

Sermon 6-9-19
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Trinity Lutheran Church
W. Hempstead, NY
Pentecost

Based on the First and Second lessons, Genesis 11:1-9, Acts 2:1-21

A Superior Righteousness

Since, the beginning of December we've been celebrating the ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ here on earth, beginning with His incarnation and birth in Bethlehem. Seven weeks ago we celebrated our Lord's resurrection after His crucifixion in the city of Jerusalem. Ten days ago, we celebrated His ascension into heaven where he sits enthroned at the right hand of the Father. Today, we celebrate the pouring out of His Holy Spirit upon all of humanity. But, just who is the Holy Spirit and what does He have to do with the likes of you and I?

Answering that would probably demand a year's worth of sermons. But let's look at a couple key things this morning.

Very often when we think of Lord Holy Spirit's work among humans, we think of events in the New Testament. But much of what we know about Lord Holy Spirit's work is actually revealed in the Old Testament. Indeed, He didn't do anything in the New Testament that He hadn't already done in the Old Testament. For instance, Isaiah 63:11-14, teaches us that during the forty years Israel was in the wilderness, God's Holy Spirit was among the Israelites, not in them but among them. The Spirit was at Moses' right hand in power and divided the waters of the Red Sea. The Spirit led Israel through the sea on dry land to the other side. He guided the people of Israel in the wilderness. Giving guidance and being God's arm of power is exactly what we find Lord Holy Spirit doing in the New Testament.

So what's the difference between the Spirit's operation in the Old Testament and His operation in the New Testament? In the Old Testament He only dwelt in a very select group of people. He was among Israel, but dwelt in only a few of their leaders like Moses, Joshua, the Judges, kings of Israel like David and the prophets. But in the New Testament, Lord Holy Spirit dwells in all believers who have had their sins forgiven and have been baptized into the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now it was prophesied in the Old Testament 700 years before Jesus that Lord Holy Spirit would one day come to dwell in all believers. Therefore, Peter used this prophecy from the book of the prophet Joel on the morning of Pentecost 33A.D. to explain to the assembled crowd what God was doing to them. It says in Joel 2:28-29, "28 'And afterward, [says the Lord,] I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. 29 Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days.'"

Therefore, under the New Testament Lord Holy Spirit is poured out on all people – even gentiles – not just a few Jewish leaders. Lord Holy Spirit resides in all who have been baptized into Christ. Peter confirmed this when he exhorted the crowd in

Acts 2:38-39, “38... ‘Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off – for all whom the Lord our God will call.” So, an important function of Lord Holy Spirit in the present age is to dwell in the sinners that Jesus Christ has redeemed. This means you and I, and the whole church of Christ. This is our first point.

Now, on Easter evening Jesus performed the last Old Testament style anointing with the Holy Spirit. I call it Old Testament style because it was an infilling of only a few select Jewish leaders.

We’ve looked at this event many times. In John 20 we find that Jesus breathed on the disciples gathered in the upper room saying, “receive the Holy Spirit.” He then commissioned them to preach the gospel. On the same evening we find in Luke 24 that Jesus opened the minds of the disciples to understand everything written about the suffering Messiah in Moses and the Prophets. Thus, when we read the record in Acts chapter 1 of how the disciples chose Matthias to replace Judas Iscariot and then the record in Acts chapter 2 of Peter’s sermon on the Day of Pentecost, we see the power of what Jesus did to them on Easter evening. It’s how at a moment’s notice, for instance, Peter the fisherman could speak out an obscure prophecy from Joel concerning the Holy Spirit that even learned Jewish rabbis had missed.

Now, revealing Jesus to humanity as both the suffering and victorious Messiah from the prophecies of the Old Testament is a most important work of Lord Holy Spirit to this day. The Spirit did this first to the disciples on Easter evening and then to the general public beginning on The Day of Pentecost 33A.D. Prior to this, no one was able see that Messiah had to suffer, die and rise from the dead even though the information was hidden in plain sight in Moses and the Prophets. But since the Day of Pentecost anyone upon whom the Spirit comes can find prophecies about Jesus throughout the Old Testament. Therefore, if you want to read and understand the Bible, ask Lord Holy Spirit to open your mind like He did to the disciples. You will begin to understand. That’s our second point.

The third point about Lord Holy Spirit concerns unity. Long ago Christian teachers realized that the tower of Babel narrative in Genesis and the Pentecost narrative in Acts are related. That’s why they appear together in today’s lessons.

At the tower of Babel Yahweh poured out a judgment upon humanity. He slowed down the speed of our rebellion against Him by dividing us into language, tribe and people groups. For, when we can’t understand one another it’s impossible for us to engage in unified rebellion against our Creator. Therefore, never again can humanity be one people here on this earth as we were before Babel. Politically and culturally humanity will be divided by language, tribe and people group until the Lord Jesus returns.

Now, throughout history there have been leaders who have dreamed of reuniting humanity. There have been kings, emperors and dictators who have attempted this and are attempting it by coercion and force. But, sooner or later the judgment Yahweh pronounced upon us reasserts itself and all empires die, victims of language, tribe and people groups.

Indeed, one of the latest attempts at empire – globalism – is now being resisted at the ballot box in many countries. You may not know it but President Trump

represents the resistance to globalism here in the U.S. That's why the political resistance around him is so intense. A non-globalist was not supposed to win that election. But rejection of globalism is a worldwide trend now.

So we will be divided until the Lord returns. But on Pentecost 33A.D. Yahweh foreshadowed His plan to reunite humanity when Jesus returns with the great miracle performed by Lord Holy Spirit that day. For a brief moment God's judgment made at the tower of Babel was suspended. On that day, everyone heard the same words of praise in their own home language in simultaneous translation. And in that brief miraculous action Lord Holy Spirit signified that greater things – much greater things – will be the inheritance of all who believe in Jesus Christ. At long last we will completely be one people when Jesus returns – one people not on our terms but on Yahweh's terms. For, Jesus has paid for the judgment of Babel and it will be completely gone. Indeed, the Apostle, John, saw precisely this in the great vision he wrote down in the book of Revelation.

And even now true believers the world over have allegiance to the same Lord, the same King, the same Master, the same Messiah. Therefore, in Christ and in the power of His Spirit, the true church is not divided by language, tribe and people group.

And this is what makes Christianity so threatening to the non-Christian rulers of this world. For instance, in China, atheist communist leader, Xi Jinping, wants Christianity suppressed so that he can unify China under atheist rule alone. In fact, he would unify the whole world under atheist rule if he could.

The Roman government resisted Christianity for centuries because Christians had higher allegiance to the Lord Jesus Christ than they did to the self-proclaimed god, the emperor. But finally, Emperor Constantine got the message in 312A.D. He was to be a Christian ruler, giving his allegiance to the same Messiah as his subjects. Therefore, when Constantine submitted to the Messiah, Jesus no longer was a threat to his government but became a unifying force in the empire, then later in Europe and finally throughout the world.

Nevertheless, Christianity cannot politically unify the peoples of earth because it's not meant to. Politically, God's Judgment dividing us into language, tribe and people groups remains upon humanity. In this life the best we can do is to live in peace alongside one another. Nevertheless, those deceived by Satan will continue their attempt to overcome God's Babel judgment by political and military force.

Now, in the church language groups likewise have to live alongside one another in the present age, but with a significant difference. All true Christians have allegiance to one Lord, One Christ. We are one in Christ. As Paul put it in Ephesians 4:4-6, "4 There is one body and one Spirit – just as you were called to one hope when you were called – 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism; 6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all." This is Lord Holy Spirit's work. Only He can make brothers dwell together in unity. Only He can enable us to be committed to one another in Agape love as Christ is committed to us.

Speaking of language, there's a new device being advertised that looks like a cell phone. If you can speak one of the 45 languages and dialects programmed into the thing, it will translate your words into one of the other languages. It's taken us 2,000

years to develop what the Holy Spirit did on the Day of Pentecost 33A.D.! But such devices may become useful here if we are successful in becoming multi-lingual.

Finally, we look at the most important work of Lord Holy Spirit on this present earth - conversion. Jesus is the distinctive person of the Trinity. For He alone among the persons of the Godhead humbled Himself and was incarnated as a creature in human flesh. Therefore, He is both Creator and creature. He did this for our sake. He was obedient to God unto death. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried. And, for His perfect obedience as a mortal human being, on the third day He rose again from the grave and was given the Name above every Name in the creation. For this reason, every human being who has ever lived will be judged according to their relationship with Jesus. He is the King of the human race – our Lord. All who will ever live owe Him allegiance – an allegiance greater than any other allegiance in life. According to Philippians 2:10-11, every knee – your knee, my knee – shall bow and every tongue – your tongue and my tongue – will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

So, how is it that we human rebels who want to define righteousness for ourselves will ever bow the knee and confess Jesus as our only righteousness? Scripture says it's all the work of Lord Holy Spirit. The Spirit doesn't draw us to Himself, for He never became flesh for our sake. He is not the human King of the human race. Jesus is. Therefore, Lord Holy Spirit draws us humans to our rightful King, Jesus.

On the Day of Pentecost, Lord Holy Spirit created a big commotion with that sound of a raging wind, the tongues of spiritual fire resting on the apostles and disciples, and the miracle translation of God's praises in everyone's hearing. But the purpose was not to draw people to Himself. Instead, He drew people to the disciples and the apostles so that Peter could preach Jesus, the suffering Messiah, to them. So, the occasion for the very first sermon ever preached on the Suffering Messiah was a Lord Holy Spirit setup.

Even the Old Testament prophecy Peter quoted in that sermon was the doing of Lord Holy Spirit. As we read in 2Peter 1:21, "... prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit." This includes Moses. And as we have already seen, Peter would not have been able to use those prophecies without Lord Holy Spirit having opened his mind on Easter evening.

Lastly, there's the response of the crowd. In his Day of Pentecost sermon recorded in Acts chapter 2, Peter condemned the crowd for their role in the crucifixion of Jesus 50 days earlier on Passover of 33A.D. This was the first of several similar sermons, and Peter didn't always get a positive response. In fact, one time the Sanhedrin ordered Peter and the other apostles flogged for preaching such a sermon. But on the Day of Pentecost the Spirit caused people to respond to the gospel of Jesus Christ – three thousand men and their families were baptized.

The righteousness of God's holy and appointed Messiah is superior to any righteousness we sinners can produce. It was very significant, therefore, that these devout Jewish people gave up trust in their own righteousness under the law for the superior righteousness that the suffering Messiah had earned for them by His obedience.

This is the gospel that we're all invited to receive. Because Jesus, the righteous Son of God was obedient, even unto death on a cross, we can have our sin forgiven. We can be made righteous before God, not with a righteousness of our own making, but with the perfect righteousness of the suffering Messiah. By faith in the righteousness that Christ has earned for us and has freely given us, we can be resurrected from the dead unto eternal life with God in perfect righteousness.

When this good news was preached to the crowd on Pentecost 33A.D., Lord Holy Spirit opened their eyes to the truth as He had opened the eyes of the disciples and Apostles on Easter evening. And Lord Holy Spirit gave them faith to believe the message they had heard. This is the great Holy Spirit miracle of Pentecost 33A.D.

For the many Orthodox Jewish people living in this community today is their actual festival Day of Pentecost as it is ours. The two calendars coincide this year. Therefore, I pray that Lord Holy Spirit would give us opportunity to preach the gospel to them. I pray that Lord Holy Spirit would give them faith to believe what they hear and be saved from condemnation before God. I pray that they will be able to give up trust in their own righteousness for trust in the righteousness of Messiah Jesus. Likewise I pray that Lord Holy Spirit would do exactly the same thing for the gentiles in this community and the surrounding area. Lord, grant us the privilege to continue in Your great miracle of Pentecost. Amen.

All Bible quotes are from the NIV.