

23 May 2010
The Feast of Pentecost

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“Come, Holy Spirit”

Text: John 14:23-31; Genesis 11:1-9; Acts 2:1-21

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

What was divided has now been united.
What was scattered has now been gathered.
What was confused has now been made clear.
Babel has been undone by the sending of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost.

Not only then, but for us, today, too.
For not only at Pentecost were the nations brought together to hear God’s Word, but here, in this place, also.
For here, we have been gathered by the same Spirit - the Spirit which descended upon us in Holy Baptism.
Chaldeans, Scandinavians, Germans, British, Koreans, Ethiopians, Australians, and more. We have been made one.
One in faith. One in our Saviour. Speaking not in strange and unusual tongues, but once again speaking one Word - the word of the Gospel.
Proclaiming the death and resurrection of our Lord.
For all who call upon His name shall be saved.

This is not our doing. Clearly not.
Why would you drive an hour from the south, an hour from the west, and hour from the east, to be here in this place - unless the Spirit has drawn you.
It is not because of your Pastor.
It is not because we have the most beautiful building.
It is because we have the most beautiful Saviour, and the Spirit, poured out upon you, has opened your eyes to see Him here.
Here in His Gospel. Here in His water. Here in His bread and wine.
Here for you, for the forgiveness of your sins. To give you life and salvation.

Yes, what was started on the Day of Pentecost, continues still today.
We are living in the Last Days, for each day could be the last day.
When our Saviour comes again in glory.
For the great thing about our God and Saviour is that He is always coming to us.
He has not told us to build a tower or climb or ascend to Him.

He descends to us.
God descending to Shinar and Babel.
The Son of God descending to us in His incarnation.
The Spirit of God descending to us at Pentecost, and in our own baptismal Pentecosts.
And the promise that our Saviour will descend again in glory on the last day.

And all these comings are good, and for our good. God working to draw us to Himself, that we may be saved. Yes, even at Babel.
For when God scattered the builders, it was not to punish, but to save.
That they may not trust in their own Word and wisdom and ways, but in God and His Word and wisdom and ways.
That crushing our pride, we seek His glory.
That showing our weakness, we seek His strength.
That revealing our sin, we seek His forgiveness.
That the work of the Spirit be manifest in us.
For the work of the Spirit is to point us to Christ, to the cross, to the source of life.

And this He is still doing, crushing the towers that we have built.
The towers of our pride, of our accomplishments, of our wisdom, of our good works. That we seek our life and meaning not in these, but in Christ alone.

And so today, Jesus said to us: ***“If anyone loves me, he will keep my word . . . Whoever does not love me does not keep my words.”***
How have you done, you who love the Lord?
Have you kept His Word? Have you treasured it above all other words?
Have you guarded it and defended it against those who contradict it and speak and live against it? Have you lived it? Have you trusted it?
Or have you lived as if God did not matter and as if you mattered most?
Has the Word of God fallen upon your stony heart and been snatched away?
Where is your pride and tower now?

But do not despair - as God scattered at Babel in mercy and grace, so He brings you in that same mercy and grace to see your sin and repent.
This is the Spirit teaching you of yourself, and leading you to Christ.
To see in Him all that you need.

For, as Jesus said, ***“the ruler of this world has no claim on him.”***
He does have claims on us, though, doesn't he?
For we have sinned in thought, word, deed, and desire.
We have not loved our neighbor as ourself.
We have not loved God above all things.
We deserve death and hell, we modern-day citizens of Babel.

But on Jesus, the ruler of this world has no claim.
And so when the ruler of this world puts to death the one who has no debt - on the cross - it is not Christ who is undone, but the ruler of this world himself is undone!
His Babel is torn down.
His kingdom is destroyed.
His towers and powers are scattered.
And he must release his claim on us.
For Jesus, who had no debt to sin or death, paid our debt, and we are set free.
Free. For that's what forgiveness is. Freedom. Release. Life from the dead.
And that is what happens here, every time our Saviour comes to us, and the Spirit is sent to us, and His Word of Spirit and power is spoken into your ears and into your hearts, saying: *I forgive you all your sins!*
Go, you are free. And you are free. Free in Christ. Free to live.

And with this forgiveness, you then have peace.
For again, as Jesus said: ***"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid."***
For what can trouble a heart in which the Father and Son have made a home?
A home through the Spirit. Three in One and One in Three.
He in you and you in Him. No longer scattered, but united in Christ.

And so we also rejoice, as Jesus said, for He who has gone away has come to us.
He who has gone to death has come in resurrection, and He who has ascended now comes in His body and blood.
That eating His body and drinking his blood in this His holy Supper, He live in us and we in Him.
Truly united, as a branch to the vine (John 15).
That His life and salvation be always given to us, and we bear much fruit, living as branches of Christ in the world.
Loving and forgiving with the love and forgiveness here given to us.
That those now scattered may be gathered as well. Here, with us.
Gathered by the Word and Spirit, just as we.
It is not our doing. It can never be our doing.
For we are not the builders, but the stones, the living stones (1 Peter 2) in the City of God, with Christ Himself as the cornerstone (Ps 118).

And then, Jesus concludes His Word to His disciples - and to us - by saying, ***"Rise, let's go!"*** Let's go and not wait, because of the joy set before Him (Heb 12:2).

For Jesus, that joy was the joy of the cross, that dying He rise. And rising, He live, that we, too, may live.

And for us, that joy is the joy of going to the cross in repentance, that dying to sin, we rise and live in Christ.

It is joyously to His Supper we go, that we rise and live in His salvation.

It is joyously into the world we go - having, each morning, risen from the death of sleep, to live in the vocations that have been given to us.

To live in love, in mercy, and in peace.

To live in forgiveness received and given.

To live trusting not in ourselves and what we do, but in the Word of God and what He does. For you, in you, and through you.

For so He has promised. And His Word is sure.

Rise, let's go! Jesus said. And the apostles did, after Pentecost.

They rose and filled the world with the Word, for their Lord and His Spirit went with them.

So too you and I: ***Rise, let's go!***

Let's go to our homes, to our callings, to our work, and fill the world with the Word that lives in us. For your Lord and His Spirit has come, and now go with you as well.

Rise, let's go! Until all going is no more, when Pentecost is finally fulfilled, and we are gathered - once and for all - to live with our God in His kingdom forever.

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of the faithful, and kindle in them the fire of Your love. Alleluia! (Introit Antiphon for Pentecost)

In His Name: the Name of the Father and of the (+) Son and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.