

Pentecost
Acts 2:1-13

June 4, 2017

1 When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. 2 And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. 3 Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. 4 All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability. 5 Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. 6 And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. 7 Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? 8 And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? 9 Parthians, Medes, 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, both Jews and proselytes, 11 Cretans and Arabs — in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power." 12 All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" 13 But others sneered and said, "They are filled with new wine."

Today we celebrate Pentecost. It is on the 7th Sunday after Easter and officially ends the Easter season. At Pentecost we honor and celebrate the descent of the Holy Spirit on the disciples. This event is the birth of Christian church.

Pentecost has a historical significance. It was an Old Testament celebration and feast. The word in Greek simply means 'fiftieth' it is fifty days after Passover. The liturgical color is red which symbolizes the tongues of flame. Red also reminds us of the blood sacrifice of Christian martyrs.

This New Testament account of Pentecost was an occasion where the disciples got together to celebrate an Old Testament festival. There were three major religious festivals that were obligatory for adult males to attend on a national scale. Passover was a celebration of thanks to God for freeing the people from slavery. Pentecost was a celebration for thanks to God for the beginning of the harvest. Tabernacles was a celebration thanking God at the end of the harvest. All festivals were primarily about bestowing thanks to God through acknowledgment, worship, and festivities.

The book of Acts begins where the Gospels end. In Luke chapter 24 the disciples were staying continuously at the temple, praising God. In Acts chapter 1 Jesus gives instructions to disciples to stay in Jerusalem and wait for the promise to be baptized with the Holy Spirit. Then Jesus ascended to heaven. So, the apostles returned to Jerusalem went to an upstairs room where they were staying and spent their time devoted to prayer. The Jesus group consisted of the eleven disciples, the women supporters, the brothers of Jesus, and Matthias whom was added to the eleven apostles.

In our Scripture today the apostles gathered together during the Pentecost festival; the national religious holiday. All of them were together, the apostles, the women, and the brothers of Jesus. They were all in one place, an upstairs room in Jerusalem. Then in Acts chapter two there was a sudden sound like a violent wind. The Scripture does not say it was a violent wind, it says the sound was like a violent wind. Wind is a symbol of the Spirit and it is marked by audible signs such as the wind and visible signs such as fire. According to the Scripture this came from heaven and it filled the whole house.

What they saw is divided tongues. The Scripture does not define the word divided. However, the Greek word appears in verse 45 and means distributed. The implication is that this Spirit was distributed among all. They did not see fire. People often say “tongues of fire.” But the Scripture is specific it states “tongues as of fire.” Tongues are a metaphor for several languages and fire is a symbol of the divine presence. It separated and rested on each of them. What they saw is the Holy Spirit. This reminds me of John the Baptist who said “Christ will baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire. What we have here is the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Exactly what they saw and how they saw it is relatively insignificant. What is significant is found in verse four “all of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

According to the story in Genesis the Tower of Babel was built because people wanted to be as great as God. It is not that they wanted to be close to God. It is not that they wanted to worship God. What they wanted was to be as great as God. The result of this desire is that the tower was destroyed and the people scattered all speaking different languages. This language barrier becomes a problem for spreading the Good News of the Gospel that Jesus is the resurrected living Lord.

With the New Testament Pentecost they now have the miraculous power needed to spread the Gospel to the world. During the Exile the population scattered to different parts of world. They traveled back to Jerusalem to observe the three obligatory national religious festivals. The pilgrims speak the language of country from which they come from. The promised comforter is baptism from the Holy Ghost. They are all filled with the Holy Ghost and each one of them heard the word spoken in their own language.

The Spirit is in all of the believers. The Spirit unites us all in one body, the body of Christ Jesus. The work of the Spirit is in the daily lives of each and every one of us. We are therefore, enabled to proclaim Christ to all. Now we have the power of Spirit, the love of God, the grace of the Savior. This is passed down through the generations to us. We have the benefit of the most precious of all gifts, salvation. And we have the power to share the Good News that he is risen indeed. Now we are called to go out into the world and make disciples.