

In the last days, God declares, I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh
... Acts 2:17

Today we celebrate one of the three great days of the entire church year. Everyone celebrates Christmas, and most people even know that it has to do with the birth of Jesus, whether or not they call Him God and Lord.

Most people celebrate Easter, and some of them know that Easter, too, has to do with Jesus, and His victory over death and sin.

But then, at least in our country, comes Thanksgiving, (when we do have ecumenical services; and that is good, although most Americans are more tuned into football and a big family reunion and meal), and then Super Bowl, and of course the Fourth of July.

But what is Pentecost? Why should anyone call it one of the "big three" Christian holy days? Do you know? To begin with:

PENTECOST IS (ANOTHER) TRANSFORMED JEWISH HOLY DAY

We say Pentecost is ANOTHER transformed Jewish holy day because Christians have seen Christ as the fulfillment behind just about all the Old Testament.

Jesus is our Passover Lamb, and Jesus is our Seder Host, transforming the Passover Meal into the Communion we will share this morning.

And so, Passover, too, takes on fulfilling significance to Christians.

Pentecost was and is a Jewish feast day celebrating two things. Called "Pesach" or "Pentecost" because it follows fifty days after Passover and the High Holy Days, Pentecost was first a celebration of the first harvesting of summer fruits.

It anticipates the later, greater harvest of the autumn season.

Pentecost also in later times came to be a commemoration of the giving of the law to Moses on Sinai.

Devout Jews praised God for giving guidance to all mankind on how to live lives of order and righteousness.

The giving of the Law can be contrasted with the giving of confusion at Babel, when God confused those who were trying to reach heaven on their own wisdom; the giving of the Law is God's way of bringing order out of chaos.

WHAT HAPPENED THAT FIRST PENTECOST?

First of all, what happened on Pentecost was that the gathered disciples received the indwelling Holy Spirit, and the Church as Christ's body came into existence.

It was the birthday of the church.

Christians believe that on the Jewish feast of Pentecost that came 50 days after Jesus rose from the dead, and ten days after He ascended to the Father, Jesus, **HAVING RECEIVED THE FULLNESS OF GLORY**, for which he prayed in John 17: 1, Jesus then poured that Spirit He had received out upon his beloved disciples.

This was **THE FIRST FRUITS** of a great harvest which was to come.

As a matter of fact that **FIRST FRUIT CELEBRATION** that day netted 3,000 new believers in Jesus Christ!

It is a celebration of **FIRST FRUITS**.

The Christian Pentecost might seem to have little to do with the second aspect of the Jewish celebration: the giving of the law to Moses on the mount.

But actually, here was a fulfillment of the promise that God would pour out His Spirit on all flesh, and as Paul declares in 2 Corinthians 3:3 God wrote his law now not on tables of stone, but on fleshy tables of the human heart.

And instead of confusion of languages, now everyone could hear God's plan of salvation in a language they could understand. In the words of a Sandi Patti song: "Fluent LOVE is spoken here!"

There were other, dramatic things that happened that day of Pentecost.

There was mighty, shaking, fearsome sound of hurricane force wind.

There were licking, flaming, forked tongues of fire.

And there were languages spoken in order that every person who came to see what was happening could understand who Jesus is, and how he can deliver from sin.

Once again here was a direct contrast with Babel: where Babel had been confusion and misunderstanding, Pentecost was God's law in the hearts, God's law of LOVE, and the opposite of confusion: interpretation: everyone heard in his own language the message of salvation.

We have been trained to think of Pentecost and the Holy Spirit only in the rushing wind, and the tongues of fire, and the exotic gifts of language or experience.

But first of all; the coming of the Spirit is God loving us, and coming to make his home in us so that we can be at home in him on our way home.

THE NEED FOR PENTECOST TODAY

Pentecost, or the descent of the Holy Spirit into the human heart, is NOT a doctrine or belief system to defend, but a reality to know and live out.

As humanly understood belief systems, even the precious doctrines of our church, even holiness doctrines, are fallible— they are subject to the shortcomings of human understanding that mark all human belief systems.

But as a living encounter with God's holiness, being filled with God Himself, transforms lives and changes the course of human history.

Almighty God actually DOES come to live in His people, and together God's people ARE the Church.

Faith in God must permeate the whole of my being and yours, not simply logically exist in my thinking, or excitedly flood my emotions, or even determinedly rest in my human will.

God must be made welcome at the center of all I am and all I do!

As a Person of God, God can make Himself known to me, and can dominate my living and your living. And together you and I are the living Church of Pentecost. That is what Pentecost is all about: that is why it is a BIG DAY!

PETER'S SERMON

That day Peter stood up and declared the glory and love and power of Jesus Christ.

He told the devout Jews assembled that they needed to change their direction: "Repent, and be baptized, every one of you, for the forgiveness of your sins!"

Then he told them: "This God-shared LOVE, this Holy Spirit is to every one of you who will believe!

I don't know how many different meanings and lessons we are able to pick up from the coming of the Holy Spirit, as we celebrate it at Pentecost.

Every time we discover one meaning, there seems to be 3 or 4 more, jumping out at us as well!

But that in itself is something about Pentecost: it is about ABUNDANCE. When the spirit of God is involved, there is always MORE THAN ENOUGH!

Enough for males and for females enough for young and for old enough for slaves and for free people enough for Jews and all the nations under the earth.

And as the life of the early church demonstrated, this over-abundance flowed on into all other aspects of their life - land, property, food, shelter, community.

Whenever people in the NT times talk about experiencing God's spirit, their language demonstrates the abundance that God provides. In all ways people have "more than enough".

The Spirit is the spirit of life and the fullness of life.

From the very first day, however, the spirit of abundance had its knockers. Cynicism reared its ugly head, standing, as it always does, against the movement of God's Spirit.

"They're just drunk" some said.

"The writers got carried away" others still say. "It isn't the same now. Can't be"

Firstly, Pentecost is grounded in Easter. It makes sense once people have been freed from the grip of death and destruction.

You see, once people are no longer menaced by the threat of death, we are freed to live. Death is ultimately a denial of all things needed for our life: but the resurrection proclaims that Jesus has overcome that which

robs us of life our entire lives are transformed into an experience of divine life

Secondly, and going on a step, we are to remember that the early followers of Jesus were said to be "Of one heart and mind" That is part of what Pentecost means: The spirit who comes to us is the Spirit of Unity.

God's Spirit overcomes the division, the power struggles, the hatred and suspicions.

The Spirit does not remove the differences but an openness to the Spirit means that the differences do not lead to a struggle for superiority over those who are different.

When we are no longer afraid of one another, looking for people's "hidden agenda" we are freed to enjoy a depth of life and discover God. And there is always more than enough.

And thirdly, again from the life of the early church, we are reminded that "no one claimed things as their own, but shared everything in common."

The most down to earth outcome is the most striking! As we discover the freedom for life and for unity we are freed from the spirit of accumulation that dogs us in this world.

Freed from the fear of death and anxiety about life, life is transformed for each of us.

And it doesn't just stop with "our own people". (If it did, it wouldn't be Christian) Even 300 years later, emperor Julian comments: "These Christians do not merely feed their own poor; they feed the poor of the whole city"

The cynic within us says that there is NOT enough for everyone. And so we must constantly compete for that which is there.

In fact, there is part within us and around us that declares that the world works best with competition.

But it is that drive for competition which works so effectively against the spirit of God.

We compete for goods, for schools, for marks, for jobs, for income, for friends and it is this incessant competition which divides us and fragments community.

As we compete, we divide into, class, race, gender, age, background.

And as we believe that there is not enough, and it is "everyone for themselves" We forget the fact that at Pentecost the prophecy of inclusive acceptance was fulfilled: "My Spirit will come on ALL people - young, old, male, female, slaves, free ..."

The Spirit of Pentecost, the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit bring us back to discovering the joy of abundance in life and the rediscovery of what life is.

For Pentecost re-opens to us the joy, the delight, the extravagance and the responsibility that we have to re-build community; to share our life with one another.

For as we build and live in community, we discover true richness.

Christian community can become the source of reforming the rest of society.

It is our joy to discover new life by the Spirit, and to live by that discovery.

The Spirit has given us all gifts. Let us use them. Pentecost is about pooling our gifts humbly and selflessly so that we can build a way to reach God. It is about building a house that leaves no one homeless—a Church.