

Opening of Worship: This is a huge day. An important day in the history of the Christian Church - it's often called the birthday of the New Testament Church. We celebrate the events of this day recorded in Acts ch.2 as a high point in the Church Year. We call today Pentecost. We drape this color red in front, as a reminder of the work of the Holy Spirit. By the end of the day that 1st Pentecost after Jesus' resurrection and ascension, the Lord added about 3,000 new people to His Church – 3,000 new believers.

As we look onward in the book of Acts, at the history of the early New Testament Church, we see... they moved forward with purpose after Pentecost. It was not a day after which we see the attitude: "Whoa! Glad we reached this point. Time to take a breather." Instead, what we see is men, women and children: individually growing stronger in faith as they devoted themselves to hearing God's teaching, to prayer, to meeting together, to praising God. [We also see how: the Church grew stronger in number, as "the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved."]

We take our cue from the early New Testament believers, to set a vision as we gather today & as we go forward. As individuals and as a group this is a time to move forward with eagerness and purpose. Peter's voice, the same voice heard preaching on Pentecost, rises up from the living word of God. At the close of the Bible book 2 Peter, he directs you – me: "Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18). May the Holy Spirit increase in us & renew in us devotion to... hearing God's teaching, meeting together, praising God and prayer.

Old Testament Reading – Genesis 11:1-9

1 Now the whole world had one language and a common speech. 2 As men moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and settled there. 3 They said to each other, "Come, let's make bricks and bake them thoroughly." They used brick instead of stone, and tar for mortar. 4 Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves and not be scattered over the face of the whole earth." 5 But the LORD came down to see the city and the tower that the men were building. 6 The LORD said, "If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them. 7 Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other." 8 So the LORD scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city. 9 That is why it was called Babel--because there the LORD confused the language of the whole world. From there the LORD scattered them over the face of the whole earth.

Devotion: We want people to think highly of us. We want to impress. We hear from the world: "You can accomplish anything you set your minds upon. You're talented. Now go out there – the world is yours to conquer." Does making a name for ourselves ever get enough of a hold on us that it directs our behavior? Are our actions ever driven primarily by what impression people will have? The outrageous pride of humanity is a force to be reckoned with.

The Bible readings on Pentecost hold before our eyes the danger of pride & rebellion. They also tell the account of God's response. ... At the time of the Tower of Babel, the people were constructing more than a tower. They were erecting a barrier in their relationship with God. What two sinful attitudes accompany their building project? Pride. They wanted more than anything to make a name for themselves. And, directly opposite of God's instruction, they weren't going to spread out over the earth. Rebellion against God's clearly stated word.

God's goal at Babel was the same goal he had on Pentecost: to turn people away from their pride and rebellion, and to bring people to listen to him and be right with him.

In both cases God had to humble the people. At Babel he fractured their unified rebellion against him by confusing the languages – they no longer listened to one another's voice as their supreme directive. On Pentecost, God overcame the age-old language barrier, in order to cut through the prideful errors the people in Jerusalem held about Jesus.

There is still work for the Holy Spirit to do in us. The Holy Spirit is always at his work as the Word of God is proclaimed: always pointing, always revealing, always drawing us toward God... to humble us, lead us to acknowledge our sin, and turn us again and again to our God for mercy and unfailing love. By the humbling and undoing of our pride and rebel ways, the Holy Spirit renews in us a right spirit and restores to us the joy of salvation.

Gospel Reading - John 15:26-27

26 "When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me. **27** And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning.

Devotion: Ever feel alone? Ever feel stuck in despair? Ever feel like no one understands your situation... no one could possibly relate with your particular challenges?

You are never alone. From the day he gifted you with faith ~ he has been there: teaching, convincing, counseling and advising you with His Word of truth; comforting you with the assurances of the boundless love of our God. When words cannot express the anguish of your heartfelt prayers, he knows what's in your heart and he intercedes for you.

The Greek word **Paraclete** – παράκλητος means: "one called to someone's side." Take heart, dear child of God! The Holy Spirit is always at your side!

Consider why the name Paraclete fits so well for the Holy Spirit as you soak in these Bible passages that call him by that name:

John 15:26 *26* "When the Counselor – that's paraclete – comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me.

The Holy Spirit was sent by the Father and the Son to convince you of the most wonderful truth you will ever know: God loves you with an everlasting love! Jesus came to crush the despair with which sin strangled our souls ~ and Heaven is ours through His work on our behalf! This the Holy Spirit has brought us to know.

John 14:16-17 *16* And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be **with you forever**— *17* the Spirit of truth. ...you know him, for **he lives with you and will be in you.**

Our God will never leave us or forsake us. He is not only "at our side." He is living within us!

John 14:25-26 25 "All this I have spoken while still with you. 26 But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, **will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.**
John 16:13:... **he will guide you into all truth.**

As we read God's Word, the Holy Spirit is giving us counsel, comfort and encouragement. Through the Word He guides and teaches us to continue to face the hard truth about our sin ~ because he does not want that sin to separate us from him forever. He wants us to see that we need our Savior constantly – to know his mercies are new every morning. He walks us to the cross and takes us by the hand to visit Jesus' tomb. He convinces us of the Gospel truth and then comforts us by them. He defends us against the lies of the Accuser. He comforts us with the forgiveness that is ours through reliance in our Crucified and Risen Lord.

- Quote... "Never need we fear that our wondrous Paraclete will fail to be at our side, the side of His Church, with exactly such blessings and gifts as will help it most mightily and effectively, as pleases the Heavenly Father, in any day of strife." (The Holy Ghost, His Person & His Work – Prof. Erwin Scharf)

Acts 2:1-21 1 When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. 2 Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. 3 They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. 4 All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. 5 Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. 6 When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard them speaking in his own language. 7 Utterly amazed, they asked: "Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans? 8 Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language? 9 Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, 10 Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome 11 (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs--we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!" 12 Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, "What does this mean?" 13 Some, however, made fun of them and said, "They have had too much wine. " 14 Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: "Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. 15 These men are not drunk, as you suppose. It's only nine in the morning! 16 No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: 17 " 'In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. 18 Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy. 19 I will show wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke. 20 The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord. 21 And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.'

Devotion: What activity – more than any other – was happening during these moments of the 1st Pentecost? (pause) You might answer: preaching. Peter delivered a mighty message.

Ok. But, turn the perspective: A crowd of thousands listened to God's message Peter shared. How many were talking... How many were listening? Recall the number we hear later in this great chapter of the Bible: about 3,000 people were added to the number of believers that day. There was a lot of listening going on.

In a way, even the preacher – Peter – and the other disciples, who were speaking, were all listening. Whose words does Peter quote? (pause) Yes, he quotes from God's Word to give the answer to what was going on. It's a prophecy from the Old Testament that explains what was taking place on Pentecost – and what would take place in the days until Jesus' return.... The main definition for "prophecy" is: to proclaim God's Word. "On my servants I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy."

Pentecost was not an isolated event with no relevance to today. Peter's words point us to application for our lives almost 2,000 years later.

The ongoing health of the Church depends on... the Holy Spirit's ongoing work in human hearts. He leads us to Call on the name of the Lord & to rely on God's Word for Answers.

We cannot go one day – not one day – if God does not sustain us. The man God chose to share His truth on Pentecost is an example of this. Let's take a close look at Peter. What words would you use to describe him this day? Bold. Confident. Undeterred. Unafraid. Jesus' last instructions to Peter, along with the other apostles, was: to be his witnesses in Jerusalem, and beyond. And they were out the door and at the task, as soon as the Holy Spirit came in this promised way.

Contrast that with a few weeks prior to Pentecost: Peter had doubted the word Jesus spoke to him about denying him. He over-estimated his own strength. He denied knowing Jesus, out of fear he would be arrested... and possibly killed too.

Do we ever over estimate our spiritual strength?

- ✘ Luther, in the preface to the Large Catechism, addresses this temptation. The danger he points out is: do we neglect the daily hearing of God's Word, where he speaks to us? If we do this we are "imagining we are much wiser than God Himself... Aren't we some splendid fellows, though, to imagine that if we have once learned [God's truth] or heard it, we know it all and need to read or learn no more! ... Let Christians guard themselves with greatest care & diligence against the poisonous infection of false security or self-delusion. Let them continue steadily reading, teaching, learning, thinking, and reflecting, never stopping..."

Peter wept at his weakness and fall into sin, as he remembered the Lord's Word. Jesus, after his resurrection, came to Peter. He spoke to Peter his Word of forgiveness.

This same Peter, forgiven, empowered by God's grace, speaks God's Word of truth on Pentecost. He points us to the Word of God for answers - most importantly he directs us: "*turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord*" (Acts 3:19).

Peter recites a message from the prophet Joel that gives the answer to the greatest question. How is one saved? Scripture says, "*Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.*":

- ✘ We call on our Lord to save us from our sins – to save us from the punishment we deserve – to save us by his grace – by his grace alone.

What a gracious Lord! As the Holy Spirit convicted, then converted, then comforted the 3,000+ new believers in Jerusalem on Pentecost with His Word, his Word continues to serve us up the truth of who he is and what he has done to save us.

This is how God has provides for the ongoing health of the Church... the Holy Spirit leading us to call on the name of the Lord, and leading us to rely on His Word of truth.