

Pentecost—Obey, Receive and Proclaim

Acts 1:1-21, Pentecost, June 4, 2017

There is an ancient legend connected with the Ascension of Jesus into heaven. Along the way our Lord is met by the Angel Gabriel who asks him: "Now that your work is finished, what plans have you made to ensure that the truth that you brought to earth will continue to spread throughout the world?"

Jesus answered Gabriel, "I called some fishermen and tax-collectors to walk alongside of me---as I did my Father's will!"

"Yes, I know about them," said Gabriel, "But what other plans have you made?"

Jesus said: "I taught Peter, James and John about the kingdom of God! I taught Thomas about faith! Besides all of them were with me when I preached the good news of the coming Kingdom to the multitudes and healed the sick!"

Gabriel further responded to our Ascending Savior by saying: "But Lord, you know how unreliable those people are and have proven their selves to be! Just think back to the hour of your arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane. At that time they all betrayed you, not totally unlike the way that Judas himself betrayed you a few hours prior to this and the way that Peter would vehemently denied ever having even known you later that evening! Surely you must have other plans to make sure your work was not in vain."

Jesus quietly replied to Gabriel: "No! I have no other plans. I am depending on them!!"

And the Book of Acts records just how the early Church spread the Gospel throughout the known world - so much so that within 300 years they had completely turned the world upside down.

Brothers and sisters, the Book of Acts is one of the most exciting books in the Bible, for it tells us of how the Church grew—from a small of band of dispirited men and women at the time of Jesus' Crucifixion to a powerful body of believers that reached Rome itself.

The Crucified and Risen Savior gave his Church a simple yet seemingly impossible task! *"Go and make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the Name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you! And surely I am with you till the end of the age"* (Matthew 28:19-20)!

As a result of their obedience you and I are here today!

When, the first disciples of Jesus heard this – it must have been a very daunting assignment! Yet Jesus gave them some very clear instructions as to how they were to go about fulfilling his great commission! It was not something that they could do in the limited strength of their own human power! Jesus told them they would receive power from on high. In Acts 1:4-5, our Lord says: *"Do not depart from Jerusalem, but wait there for the promise of the Father, which, he said, 'You heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now'"* (Acts 1:4-5)! In other words, Jesus himself would enable them to fulfill the Great Commission! How? By giving to them the Power of the Holy Spirit!

1. The first principle integral to these disciples' success was that the disciples obeyed Jesus. You might wonder why the disciples were told to wait in Jerusalem before they would go out into the world and seek to testify to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ to other people! You might

wonder why the disciples told to wait in the city of Jerusalem before bearing witness to the Gospel themselves!

The answer is simply because Jesus had commanded them to do this! The first principle integral to the success of Jesus' first disciples was that they obeyed Jesus!

I think the simple answer is that if we are going to be servants of Christ, we have to learn to do WHAT Jesus tells us to do.

Someone has wisely pointed out that on the day of his Ascension our Lord Jesus was telling his disciples that they needed to have THIS in order for them to do THAT! And what is the "THIS" that they needed?

They needed to be in personal possession of the Holy Spirit and what, would the Holy Spirit empower them to do? He would empower them to become bold and effective witnesses to his Gospel. Yes, Jesus was telling them that they needed this if they were going to do that!

In our celebrating the Festival Day of Pentecost—let's give thanks to the Triune God for the OBEDIENCE of Jesus' first disciples! Jesus commands the disciples to wait, and they obeyed. They obeyed Jesus and waited, not ten minutes, not ten hours, but ten days. So often, God responds to obedience! He looks for people who are willing to seek Him and then patiently wait for Him.

The popular television evangelist Joyce Meyer wrote, "When we obey God we are blessed. People miss out on the blessings because they don't obey what God clearly tells them to do. God lays out a good plan for our lives so that we can walk in it . . . God wants a body of people who will obey Him, and He wants people who will obey quickly."

Brothers and sisters these are precisely Jesus own words, to his disciples on the night before he dies! In John 14:23 our Savior says: "*If anyone loves me they will obey my commandments, and I and the Father will come to them and make our home with them!*"

The disciples were obedient and waited for ten days—literally—this must have been a 10-Day prayer meeting. They spent ten days praying and hungering for God. They spent ten days praying and thirsting after God. They realized Jesus didn't give them a choice. They realized as they prayed that: "We can't go and do THAT without our first of all doing THIS!"

2. The second principle integral to these disciples' success was they received the powerful gift of the Holy Spirit.

St. Luke tells us that when the Holy Spirit came upon Jesus' first disciples on the 50th Day after Easter—with the sound of a rushing wind—and tongues of fire—that these disciples did not freak out! When they suddenly speak forth the Word of God in languages that they had never spoken before; the disciples did not run! They were receptive to all the gifts the Crucified and Risen Savior was willing to pour out upon them that day!

We need to hear those same words that St. Paul spoke to the church in Thessalonica one day when he said: "*Do not quench the Holy Spirit but hold fast to what is good*" (1 Thessalonians 5:19)!

When the Holy Spirit begins moving in our lives, the last thing we should ever want to do is to shut him down! Do you remember that day when the disciples, who could not help but notice that Jesus was a true Man of prayer, asked our Lord to teach them how to pray—what it was that he did next? Yes, that's right! According to Luke 11:2-4, our Lord gave them the model prayer that the Church has identified for over 2000

years now as: “The Lord’s Prayer.” Jesus then went on to share with his disciples a parable about their need (and our need too, obviously) to always be persistent, always, in our prayer lives!

And then he goes on to ask us some of his rhetorical questions—meaning questions in which the answer to the question—resides largely in the question itself!

“What father among you if his son asks for a fish will instead of a fish give him a serpent? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, who are evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him” (Luke 11:11-13)?

I know that I have said this many times before, but I believe it bears enough importance for us to say this again: There in one prayer that God always promises to answer for us with a yes! That’s when we pray to him to fill us with ever greater measures of the Holy Spirit; the Comforter, the Advocate, the Counselor, even the Spirit of Truth, whom the world cannot receive because it neither sees him nor knows him!

Well, the really big question that I find myself being asked this morning is: What can we learn from Pentecost? And the best response I believe I could share with you—this morning comes in the form of a story that I first came across in one of those daily devotional books, much like our PORTALS OF PRAYER, though the title of this little publication is: THE WORD FOR TODAY.

In the September 7th, Saturday, 2002 devotion the story is told about the son of a wealthy father, who was expecting to receive from his father a brand new sports-car on the day that he graduated from college. But shortly after the graduation ceremony and festivities were over, the son returned to his parent’s home with them. About an hour later, the dad asked his son to meet him in his father’s study and there the father handed his son a beautiful wrapped present; obviously wrapped in a box about 6 inches tall and about 4 inches wide. When his newly-graduated from college son opened the gift, he found that the box contained a beautiful leather-bound Bible with his name inscribed on the front cover!

What was the son’s reaction? Angrily he tossed the box with the Bible still in it onto his father’s desk and stormed out saying: “Dad, with all of your money, all you can afford to give me is a Bible! You knew that I have been repeatedly asking you for a new car!”

Well, this father-son relationship had been strained for a while, but in the young man’s mind this was the proverbial straw that broke the camel’s back; so much so that he and his father never spoke again, despite the father’s repeated attempt to make contact with his son.

Years later, he received a telephone call—revealing to him that his father was dead—and further more revealing that his father, whose wife and the boy’s mother had died, left to his disenchanted son his entire estate.

As he was going through his father’s belongings, he found that Bible that had been given to him by his father still in its box. Curiously, he finally took the Bible out of the box and opened it. The page fell open at a passage his father had marked. And as he looked at the page, he noticed that his Dad had underlined Luke 11:13, *“If you then being evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him.”* As the son was now reading that verse, a car key fell out from inside of the Bible. It had a tag with the dealer’s name on it—for the sports car that he had wanted years earlier. On the tag beside his graduation date we read the words: “Paid in full! Love, Dad!”

Pentecost is the season when we remember God’s great gift to us following the death of his Son; his Son who actually took the place that was rightfully ours there upon that cross to make a vicarious satisfaction for all of our sins! He became our Substitute...as the Only One who ever could be our Substitute because he was born into this world, and remained all throughout his life—TOTALLY INNOCENT OF ALL SIN!

That we might hear this message and hear it in such a convincing way that we would actually come to believe in it and have our faith in that message strengthened all of our lives, he poured out upon us the gift of the Holy Spirit. Yet so many of us, at times, as Christians are willing to celebrate this day only as a great historical event in the life of the church—failing to obey our Father’s invitation for the Holy Spirit still to come to us today! There still needs to be a yearning and a hungering and a thirsting for God the Holy Spirit to still take all the things of Christ and to make them our personal possessions too—his righteousness, his forgiveness, his peace and the sure promise of eternal life!

3. The third integral to these disciples success is that they boldly proclaimed the Gospel.

We still need THIS from God in order for us to do THAT! We need the Holy Spirit to come to us afresh each day! This is certainly what Martin Luther was encouraging us to do when he wrote his great hymn to be sung as the hymn of the day each Sunday that we celebrate the Festival of Pentecost!

The words of that first verse of this hymn, in their English translation go like this:

Come, Holy Ghost, God and Lord, with all your graces now outpoured!
On each believer’s mind and heart; your fervent love to them impart!
Lord, by the brightness of your light—your Holy Church in faith unite!
From every land and every tongue—this to your name, O Lord, our God be sung!
Alleluia! Alleluia!

One of my favorite post resurrection appearances that the New Testament shares with us is the one that St. John shares with us in chapter 21 of his Gospel account!

¹⁵ When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” He said to him, “Feed my lambs.” ¹⁶ He said to him a second time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” He said to him, “Tend my sheep.” ¹⁷ He said to him the third time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, “Do you love me?” and he said to him, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my sheep.

One of the best ways we can prove that our love for Jesus is genuine, is by sharing the good news about him with others...by proclaiming that good news to all of the people we can. And isn’t this something that God asks every Christian church to do?

It’s one of the reasons that most Christian congregations today have a Sunday school, and it’s the reason people are still willing to come forward and teach Sunday school—knowing that the one who often feel the greatest calling for this—are people who do it year, after year, after year!

About 12 years ago a discussion was begun among us here at Mount Olive about the possibility of our opening a Christian preschool. When it was determined that Irmo and the surrounding community could definitely use another Christian preschool, the committee went to work to make that happen; chaired by David Painter and the great devotion of his wife Patti. A preschool was born and the rest is history!

Part of the Holy Spirit’s guidance in that whole process was leading us to a wonderful young woman, who had been a Lutheran all her life and who even attended and graduated from the largest Lutheran college in Valparaiso University in 1990. She married her husband Matthew, who came to Columbia to pursue a PhD at the University of South Carolina. God blessed the Bernthal’s with four wonderful children. And as they say, “The rest is history!”

Today, we take time out to thank God for sending this gifted teacher to us and for all the love of Christ inside of her that has motivated her to not only do the job but to fill others all around her with the love of Christ that flows so abundantly out of her into the lives of her fellow teachers, volunteers from Mount Olive and the children's lives!

Pentecost is the call of God always upon us to obey his commands, to receive the Holy Spirit and to proclaim the Gospel! Pentecost—obey, receive and proclaim! Amen