spirit’s presence, in those things, or do we compartmentalize and partition them all off, as if God only had a claim on our Sundays and only an hour or two of that. Has not Pentecost and the gift the Spirit brings sanctified the whole of life?

God taught our hearts this day. What is the heart? We talk about heart and head, spiritual and intellectual Christianity. Normally when we talk this way we mean the difference between assenting to a list of truths. We have read the catechism, know our doctrines well, may have read the whole Bible, but while they intellectually agree it has not really made a difference in their lives. The difference we usually locate in something called faith. Soren Kirkegaard, the Danish theologian/philosopher of the late 19th century railed against his church which he thought had all the doctrine right and did not really believe it. The most common marker to distinguish the head and heart Christian is to discuss what they trust. The heart Christian trusts God.

Where does emotion fit into this? Some people mistake emotion for the antithesis to the intellectual sort of faith. But in truth, one can be emotional and still not be a heart Christian. If one locates one’s Christianity in how much one feels, one still has not actually come to faith yet. For just as intellectual faith is not yet heart faith, so too emotional faith is not yet heart faith.

Heart faith, that real spiritual life, is something else than either emotions or intellect, although it is not antithetical to feeling or knowing God, indeed it delights in that experience and that knowledge. It might embrace both of them in the same person. At the risk of sounding like Frederich Schleiermacher, the heart faith is the whole person entrusted to God. He is the answer to every problem, he is the one who will come through when no one else does. Faith trusts. The problem with Schleiermacher is that once you objectify faith, once it becomes something other than you, it stops really being faith. Faith has its eyes firmly fixed on Jesus, as soon as we look at faith we stop looking at Jesus. As soon as we put our faith in faith, we miss the whole point!

I am not going to go into a discourse on whether we measure up to the faithful thing or not. There is little to be gained by that one. But God does teach our hearts today. We usually think of God teaching our minds and we don’t think much about the education of our hearts, but in truth our hearts must be taught as well. Most especially what they learn from God is love itself. I know there is a human love which the pagans also have, but this is different, this is the love conquers the world and sent Jesus and us to a cross. This love in turn pours forth from Christians as self-

less service to this broken world and a willingness to die for what they believe. Did you know that the largest provider of health care in the world is the Roman Catholic Church? Christians are the only people doing any sort of aid work in the forgotten and very dark corners of the world like Chechnya? God has taught us to love.

“By the same Spirit in our day....” The modern church needs to remember that it has an ancient root. When Paul speaks of Church – he is talking to us. We are the church which started on the first Pentecost. Dispensational Calvinism which often dominates our world doesn’t get this. They imagine that the relationship with us and the Spirit is somehow qualitatively different than it was with the first Christians, as if we somehow have less or need less. The restorationist branch of the Reformed movement also tends to think the Spirit left and has come back, usually in the person of some preacher/reformer of their own tradition. Most egregiously the LDS believe this but so do the Christian Church/Disciples of Christ.

We pray for a right understanding in this prayer and that we may always rejoice in God’s holy consolation. The right understanding and the holy consolation are all of a piece here. This is not just the knowledge such as one might gain at a school, even a vaunted educational institution like Concordia University. This right understanding is the knowledge of God, which surely can be aided by a good education, but is learned in the school of life as well, when we live in Spirit filled relationship with one another. And in that relationship, in that study, we encounter the very consolation of God for us. Again, this all comes back to his love, doesn’t it? The consolation and the love are all the same. He loves me, I know it because the Spirit poured out has through word and sacrament engendered in my heart the faith which trusts and loves and worships and expects great things from him.

Readings

Ezekiel 37:1-14

The hand of the LORD was upon me, and he brought me out in the Spirit of the LORD and set me down in the middle of the valley; it was full of bones. ² And he led me around among them, and behold, there were very many on the surface of the valley, and behold, they were very dry. ³ And he said to me, “Son of man, can these bones live?” And I answered, “O Lord GOD, you know.” ⁴ Then he said to me, “Prophesy over these bones, and say to them, O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. ⁵ Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: Behold, I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. ⁶ And I will lay sinews upon you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live, and you shall know that I am the LORD.”

⁷ So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I prophesied, there was a sound, and behold, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. ⁸ And I looked, and behold, there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them. But there was no breath in them. ⁹ Then he said to me, “Prophesy to the breath; prophesy, son of man, and say to the breath, Thus says the Lord GOD: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these

slain, that they may live.”¹⁰ So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived and stood on their feet, an exceedingly great army.

¹¹ Then he said to me, “Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. Behold, they say, ‘Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are indeed cut off.’”¹² Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I will open your graves and raise you from your graves, O my people. And I will bring you into the land of Israel.¹³ And you shall know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves, and raise you from your graves, O my people.¹⁴ And I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I am the LORD; I have spoken, and I will do it, declares the LORD.”

We welcome the OT readings back to our Sunday mornings after a six week series on Acts.

Ezekiel was a prophet in the seventy years of the exile of God’s people in Babylon. They had been led into exile in no less than three different events. The first time Nebuchadnezzar came he only took the very elite from the society, the priests, the governors, the captains of the army, the nobles and the royal family. He left most of the people to tend the farms, conduct the trade, and, most importantly, pay the taxes. Ezekiel, being of the high priestly family, was of that first group. His initial ministry was dour. Many had a false hope that they would soon return, that Nebuchadnezzar would relent and allow them to go home and resume their positions of leadership. Ezekiel had the hard job of dashing those hopes. His advice was buy a house, start a business, you are going to be here a while. And they were.

After the second and third intrusion by the forces of Nebuchadnezzar, the nation of Judah was virtually emptied of people. A great wave of more common folk came to Babylon and many of the poorest fled with Jeremiah to Egypt. (Jeremiah did not want to go.) It was after this crushing defeat that Ezekiel’s ministry changed from one of discouraging the false hopes to encouraging a genuine faith in God. He became a prophet of hope.

This reading is from that second phase of Ezekiel’s ministry. He is giving hope. The people are despairing, they feel that they have gotten a raw deal from God, their fathers sinned and they are being punished. They feel like they are a corpse, beyond hope, a people who are dying and without any chance of restoration. As God quotes them here, “our bones are dried up, our hope is lost, we are indeed cut off.”

Ezekiel’s vision of a people recreated from the dry and sterile bones is familiar to many of us, but I think sometimes that the imagery and perhaps the African-America spiritual have gotten in the way of really hearing it. Ezekiel addresses the feelings of the people. They perceive that they are dried up bones. This is not talking about the resurrection of the flesh; although, I would not discount such a sermon. Ezekiel is talking to a death by discouragement.

What makes this important for today is the mechanism for this re-creative act by God. Ezekiel preaches to dry and lifeless bones. God’s Word creates the hearers themselves. Bones cannot hear what we say, but when God’s Word is proclaimed, it creates the thing he calls for. Ezekiel also prophesies to the ruach. This word in Hebrew is important and worthy of attention by the

interpreter. This is the very stuff that God blew into the man at the creation moment in Genesis 2. In Hebrew, and in its Greek counterpart, the word can be translated three ways: Wind, Spirit, or Breath. Like this passage, Jesus will pun extensively on this word in John 3 when he speaks to Nicodemus. Thus if you are doing a concordance study in English you will really need to look up all three words to get this straight. The punning is evident when you realize this. Ezekiel prophesies to the wind, the winds blow, the corpses breathe and in them is the spirit of life. All three of these are the same word in Hebrew.

I encourage you to pay close attention to how all this works. God asks Ezekiel if all these bones can live and Ezekiel does a really smart thing here. He says that God alone knows the answer to that question. At God's command, Ezekiel preaches to the dry bones. This looks utterly hopeless, it cannot work, but the word which Ezekiel preaches is strong and has a divinely given power. There is a rattling sound, one can almost hear it in your imagination. The bones assemble themselves, ligaments and muscles, and then skin, but the corpses do not live. Ezekiel is again commanded to prophecy, this time to the wind/breath/spirit. That Spirit comes and the corpses live, standing on their feet, a mighty host. What had been nothing but a pile of bones now is a whole nation of people.

God applies this to the exiled nation of Israel. They feel dead and God promises that he is the resurrection God, he makes them "alive" again. Notice how they will be resurrected from their graves. The word preached, the spirit blowing, an impossible task for such ephemeral things like words and puffs of air, but it works.

When we apply this to ourselves, this is a profound message for the preacher. Ezekiel has to believe in the power of what he says, because it is God's to say. Zeke has a valley full dry old bones and he is told to make them alive. We can look out over our congregation and feel like it is a nave full of dried up husks of Christians. Do we believe that the word we preach has the power to transform the people who hear us? If we don't, why do we preach?

Do our congregations feel like dried up people? Do they feel that way because their retirement funds have been gutted, because their families have shattered, because they have lost their job or because their Sunday School and ministry have shrunk over the past thirty years and today they can only mourn what is lost to them? Is this the mother who has poured her whole life into her children and raising her family, and she just doesn't have anything left? Is this the guy who turns around and looks back at a career in a business he really doesn't love and wonders "why, why have I sunk so much into this?" Is this the parishioner who comes because it is just a habit, they have done this for decades but don't know why and can't really point to any good reason that they are here today?

God raises dead people – Ezekiel preaches to these bones and contrary to all expectation they come together and God breathes into them and they live, a mighty host. He gives purpose to the meaningless life, he gives renewal to dying congregations. He even recruits 80 year old guys like Moses to new careers as nation builders. He was a carpenter who knew hard work and had

compassion on the hungry and the homeless and the suffering around him, just as he has compassion on us today.

Psalm 139:1-12 (13-16)

O LORD, you have searched me and known me!

² You know when I sit down and when I rise up;
you discern my thoughts from afar.

³ You search out my path and my lying down
and are acquainted with all my ways.

⁴ Even before a word is on my tongue,
behold, O LORD, you know it altogether.

⁵ You hem me in, behind and before,
and lay your hand upon me.

⁶ Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;
it is high; I cannot attain it.

⁷ Where shall I go from your Spirit?
Or where shall I flee from your presence?

⁸ If I ascend to heaven, you are there!
If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there!

⁹ If I take the wings of the morning
and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,

¹⁰ even there your hand shall lead me,
and your right hand shall hold me.

¹¹ If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me,
and the light about me be night,"

¹² even the darkness is not dark to you;
the night is bright as the day,
for darkness is as light with you.

¹³ For you formed my inward parts;
you knitted me together in my mother's womb.

¹⁴ I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.
Wonderful are your works;
my soul knows it very well.

¹⁵ My frame was not hidden from you,
when I was being made in secret,
intricately woven in the depths of the earth.

¹⁶ Your eyes saw my unformed substance;
in your book were written, every one of them,
the days that were formed for me,
when as yet there was none of them.

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.’

The Day of Pentecost, a feast in the Jewish calendar, a harvest festival (see my notes in the essay above) was one of the three big feasts on the Jewish calendar along with Passover and the feast of booths in the fall in which the people remembered their sojourn in the desert. This festival

really remembered their first agricultural harvest in the land, the first time they had a meal from the crops they had planted, ever. Remember they had wandered for a whole generation. Those who had planted crops and eaten of them in Egypt had all died on the journey save Joshua and Caleb. I wonder who taught them to plant and harvest after a generation of eating manna in the wilderness?

What shall we make of the description of the Apostle's experience in the first verses? Some have pointed to the tower of Babel being undone in these verses. But that is actually a theme that gets picked up in another year of the cycle – when we get to read Genesis 11. N. T. Wright suggests that this is the return of the Shekinah the glory of the Lord that Ezekiel saw departing at the time of the Exile. Others have noticed the order of these events. First they heard, then they saw. We often want to reverse that order and have God show us before we will start to listen to him. We see the lightning before the thunder clap.

There were Jews there from all around. If you look at a map in the back of your study bible, or perhaps there is even one on this page in your bible, you will notice that the countries from which these have gathered are from all around the city of Jerusalem. Every cardinal direction is represented. Luke is very geographically conscious when he writes. He wants you to see that the kingdom mission is going in every direction – to the ends of the earth.

The disciples are visited by the Spirit, the sound of a great wind, tongues of flame appear on them, and they begin to speak in tongues as the Spirit gave to each of them. The many who were there heard the sound and came seeking to know what had happened. They were amazed by this. They heard the disciples speaking in their own languages, the languages of their heart, the tongue their mother had spoken to them when they were children. They had all learned to speak Aramaic and Greek, the languages they needed in Jerusalem, but this was in their native tongue and dialect.

Of course some did not believe what was happened, some scoffed, attributing the disciples inebriation. I wonder what they did with the tongues of flame. But the text doesn't address that so we are left to wonder about this. Some of them, the ones which Luke wants you to see, are really wondering what is going on and asking what this means.

Peter stands up. Peter, who a few short weeks before had denied even knowing Christ at Jesus' trial, stands up! I don't think we sometimes get just what that means. Peter who had been so afraid, stands up and confronts these men with a sermon that cut them to the heart and moved men to radically transform their lives. Peter bears witness to Christ, even when some are scoffing at this. What has come over this fearful man to replace his fear with courage? The Spirit of God has come upon him and changed him.

Read his sermon carefully. We only get the first part of it this week, next week we will get the rest of this, so don't preach the whole thing yet unless you have other plans for next week.

In this part Peter is really connecting this event and his faith to the faith of the Old Testament church. The prophets had foretold this day. This could have been expected, in a sense. Indeed, it

might not have been expected to happen this day, but this day had to come. God's prophets had foreseen it.

There are two important themes in here. First, notice that the Spirit is poured out on all flesh, male and female, slaves and old people and young people. It is a universal outpouring of the Spirit. While the Spirit had been active in the years prior through prophets and kings and priests like Elijah and David and Ezra, now he was poured out generally. If you want to preach Peter's sermon, you could do much worse than to think of this in terms of the universal priesthood of all believers and the idea that all of us are made competent by the Spirit to be people of prayer, divinely empowered forgiveness, and a witness to God's activity.

The second theme that one notices here is that the one who calls on the name of God shall be saved. Already Peter is preaching a salvation for all people, mediated by the instrument of a faithful relationship with God. This is regardless of the Jew and Gentile piece. Another great sermon which remembers Peter's sermon is to preach that the church was founded this day to be the agent of God's salvation to this whole world. The coming of the Spirit means salvation is not just for some, but for all. Anyone who calls on this name will be saved.

Of course, both of these themes are simply the outgrowth of the reality that the Third Person of the Trinity is really poured out this day. One could preach a marvelous sermon too simply on the proclamation that the Spirit poured out that day is still being poured. Think of a great waterfall that still pours over some heavenly precipice. You and I can still stand at the feet of waterfalls in Asia Minor which Paul undoubtedly saw as well. This is an ongoing event. The Spirit still pours, blows, makes alive, calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies his whole Christian Church on earth.

John 15:26-27; 16:4b-15 (I have included the excised verses)

²⁶“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. ²⁷ And you also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning.

“I have said all these things to you to keep you from falling away. ² They will put you out of the synagogues. Indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God. ³ And they will do these things because they have not known the Father, nor me. ⁴ But I have said these things to you, that when their hour comes you may remember that I told them to you.

“I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you. ⁵ But now I am going to him who sent me, and none of you asks me, ‘Where are you going?’ ⁶ But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart. ⁷ Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you. ⁸ And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning

sin and righteousness and judgment: ⁹ concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; ¹⁰ concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer; ¹¹ concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.

¹² “I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. ¹³ When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. ¹⁴ He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. ¹⁵ All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

This is a text pregnant with theology about the Holy Spirit. Here are a handful of themes we might address, but there are surely more:

- 1. The Spirit is called the Helper whom Jesus sends. How does he “Help”? The Greek word used here, “Paraclete” is worthy of your study. Literally it means “called beside” and suggests a meaning of one who is with us. How does that presence help us? I think that likely has legs to preach!*
- 2. The Spirit is all about witnessing. That is what he does and presumably what he comes to help us do. He bears witness himself, and he enables our witness. A great evangelism sermon.*
- 3. The presence of the Spirit is actually better than talking to Jesus as the disciples did that day. It is to our advantage that Jesus goes so that the Spirit may come. If he doesn’t go, the helper doesn’t come and we need that helper more than we need the unascended presence of Christ. Sounds strange – but it is true. The Spirit’s presence makes Jesus even more present in a way. But in order for that to happen Jesus has to step aside and into the world in a different way. The Spirit by his very nature is somewhat shy.*
- 4. The Helper does some interesting things. He especially convicts the world. He does this in three ways*
 - a. Regarding sin because they do not believe in Jesus*
 - b. Regarding righteousness because Jesus goes to the Father*
 - c. Regarding judgment because the ruler of this world is judged*

If you are finding these last three things less than clear, don’t feel too badly, lots of people have read this and scratched their heads a little. Here’s my stab at this, but don’t think that this is the only way to run with this. Sin is only a problem for the sinner who does not believe in Jesus. For the person who believes, there is no sentence passed, sentence for my sin was passed a long time ago on a hill outside of Jerusalem. With regard to righteousness, which is really the opposite of sin, I have sin, I need righteousness, Jesus, who has paid for sin, has triumphed and ascended to the very highest place. United to Jesus, I am at the very center of God’s righteous kingdom. Regarding Judgment, this is a little tougher. Does he mean the judgment of a court room? In

other words, is the world being judged along with the one who brought it into rebellion? Or is this that the world has exercised bad judgment? I prefer the first one.

- 5. The final piece one takes away from Jesus description of the Holy Spirit here is that he is shy. He glorifies Jesus, not himself. He tells what he has been told, not what he makes up. He is a conduit, not an original source of salvation or message, but a conduit of that salvation and message. He is here, but he does not draw any attention away from Christ.*

That is not to say that the Spirit is not God or that he is not creative or original. That simply doesn't make sense, but I do think this says something about the role that the Spirit plays in our life, as we interact with Him. He is here to glorify Christ, not himself. If your proclamation is about the Spirit, it might be missing the Spirit's point. He is here to testify to Jesus, he wants us to proclaim Jesus too. When we proclaim Jesus we are really being Spiritual. When we proclaim the Spirit without Jesus, we are being most unspiritual. If we worship the Spirit without the Son, we have missed it. The Spirit is poured out to bring us the Son who exegetes the Father. They are always a piece and God's love is always expressed through the hands of Christ.

Law

1. I am a very long way from Jesus. He lived two thousand years ago and half the planet away from my house.
2. My life, separated from Jesus, can really feel like a dried up husk of a life. I go to meetings that seem meaningless, I work hard and don't see results.
3. Time is inexorable and relentless. I see my youth slipping through my fingers and yet I cannot say that I have actually used it wisely or accomplished much.
4. I long for Jesus, but he seems to be absent, far away from my life. For that reason, my life is sad. I cannot even really say that I miss him like the disciples must have missed him. I am not sure that I ever really knew him. I never was in that upper room, I was not there by the shores of Galilee, I did not see the lepers rejoice in their health or the lame man leap for joy on his newly healed legs. I did not experience the first flower or butterfly with a man whose eyes had been restored. My sadness seems more profound for having to read about Jesus but never having gotten to meet him.
5. In a glut of self-pity, my world inexorably shrinks, getting smaller and smaller until I am in a gloomy little place. I look on my fellow human being only through the lens of my own sadness. Perhaps their problems are greater than mine, perhaps they are smaller than mine, but all I can really feel are my own.
6. I live a world which has largely discounted the spiritual reality. I am told to be busy with life and that is where "reality" is at. But this is a blindness of sorts, and a dangerous one at that. There is a spiritual reality which can bite me very hard.

Gospel

1. Jesus has poured out his Spirit, giving his Comforter who brings me Jesus himself. He tells me what Jesus says, he loves me with Jesus' love, he brings me Jesus.
2. Jesus is the source of life and truth and peace. He makes the meetings into occasions for his gracious love to be expressed, the hard work becomes a service rendered to him, a gift for him to use as he sees fit.
3. My whole life, its every decade, whether young or old has been redeemed by his blood, sanctified by His Spirit, and now is a precious treasure to him, worth more than all the universe.
4. The Gift of the Helper is better than Jesus walking around for my eyes to see. Now I have Jesus much more intimately than the disciples had him. He comes inside me. I touch him in baptism, and even better, his blood flows through my veins, his flesh has become my flesh. I never need to gather in an upper room waiting for Jesus, because the Spirit is poured out, I know he is right there, as close as the embrace of a fellow Christian, a kind word, a teaching, a forgiving, an act of love selflessly given.
5. Jesus opens up my world. By turning my sadness into joy, I can see the neighbor differently too. My loneliness and self-pity have been transformed into a joyous presence, but that presence is a presence which seeks out the good of neighbor and friend and family. I may not have the solution to their problem, but I can care. I can weep with the sad, rejoice with the joyous, work with the weary and hold a child on my lap.
6. The Holy Spirit poured out tunes me into a spiritual world in which I am now equipped with the very Holy Spirit of God. I can live in that world with confidence and joy.

Sermon Ideas

1. A Gift from Jesus to You (Gospel and Acts: That the hearer would believe and rejoice that the gift of the Holy Spirit is for them too, equipping them with Peter's boldness and courage.)

We often have the idea that we are somehow impoverished by our distance from the Jesus event. It is as if we believe we attend a different church than the one the apostles founded. We imagine what it would have been like to witness the miracles Jesus did or to have been there with the disciples. But this is like living in Italy and missing the macaroni and cheese your mom used to make from a box when you were in elementary school. You have so much better pasta right around the corner!

The truth is that Jesus has not left, in fact he has promised us that we will see bigger and better things than the disciples and we do. Jesus in the Gospel lesson today promises us the gift of a helper and in the Acts reading he delivers on that. Ten days ago we celebrated the ascension of Jesus to the very highest place, the throne of the universe, but he has not forgotten nor abandoned us there. He in fact tells us that it is good that he

goes, because his first order of business was to send his Spirit to us, a sending which was no one time event, but an outpouring which continues to this very day. Just look at what that has done to Peter today. Look at Ezekiel today. He goes out and preaches to a bunch of dead bones. That can't work, but it is not his word which he preached that day, but the Word, and the same Word which you have heard in absolution and sermon, readings and blessings this day.

A few weeks ago, in the passion narratives, we heard about fearful and weak Peter. He had betrayed his master and denied he even knew him, swearing an oath. But today he is emboldened to preach the good news to strangers who are laughing at him. What has worked this change? It was not Peter, it was not any self help book, it was not even his decision to lead a purpose driven life. It was the Spirit of God who transformed Peter. That same Spirit is poured out on the world today. Since 1949, sixty-three short years in which many of us have been alive; God has been doing marvelous things. I just read an article the other day that said that mainland China now has something like 110 million Christians, the government of China actually estimates that to be 130 million. That is ten percent of the population. How did that happen? It surely was not through the work of well funded western missionaries, slick advertising campaigns or anything of the sort. Much of that time saw cruel government oppression of Christianity, brutal repression, the arrest of pastors, etc. But still the church grew there because the Spirit moved Christians just like you and me to bravery, a bravery that put their lives at risk. That same spirit is poured out this day too, on God's people in this town too.

Now you and I are Spiritual people, empowered and enlivened by Jesus, to be the raisers of dead people. It should not have worked for Ezekiel, but it did, and it doesn't look like it should work for us either, but that Spirit creates the faith which opens our mouths and gives our lives the message to live, the Truth. We could look at our lives, our churches, our families, and more and pronounce them dead. But that would simply be noticing the obvious. The Spirit of God comes with this strange and contravening message of hope and life. He speaks to dead bones that they are alive. He speaks to broken families that they are whole. He speaks to dying congregations that they are precious to God and instruments for his grace. He speaks to old tired preachers that they have a place in his kingdom, he speaks to communities of people slipping into sinful excess that they are the precious people of God.

When he speaks, interesting things happen. Try it. Hope it. Watch it!

2. Our Tender Helper (That the hearer would better understand the nature of the Spirit and thus be better equipped to recognize the Spirit's blowing in his/her life, give thanks for it, and cheerfully cooperate with Him.)

This is the day of the Holy Spirit. We have a day which really celebrates the Father who sends the Son at Christmas. We have a time of the Son who accomplished salvation: Good Friday through Easter. This is the day of the third person of the Trinity, the Holy

Spirit. There is a really interesting thing about the work of the Spirit in our lives. He invites us to cooperate with him. Now, I am not talking about conversion, but hey, we are already there, and if you are not, please talk to me after the service. For those of us who have already been touched by this Spirit, we are given to cooperate with him, to work beside him. Today let us look for that Spirit and learn a little better how to identify his good work and along the way even get to hear the good news that Jesus loves us enough that having given us his very life, he keeps on giving, even the gift of the Spirit.

The Spirit is shy; He is almost pathologically Lutheran-like in his aversion to self promotion. He is just not the sort to beat his own drum. That is because he does not want to take anything away from the attention we pay to Jesus. Jesus is the one who died for our sins, not the Spirit. Thus, the witness he bears is not to himself, but to Jesus. He likes it that way. He always points to Jesus because it is all about Jesus. So the first thing to know about the Spirit is that he will be present wherever Jesus is being taught and proclaimed and heard and loved. If you see someone who is loving with Jesus love, helping the little guy, befriending the lonely and the sad, touching the leper, and addressing the needs of real people, you can bet the Spirit is there. Conversely, if there is no Jesus, the Spirit is probably still there, but now trying to put him into that situation. Perhaps there is your invitation. But then, there are a few other things Jesus tells us about this Helper and Comforter who is the Spirit. He is terribly necessary. He brings Jesus to us. Without the Spirit, I don't know Jesus and I am powerless to bridge that gap. He is the one who puts Jesus touch in that water of baptism, he is the one who gives me body and blood to eat in this meal. It is even the Spirit who makes the words of this humble preacher into a message from Jesus to you so you can recognize his voice. That is all Spirit work, but notice he doesn't put Spirit in that water or Spirit in the bread, it is Jesus whom he brings in there.

We also learn that the Spirit is calling people to account here. He is convicting the whole world. For being poured out into the whole world, and being the sort of presence which can be rejected, the whole world today stands in a stark and brutal polarity. There are those who have heard, believed and rejoice in the presence of Christ. There are some who have not yet heard and then there are those who have heard and said no to that Spirit's tender working. This latter group stands convicted. But he has not given up on them. Peter preaches today to folks who are eager and those who scorn him. I bet some of those who thought he was full of a different sort of spirit came to the waters of baptism that day along with the other 2,999 who heard and believed.

That Spirit is also at work in and through you and inviting you to join him. He used a fearful and cowardly man like Peter to preach a great sermon. He used your parents, teachers, pastors to bring you the Gospel and Jesus himself so that you believed. Today he would use you. He wants your willing and cheerful participation in the kingdom. Guilt-ridden and begrudging witnesses are singularly ineffective. Don't even apply for

the job if you are being shamed into it. But if you would like a really exciting life to live, one which is energized by God himself, one which remains wholly yours and at the same time is wholly God's, watch for his presence and when you see him, join in his work. I tell you there is nothing quite like it.

3. DUI Christians (Disciples under the Influence of the Holy Spirit!)
 - a. Alcohol can influence a person pretty profoundly, but usually this is pretty negative.
 - b. This other Spirit, this Gift from God likewise influences us, but this is for the better:
 - i. Drunks in a bar will affirm their love for one another, but the Spirit of God connects us to Jesus and God himself.
 - ii. He makes us a servant – Ezekiel preached to discouraged people.
 - iii. He fills us with love – Peter preached to folks who were laughing at him, thought he was drunk.
 - iv. The worship experience we have when we sing songs in this place is no longer simply a “ritual” which goes through motions but a spirit filled moment. God is here. He is listening and he loves to hear our prayers and our songs. The disciples saw that with tongues of fire, but though we don't see the flame, the same Spirit is here.
 - v. This loving presence of the Spirit overflows – Peter speaks of how “everyone” is the recipient of this gift.
 - vi. This is God's doing. I don't have to get it right. I don't have to squint my eyes and gin up some spirit. God gives this gift, and when he gives, weak and fearful people are changed into bold witnesses.
 - c. The law in this sermon is really the life that is flat and doesn't see or perceive the Spirit's blowing in their life. The Gospel is that list above – the Spirit blows!