

## **“Pentecost—As a Present Reality,”**

**Acts 2:1-21,**

**Pentecost Sunday, May 24, 2015**

“That’s just a train wreck waiting to happen!” We’ve probably all heard this idiomatic expression before, haven’t we? Sometimes, people use these words as a figure of speech to describe any situation in which an accident is highly probable!

When I first began working on this sermon two weeks ago, unfortunately there was, quite literally, a gigantic train wreck just waiting to happen; not far from that historic city of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, home of Independence Hall and the Liberty Bell.

On Tuesday evening, May 12 at 9:30 PM, Amtrak Train no. 188, traveling from Washington DC to New York City was rounding a curve near Philadelphia going twice the legal speed. This train was going 106 miles per hour when the actual speed limit for that train was 50 miles per hour. When the engineer realized that the train was traveling way too fast, he apparently slammed on the emergency brakes; but even this 11<sup>th</sup> hour attempt was not able to prevent a horrible train wreck from happening, only causing more of the passenger cars to derail from the tracks; resulting in the death of eight passengers on board and seriously injuring two hundred more.

You know if Jesus’ first disciples had been living in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century on that first Pentecost Sunday, they may have easily jumped to the false conclusion that they too were just waiting for a train wreck to happen! For St. Luke tells us that *“when the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place, and suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind”* (Acts 2:1-2).

You know, my brothers and sisters, spiritually speaking, at one time, the whole human race was just a train wreck waiting to happen! And if you don’t believe me, then just listen to these words of the Apostle Paul found in Ephesians 2:1-3, where he writes: *“And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath like the rest of mankind!”* ---- But here’s the good news the Holy Spirit of God is prompting all of us to celebrate again today, when St. Paul goes on to tell us in his very next breath, *“But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—(by grace you have been saved) and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing. It is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast!”* (Ephesians 2:8-9)

(1) Here we read, *“When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty, rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. And divided tongues, as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance”* (Acts 2:1-2)

Here the initial descent of the Holy Spirit upon them was to a large degree, internal and invisible. And isn’t this what Jesus told Nicodemus too? *“The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit!”* (John 3:8)

(2) But then the second sign, unlike the rushing of a mighty wind that they could hear with their ears but not see with their eyes, now became visibly manifest among them too—Luke tells us: *“And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them”* (v. 3)!

Do you remember the words of John the Baptist when many people came to him on the Jordan River where he was preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, and some curious people asked him: "Are you the Messiah?" He answered truthfully, "*I am not. One, mightier than I, is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire*" (Luke 3:16)!

Brothers and sisters, now those words of John the Baptist were being fulfilled!

(3) And then there was yet another external manifestation of the Holy Spirit's presence with Jesus' disciples there that day! The disciples now become apostles, were enabled to speak in various languages as the newly endowed gift of the Holy Spirit empowered them to do! You know, friends, the Bible teaches us very clearly that the Holy Spirit is God, just as much God the Father is God, and just as much as the Son is God, so also God the Holy Spirit is God and he is still performs many miracles among us today!

Just think of all the miracles he has performed among us this morning.

First, the gift and possession of every person's faith, who genuinely believes that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and the Savior of the world is a miracle of God the Holy Spirit! For we read in 2 Corinthians 12:3, "*No one can say that Jesus Christ is Lord, but by the Holy Spirit!*"

Secondly, it's a miracle if you believe that Jesus Christ is the Lamb of God who took away all of your sins! And isn't this what we sing in those words of the ancient liturgy of the church every time we approach the Lord's Table? *Agnus dei qui tollis peccata mundi, miserere nobis. Agnus dei qui tollis peccata mundi, miserere nobis. Agnus dei qui tollis peccata mundi, dona nobis pacem!* "*Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world...*"

Thirdly, it's a miracle that you have rearranged your priorities in such a way today that you are actually sitting here inside this house of the LORD again today worshiping the Triune God with us, rather than your sleeping in still at home, or your being out on the lake, or your being on the golf course.

Today you have already confessed your sins, rejoiced in God's forgiveness - all of these things are miracles that God the Holy Spirit is doing right now. Today on this Pentecost Sunday we give thanks for the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives, and we pray that God would send his Holy Spirit to others.

Today we are especially going to focus on two miracles that the Holy Spirit gives - courage and conversion.

The Bible says that everyone was utterly amazed when these uneducated fishermen from the middle of nowhere were suddenly doing this: "*We hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues. Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, 'What does this mean?'*" Some made fun of the disciples and said they had been drinking, and that's when Peter stood up and spoke to the crowd. And here we see one of the greatest miracles of Pentecost - the miracle of courage - this same Peter who had been too afraid to identify himself as a disciple of Jesus not long ago - remember how he denied Jesus three times? There he was, speaking boldly to total strangers, in the same city where Jesus had been crucified. He quoted the Old Testament prophet Joel, and told the crowd that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord would be saved. Courage - here we see it in the Apostle Peter - a gift from the Holy Spirit.

Just think of the people who were in that crowd. They had not believed in Jesus as their Savior. Many of them had been part of the crowd that had called for Jesus to be crucified. Later in his sermon to them Peter even said to them, "*You, with the help of wicked men put Jesus to death by nailing him to the cross.*" --- Can you imagine standing in front of a crowd and saying that? Courageous words from Peter.

(2) And then another miracle happened in that crowd of people. Instead of defending their sins or making excuses for their sins, they were sorry for their sins. "*They were cut to the heart*" the Bible says. And

not only were they sorry for their sins, they also believed Peter when he told them, *"Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."*

And they believed! They didn't turn their noses up at the idea of Jesus taking their sins away. They didn't say, "Well, Jesus could never have risen from the dead - that defies all human reason." No! They believed! The miracle of conversion - here we see it. 3000 people came to faith and were baptized in one day. We Christians today need the Holy Spirit to perform the same blessings of courage and conversion.

And let's think of ourselves this morning. Aren't we tempted today to shrink back and stop living and sharing our Christian faith with others?

As our culture becomes more and more secular, redefining marriage, promoting abortion, teaching evolution and atheism, aren't we tempted to shrink back? "I don't want people to know that I'm a Christian. What if they harass me? What if they make fun of me? And what if they ask me what I believe, and I tell them, and they ridicule me? Maybe I should hide my faith, we might say.

But doesn't this sheepish kind of witness for Christ go completely contrary to so much of that which our Savior has taught us? In Matthew 10:27 Jesus says, *"What I tell you in the dark, say in the light, and what you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops. And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Father fear him who can put to destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered!"*

Have you ever been intimidated by the world, afraid of openly living and sharing your faith?

Peter did that when he denied Jesus 3 times. Jesus forgave him, and today Jesus forgives you and me as well. Do you believe that Jesus has paid the full ransom for all of your sins, even those sins of fear that keep you from openly living your faith? Do you believe that Jesus forgives you, that he rose from the dead to prove to you that he loves you and forgives you? If you believe that, then God the Holy Spirit is in you. And he not only gives you faith. He gives you courage, the same courage that enabled Peter to stand up in front of a crowd of people and share his faith.

Unfortunately, that terrible train wreck that happened near Philadelphia is not something the uncommon when we remember that we and all the other people who live on this planet are a fallen people and living in a fallen world.

Three weeks before this horrible train crash took place in Philadelphia, on March 24, a German Wings Passenger Jet, whose parent company is Lufthansa, was flying from Barcelona, Spain to Dusseldorf, Germany on March 24, when it crashed into a mountainside of the French Alps, immediately killing all 150 passengers on board.

But remembering the proper meaning of that popular metaphor I explained to you at the beginning of the sermon today, this really was a "train wreck just waiting to happen!"

This was a deliberate attempt for a 28 year old German copilot named Andreas Lubitz to commit suicide, as one who was suffering from depression. When the captain exited the flight deck, the copilot saw this as his one and only great big chance to end it all, by locking the captain out of the cockpit. The voice recorder on the "black box" reveals some very chilling, final moments of that fatal flight with the captain demanding to be let back in, and the voices of many passengers heard mercilessly screaming!

How completely different from that most senseless tragedy was the greatest act of self-sacrifice which the world has ever known in the life, death and resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! He

wasn't dying on that old rugged cross to escape any depression he may have suffering from! Quite the contrary, he was willingly going to that cross to take the punishment that rightly ours upon himself!

I just love the words of our opening hymn today:

*“For Christ bore our sins and now his own, when he on the cross was hanging; and then he arose and moved the stone that we, unto him belonging, might join with angelic host to raise, our voices in endless singing!” (LSB 503:3)*

*“God came to us then at Pentecost, his Spirit new life revealing, that we might no more from him be lost, all darkness for us dispel. His flame, will the mark of sin efface and bring to us all his healing! (LSB 503:4)*

Do you know why red is the color of the festival of Pentecost? Red reminds us of Jesus' blood shed on the cross. Red reminds us of the tongues of fire resting on those disciples' heads. Red reminds us of the invisible fire of faith and courage that's burning inside of all of us. If you were to give the Holy Spirit a color, maybe the best color to describe him would be red; that color of fire.

*“When we on that final journey go that Christ is for us preparing, we'll gather in song our hearts aglow all joy in the heavens telling, and walk in the light of God's own place, with angels his name adoring!” (LSB 503:5)*

May God the Holy Spirit continue to carry out his miracles of courage and conversion in our lives and in our world! Amen