

9 June 2019
The Feast of Pentecost

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“A Life-Changing Event”

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

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

Some events that happen in life are life-changing. Marriage. Or divorce. The death of a loved one. Graduation, and then starting a new job, or at a new school. Moving to a new place. Having a baby.

Some events happen on a larger scale and change many lives at once. Like natural disasters. The floods and tornadoes in the Midwest have changed a great many lives. The shootings that took place in Virginia Beach last week. Stock market booms and busts have both made or ruined many.

And some events are world changing events. This past Thursday was the 75th anniversary of D-Day, the beginning of the end of World War 2. September 11, 2001. The Tower of Babel was an event that changed the world forever, dividing peoples and languages that are still separate today.

And maybe for you it was something that no one else knows about, but your life hasn't been the same since.

Well one of those events is Pentecost. The sending of the Holy Spirit is a life-changing event - and in all three of those categories. The sending of the Holy Spirit changes individual lives, larger groups of people together, and even the world.

Pentecost certainly changed the lives of the twelve apostles. The mighty rushing wind, the tongues of fire, and then they began to speak in other tongues, other languages. In fact, everyone heard them *speaking in his own native language*, undoing the confusion and gathering together what had been scattered at the Tower of Babel. And the Spirit brought to the apostles' *remembrance all that Jesus had said to them*, and they proclaimed it. It turned them from learners into preachers. And everyone was looking at them - some marveling and some mocking. But clearly their lives had changed. Nothing now was going to be the same again.

But even more than that, Pentecost changed the lives of many. For in response to the preaching of Peter and the eleven, more than 3,000 were baptized that day, and more after

that. And then it was as Jesus told them before He ascended - they would go out and *be His eye-witnesses* not only *in Jerusalem*, but *in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth*. Pentecost was truly a life- and world-changing event.

And now, **for you**. For the Holy Spirit that was poured out on that first Pentecost wasn't just poured out that day - it is a pouring out that *started* on that day and hasn't stopped since. That first Pentecost the Holy Spirit was poured out through the means of *the mighty rushing wind* and *the tongues of fire*. But after that He was poured out through the preaching of the Word and the water of Baptism that changed the lives of the 3,000 that day. And through those means He continues to be poured out. Wherever Jesus as Saviour is preached, the Holy Spirit is working. Wherever the water of Baptism is poured out in the name of the triune God, the Holy Spirit is being poured out in that water. And changing lives. Creating faith in Jesus. Making children of God. Forgiving sins. And bestowing the gifts of peace and hope and holiness.

Now, I don't know if you ever really thought about Pentecost as a day that changed your life, but it surely did. For the Spirit has been given to you that you might live a new life. A changed life. Because you know what happened? Through the Spirit you have been drawn into the life of God Himself. The Father who created you, the Son who redeemed you, and the Spirit who sanctifies, or holies, you. The Father who sent the Son and the Son who sends the Spirit, and the Spirit who takes you to the Son and the Son who takes you to the Father. God has made His home with you that your home may be with Him. And so this new life is not just something you have or do, it is who you are. It is not like a change of clothes that you have in the closet and put on once in a while, but the blood that pumps through your body and gives you life. Jesus' very body and blood, in fact, given to you here, in you. Life-changing, to say the least.

Though we must admit, we don't always live like it. We don't always live this new life we've been given. We allow other things to change our lives and pull us away from this life. Like Eve, we listen to the lies and the seduction and we look for life and define our lives in terms of what we have, what we do, in our successes and achievements. We hang our holiness like that change of clothes in the closet and only get it out once in a while. We forget who we really are.

You know, that's like getting married but continuing to live apart. Like being homeless and being given a nice new house but going back out to sleep under a bridge. Those things don't make much sense - but really, neither does being a Christian but not living as one. Yet of this we're all guilty, to one extent or another. Which is why we confess first thing here every week. And ask for pardon, for absolution, for forgiveness. But with that, *this too* - what we asked for in the Introit today. With our confession we are asking: ***Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of the faithful, and kindle in them the fire of your love.*** Come, Holy Spirit, fill my heart! And kindle in me the fire of your love. That I might live as the child of God I am. That I might love God and my neighbor, this week

and every week. That the new life you've given me be who I am.

And I think *kindle* is a good word for that work of the Holy Spirit in us. We have a fireplace in our home and to start a fire there, I have to start with *kindling* - something small that burns easily and that will then grow into a larger fire. And that's exactly the work of the Holy Spirit in us. He comes and gives us the spark of faith in Jesus. But then He also blows the wind of His forgiveness on that spark that it grow. And He feeds that flame with Jesus' body and blood that it might grow in us into a fire in our lives. We can't do it. Without the Holy Spirit, the fire would go out, as the one in my fireplace so often does! But with the Holy Spirit, as He continues to come to you and forgive you and feed you, Christ lives in you and you in Him. *So, we pray, come, Holy Spirit!*

That's why Jesus calls Him *the Helper*. That word can also be translated as *Counselor* or *Advocate* or *Comforter* - but let's stick to Helper for now. You can understand that in two ways, it seems to me. You can understand that in the sense that I can do it, I just need a little help, a little boost. Or, you can understand it in the sense that I cannot do it, and I need a Helper so that it gets done. It is the latter that Jesus means here. For without the coming of the Holy Spirit, no new life for us. Without the Holy Spirit *continuing* to come to us and work in us, the flame of faith in Christ would go out. *So, we pray, come, Holy Spirit!*

And He does. Pentecost continues. For the Holy Spirit is not our possession, a thing to be had. He is a person, one of the three persons of the Godhead, who is continually coming to us and dwelling with us. He is not given to us like money that I put into my pocket and possess, but as a person of the Trinity He is more like persons who give themselves to each other - like a husband and wife - and yet neither possesses the other. But husbands and wives are joined, are united, and continually give themselves to one another since the day they were wed. So too with the Spirit, who continues to give Himself to us, to work in us, to forgive us, to holy us, to give us peace and hope.

So the Holy Spirit isn't a possession that you can throw away, but more like the spouse that, sadly, is sometimes neglected, grown away from, grown apart from, and in the end winds up in divorce. Some do fall away from the faith once kindled in them without the breath of the Spirit's Word and forgiveness and the feeding of Christ's body and blood. *So, we pray, come, Holy Spirit!* Faithful and true. Keep us faithful and true to the end. You are the Helper we need, for we cannot do it ourselves.

And He is that very Helper Jesus promised to send to us. So after Jesus dies on the cross and rises from the dead, atoning for the sin of the world, your sins and mine, finally, *He hands over the Spirit*, John tells us (John 19:30). So that the work accomplished on the cross be given to us and kept in us. The winds of the world's false teachings and the floods of sin try to blow out your faith and drown it. And they would . . . were it not for the Helper. Your Helper. Who helps you *keep Jesus' Word*. That's what Jesus said. And the Word

keep there means to hold onto it, cling to it, treasure it. And the Spirit who comes through that Word, enables you to do that Word - to be who you are, and live the new life you've been given. That you have peace and hope and joy. In this life, and in the one still to come.

So is knowing that when you die you will live on forever, life-changing? Is knowing that when you sin and really mess up you have forgiveness, life-changing? Is the assurance that you're not on your own in this world but have a Helper sent to you from Jesus, life-changing? Is having a Father in heaven who loves you and a brother who laid down His life for you, life-changing? Is joy in the midst of sadness, peace in the midst of turmoil, and certainty in the midst of change, life-changing? Is having a faithful God in an unfaithful world, life-changing?

If so, then Pentecost has changed your life. And more than any other life-changing event. And that can get you through *every other* life-changing event.

So Come, Holy Spirit! Fill our hearts and kindle in us the fire of your love. Keep our faith in Christ Jesus. Fill us with your life. Pour out on us your forgiveness. And feed us now with the Body and Blood of our brother and Saviour. That we live and be who we are, who you have made us: children of God.

In 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.