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Zion Lutheran Church, Youngstown, Ohio

Weekend of Sunday, May 16, 2021
Vigil of Pentecost /Lectionary X/Proper X/Year B
First Reading: Acts 2:1-11
Second Reading: Romans 8:14-17, 22-27
Gospel Reading: John 7:37-39
Sermon Title: “Come Holy Spirit”

Theme

Jesus describes the Holy Spirit as living water, quenching the thirst of all who come to him and filling the hearts of believers until they overflow.

Text

³⁷On the last day of the festival [of Booths], the great day, while Jesus was standing [in the temple], he cried out, “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, ³⁸and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, ‘Out of the believer’s heart shall flow rivers of living water.’ ” ³⁹Now he said this about the Spirit, which believers in him were to receive; for as yet there was no Spirit, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

Sermon

You are probably aware that I preach the same sermon (more or less) on both Saturday and Sunday. However, because the Bishop will be preaching in the morning, and the Saturday before Pentecost is known as the Vigil of Pentecost, I have decided that we shall celebrate the Vigil of Pentecost. Some of the propers, those things that change week by week, are slightly different than tomorrow's, but one thing that doesn't change is that list of nations from the known world from which Jews have made the pilgrimage to Jerusalem to celebrate the Festival of Pentecost.

Pentecost is what we call a *moveable feast* because it is celebrated on the 50th day after Easter and Easter itself is a *moveable feast*. But what many Christians don't realize is that Pentecost is actually a Jewish festival celebrated seven weeks and one day or fifty days after the first day of Passover, hence the prefix *pente-*. And why would the LORD co-opt this Jewish festival day to send the Holy Spirit? Because the Festival of Pentecost is one of three pilgrimage festivals of Judaism, meaning that observant Jews would make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem to make their offering for the first fruits of the wheat harvest. In other words, there would be a lot of Jews in Jerusalem. What a pregnant moment ripe for God to do a new thing!

And that new thing is the new thing John mentioned in the Gospel Reading.

³⁹Now he said this about the Spirit, which believers in him were to receive; for as yet there was no Spirit, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

To clarify what John wrote, in our understanding of the Holy and Eternal Trinity there was and always has been a Holy Spirit just as there always has been a Son, even before the Son became incarnate in the person of Jesus Christ. But just as the Son was unknown to humanity before Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit was unknown to humanity before Jesus sent it.

In that same Gospel Reading, Jesus said another thing about the Holy Spirit. He said,

‘Out of the believer’s heart shall flow rivers of living water.’

Now, of course, Jesus was being metaphorical when he said those words. What he meant was that out of the believer's heart will flow all kinds of supernatural activity. Case in point, the First Reading from Acts in which the Disciples, now Apostles, that little band of faithless bumbler, led by Peter the liar and denier, clearly and convincingly articulated the Gospel of their Lord Jesus Christ to the point that Luke wrote the following:

Acts 2:37-47

³⁷Now when they (the Jews gathered in Jerusalem for the Festival of Pentecost) heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and to the other apostles, "Brothers, what should we do?" ³⁸Peter said to them, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him." ⁴⁰And he testified with many other arguments and exhorted them, saying, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation." ⁴¹So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added. ⁴²They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

⁴³Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. ⁴⁴All who believed were together and had all things in common; ⁴⁵they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. ⁴⁶Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, ⁴⁷praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

Now, I hope that reading is not unfamiliar to you, but as far as I can tell, it is only read once during the three-year rotation of the lectionary and that is in year A (last year) on the Third and Fourth Sundays of Easter, and that is a shame because I think it is one of the most powerful readings of the early church era and is the event that has become known as the birthday of the church, so happy birthday church!

But these readings are more than a history lesson, they represent the headwater of the church. (Did you see what I did there? Jesus said 'Out of the believer's heart

shall flow rivers of living water.' And I pointed to the Pentecost event as the headwater – a headwater is the place where a river starts.)

Well, what does this mean to us? I am so glad you asked. There are innumerable illustrations, but I will give you just a few.

The first that comes to my mind is the Drive-Through Crew. Zion has an enormous debt that we are trying to reduce so that we can apply more of our tithes and offerings to doing ministry and not as much to support this building. So Norma Roden got an idea and called some friends and they produce meals that many members buy and some cash is raised that goes entirely to debt reduction.

At the same time, we come up with a list of folks who have not yet and may never be able to return to worship at Zion and we ask members who buy meals for themselves to deliver meals to those members who are part of our fellowship that we haven't seen. The spirits of both the deliverer and the deliverer are elevated by this simple activity. This is an example of the living water flowing out of our hearts.

The same could be said about the vocal choir, the bell choir, those who volunteer in our Food Distribution Ministry, the counting teams, the worship assistants, the ushers, the eucharistic ministers, the Sunday School teachers, everyone who puts an offering in the plate, and the list goes on and on.

Just ask yourselves why you do what you do? Maybe you've never thought about it before, but why do you come to this church and worship the Lord and give a portion of your hard-earned cash and donate your time and talent? You can't help yourself any more than the mighty Mississippi River can control itself. You have a believer's heart and our Lord Jesus said that when you have a believer's heart, living water will just flow out of you! Praise his holy name!

Raisin' the Bar Challenge

So church, make no apologies to your faithless family and friends when they ask why you do the things you do for that church. Just tell them that you can't help yourselves. Jesus put the Holy Spirit in you and it just runs out of your heart like a river of living water.

That might cause them to shake their heads. Or it might just cause them to consider their motivation for the things they do and ask you more questions.

Prayer

Almighty and ever-living God, we thank you for giving us your Holy Spirit. And we thank you for the inspiration it gives us, to get up and get over ourselves and continue the ministry of your Son. For he alone brings healing and forgiveness and eternal life. We pray this in his name. Amen