

Immanuel (Augsburg) Lutheran Church
Shobnier, Illinois
Pentecost A
May 31, 2020
Acts 2:1-21

The Essential Church

When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. 2 And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. 3 And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. 4 And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.

5 Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. 6 And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. 7 And they were amazed and astonished, saying, ". . . we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God." (Acts 2:1-7 ESV)

In the name of Jesus, the only Savior of the world,

There's been a lot of talk the past few weeks about whether church is essential or not. Politicians have sounded forth on the subject, some declaring churches to be essential, some declaring them to be non-essential, and others declaring them to be non-essential by not including them on a list of essential enterprises. As God's people we know that church is essential because God Himself has called it into being for the purpose of saving people from their sins and from eternal death. There's nothing more essential than that!

On this day of Pentecost, we see how this is so. The disciples were together in one place and there came from heaven the sound of a great wind filling the house, without the wind itself. There also appeared "tongues as of fire" resting on each of them, without harming them. These signs indicated that the Holy Spirit had come upon them. Yet, as great as these signs were, it was the disciples speaking in tongues, that is, other languages, that really drew the attention of others. And this speaking was given by and directed by the Holy Spirit for the proclamation of the Gospel for the salvation of those who heard.

Keep in mind the Holy Spirit was active in giving utterance to the disciples. They spoke as they were given to do by the Spirit, saying the right words in languages they didn't know to declare what God wanted them to declare. Just as Jesus said what He was given to say, so the disciples say what they are given to say.

And what was that? The "mighty works of God." That really narrows things down, doesn't it? That could cover creation, the expelling of man from the garden with a promise, the deliverance of Noah through the flood, he too receiving a promise. The confusion of languages after Babel, the selection of Abraham and all that God did for him and his family, including the

giving and keeping of many promises. The delivery of Israel from Egypt and into Canaan, all according to God's promise. The selection of David as king of Israel, saving him from Saul and a host of other enemies, and again according to God's promise. The sending of prophets to call Israel to repentance, to turn from their sin, their idolatry, and back to the living God who had called them to be His own. We could be here all day trying to enumerate "the mighty works of God."

And as people from all over the known world – Jews that had been scattered, or dispersed, to other nations, proselytes, those who had heard God's Word and had become Jewish, as well as gentiles – who had all come to Jerusalem for the feast of Pentecost heard these Galilean disciples speaking the various languages, they were amazed and perplexed about what they were seeing and hearing. Some wanted to know what this all meant. Others thought the disciples were drunk.

So Peter begins speaking. Peter, the impetuous one, the one who Jesus rebuked after Peter had rebuked Him, the one who drew his sword in the garden, the one who denied his Lord three times, the one who was fearful, he now stands without fear. He boldly proclaims that they are not drunk as some supposed, but that what they were seeing and hearing was the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy. This was the outpouring of the Holy Spirit for the salvation of sinners. The salvation was for "all flesh," man, woman, child, Jew, proselyte, Romans, pagans.

And the end of Joel's prophecy that Peter quotes demonstrates why the church is essential. "And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." (Joel 2:32). What a promise! Facing the destruction of their nation, Israel should call on the name of the Lord. Facing plague and tempest, people should call on the name of the Lord. Facing death or the end of the world everyone should call on the name of the Lord. But what does it mean to call on the name of the Lord? Is it to call upon the god of your own imagination, your own making? No. It's to call upon the one true God. It's to call upon Him with faith in His Son. Peter goes into that in the next part of his sermon which we'll hear next week.

The Church is essential because the Holy Spirit is active in and through it. For the Holy Spirit was poured out upon the disciples, upon the Church, for the proclamation of the Gospel of Christ for the salvation of sinners. For as we learn, the Holy Spirit doesn't do anything to draw attention to Himself. Not the wind. Not the tongues as of fire. Not even the confusion of that Pentecost. For all those signs were for the purpose of the proclamation of Jesus Christ and the salvation that comes only through Him and His saving work – His sacrificial suffering and death, His resurrection from the dead, His ascension to the right hand of his Father, His continuing reign over all things for the good of His Bride, His Church, even His return in glory and judgment at the end of the age.

You see, there's nothing more essential than hearing your Lord Jesus say to you, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink." (John 7:38). In this time of great uncertainty, great anxiety, great despair for some, many people are suffering. Some are feeling the effects of loneliness, depression, anger, despising of authorities, a rebellious spirit. Some have lost hope.

It is for just such a time that we need to go to Jesus and drink. Receive from Him an abundance of grace, mercy, compassion, forgiveness, love and more. He gave His life for you so that you could have life in abundance. Read and study God's Word and commit it to memory. Attend to the preaching of that Word, utilize confession and Holy Absolution, and partake the Lord's Supper. Have a true "come to Jesus" moment when you receive all that He has to give you and do for you. Call upon Him at all times and in all places and He will deliver you and give you to drink of living water. And calling upon Him believing that He does hear you, that He does love you, and that He will keep His promises to you, you will be saved – now and forever. And there's nothing more essential than that. To God be the glory. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

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Pastor