

# "PENTECOST—SUMMED UP IN ONE WORD"

Acts 2:1-21, Pentecost Sunday, June 8, 2014

SO HERE WE ARE SIX MONTHS INTO THE NEW YEAR! How are we doing at living out our New Year's resolutions? Is it possible that some of us may HAVE COMPLETELY FORGOTTEN our New Year's resolutions altogether? New Year's resolutions are not bad things, but the kind of "change" being advocated in the appointed Scripture lessons on this Pentecost Sunday IS A NOT A SELF-DIRECTED CHANGE, but the kind of change that takes place inside of people through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon them.

It's a lovely little story from the book of Numbers in our Old Testament lesson today.

Moses had been feeling overwhelmed, frustrated and angry, to put it mildly, because of all the responsibility that **LORD God had placed upon his shoulders** as the only pastor serving the whole nation/congregation of Israel. Therefore, the LORD God does a very kind thing for Moses.

**God tells Moses to gather together 70 of the elders in Israel** around the **Tent of the Tabernacle** which was that collapsible, moveable Tent that was the highest symbol of God's presence among his chosen people on their way to the Promised Land that housed the "HOLY OF HOLIES," THE ARK OF THE COVENANT, A GOLDEN LAMPSTAND for the SHOWBREAD AND THE ALTAR OF INCENSE. We can certainly see that what happened there that day was actually a great foreshadowing; what theologians call a "type" of the great day of Pentecost yet to come (Acts 2:1-21).

First of all, THE LORD GOD COMES DOWN IN A CLOUD AND AFTER THE LORD GOD SPEAKS TO MOSES, **God takes some of the Spirit that was upon Moses and puts it upon all these 70 elders.** And as soon as the Spirit rested upon them—they prophesied, which means that they began to speak forth the Word of God, even though the writer also tells us that they did not continue to do so forever.

Meanwhile there are two dudes named Eldad and Medad whose names were on Moses' designated list to be an official part of those 70 elders chosen, who didn't make it to the worship service that day, nevertheless the gift of the Holy Spirit fell upon them too and they actually speaking forth the Word of God at some other places in the camp.

**A young man named Joshua, who would eventually become Moses' successor, gets completely "bent out of shape" because of what these two gentlemen are doing!** He runs to tell Moses and commands Moses to stop them, yet Moses' response must have certainly shocked this young man Joshua! *"ARE YOU JEALOUS FOR MY SAKE? WOULD THAT ALL THE LORD'S PEOPLE WERE PROPHETS, THAT THE LORD WOULD PUT HIS SPIRIT ON THEM! AND MOSES RETURNED TO THE CAMP!"*

GOD WANTS ALL OF HIS PEOPLE, not simply the CLERGY and other professional church workers to possess the Holy Spirit, but everyone who calls upon the name of the LORD, everyone who comes to faith in Jesus Christ his Son through the Gospel to be filled with the Holy Spirit too!

AND ST. PETER REMINDS THE PEOPLE PRESENT IN THE STREETS OF JERUSALEM THAT DAY, AND STILL REMINDS US IN OUR DAY, THAT THIS HAD ACTUALLY BEEN GOD'S PLAN FROM THE VERY BEGINNING. Some 800 years before the Day of Pentecost, God had said through the **Prophet Joel:** *"And in the last days it shall be," God declares, 'that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; even on my male servants and my female servants in those days will I pour out my Spirit!"*

Friends, of course there are things in each of our lives that we might like to change, but how many of us really look to God and pray for him to change the things in our lives that really need changing?

So often our prayers can degenerate simply into what we are asking God to do for us and for those whom we love. **The Psalmist is Psalm 25 day takes a totally different posture in his prayer life towards God when he prays:** *"Make me know your ways, O LORD; teach me your paths. Lead me in your truth and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all the day long. Remember not the sins of my youth or my transgressions; according to your steadfast love remember me, for the sake of your goodness, O LORD!"* (Vv. 4-6)

PENTECOST REMINDS US THAT OUR GOD IS INTERESTED IN CHANGE. He is interested in changing you and he is interested changing me. Certainly there were many changes that came about in the lives of those first participates on that first Pentecost Sunday. **I WANT TO SPEAK ABOUT TWO OF THOSE MAJOR CHANGES TOOK PLACE ON THAT FIRST PENTECOST SUNDAY.**

### **I. Change number one concerns the great empowerment of Jesus' first disciples.**

Before that first Pentecost Sunday, the disciples believed in Jesus as their Savior, but they were still very confused about all kinds of different things. **They still didn't understand that Jesus' mission was something much greater than merely establishing some form of an earthly kingdom right here for himself on this earth!**

We saw that the disciples still very much confused last Sunday on that first Ascension Day. Just before our Lord Jesus ascended to his rightful place in glory at the Father's right hand, the disciples asked him, **"Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom of Israel?"** (Acts 1:6)

Too bad that these disciples were not present about six weeks earlier to eavesdrop on Pontius Pilate's interrogation of our Lord Jesus Christ! On that day, Pilate asked Jesus: **"Are you the king of the Jews?" And Jesus answered Pilate, "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world!"** (John 18:33-36)

**Before that first Pentecost Sunday, Jesus' disciples were still confused and very timid! They were not confident about sharing the Gospel with others.** How could they be, if they didn't fully have a grasp on everything that God was doing in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus either?!

BUT THEN PENTECOST CAME. THE DISCIPLES WERE TOGETHER, WHEN THE SOUND OF A BLOWING WIND CAME DOWN FROM HEAVEN. WHAT SEEMED TO BE TONGUES OF FIRE, MUCH LIKE LARGE CANDLE FLAMES, SETTLED JUST ABOVE THEIR HEADS! THEY WERE ALL FILLED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT AND BEGAN TO PREACH THE GOSPEL IN THEIR OWN LANGUAGE, PROBABLY ARAMAIC. **Yet, all of the people, who came there from distant places throughout the Roman Empire; who spoke different languages were able to hear these "Galileans" as if they were preaching to them in their own native tongues!** It was the momentary reversal of all of the confusion that was first brought upon the human race, by God's confusing their communication with different languages; an act of God's judgment that took place at the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1-9).

Everything that was happening was so out of the ordinary, so unlike anything any of these people had ever experienced before that the people present responded in two different ways: (1) Some of the people were so mystified by what was taking place that they were left completely speechless, after asking the question: **"WHAT DOES THIS MEAN" (ACTS 2:12)?** And others drew the false conclusion that **everyone present was "FILLED WITH NEW WINE" (ACTS 2:13).** But this is when the Apostle Peter stood up and addressed the crowd. He gave a beautiful sermon that God the Holy Spirit inspired him to preach!

**II. The second great change that took place on Pentecost is that 3000 people who were present in Jerusalem that day, not only confessed their sins to God, they also gladly received the sacrament of Holy Baptism; and in doing so they became Christians!**

Originally Pentecost was an Old Testament agricultural festival - God had told the Jews to gather in Jerusalem 50 days after Passover to celebrate the harvest. Jews from all over the Roman Empire came. 3000 of them who were not Christians, who did not believe in Jesus Christ, were changed that day; converted by the Holy Spirit—through the powerful sermon Peter preached to all present.

Their whole way of looking at God, at themselves, at the world, at eternal life - everything had changed. Now these people knew how to get to heaven. Now they knew that they were at peace with God. Now they knew that Jesus was their Savior.

Pentecost can be summed up in one word, and I believe that word is change.

We see that a great change took place in the lives of Jesus' first disciples and we can see that a giant change took place in 3000 other people. **Our world today needs change. There are so many people who do not believe in Jesus Christ, who do not know how to get to heaven. And there are so many Christians come to us, and to change us.**

BUT SO OFTEN OUR PROBLEM IS THAT WE DON'T BELIEVE WE ARE IN NEED OF ANY FURTHER CHANGES IN OUR LIVES, ESPECIALLY PERHAPS, THE OLDER THAT WE GROW.

I CAN BE JUST AS GUILTY AS ANYONE ELSE IN SAYING TO MYSELF: "I'M ALRIGHT THE WAY I AM! WHAT DO I NEED TO CHANGE ABOUT MYSELF OR MY LIFE?"

THE ANSWER, OF COURSE IS, A LOT!

Yes, it's true, we are Christians, but we still have sinful habits that we don't want to get rid of. We still have moments when we are selfish. We still have moments when we completely misunderstand what God is telling us in the Bible. We still have moments when we fail to share our faith others who could really profit by hearing our testimony, but we fail to share our faith with them because we are just too timid! **It is true that we are Christians! It is true that we are destined for heaven! But not a one of us are a completely finished project so long as we are living out our lives as sinful people in a sin-filled world!** We still need to become more and more the people that God wants us to be.

How does a person change his soul? He can't do it by himself! But do you hear that last verse of our second lesson today, the concluding words to Peter's magnificent sermon? ***"But it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved!" (Acts 2:21)***

**You can't do it by trying to be a better person. That's like saying that "there is something wrong with my car, but I'll try to FIX IT by being a better driver. You need someone to work on your engine!" And we all need someone to work on our innermost engines and that is our souls!** But our souls are too complicated for us to fix by ourselves. We need someone to fix them for us and that someone is the Third Person of the Holy Trinity—the Holy Spirit!

On that first Pentecost Sunday the Holy Spirit came to Jesus' first disciples in a powerful display of the loud sound of the wind and what looked like tongues of fire. Today the Holy Spirit comes to people in the preaching of God's Word and in the administration of God's great sacraments in the gift of Holy Baptism and in our celebrations of Holy Communion. I didn't write the words, I only can repeat them and share them with you when St. Peter writes in I Peter 3:21-22: ***"Baptism now saves you, not as a removal of***

**dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him!"**

In **Romans 10:17** St. Paul writes: *"The Word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" (that is the word of faith that we proclaim); because if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved!"*

On the surface, someone standing in a pulpit preaching the Word of God certainly doesn't look like anything spectacular! But on the inside of the people who listen to the Word of God being preached from a pulpit or taught faithfully by any other person who is leading a Bible Study or a Sunday School Class, something spectacular is happening! There are all sorts of changes that may be taking place inside of you; some of which you we might be aware and others to which we may be completely oblivious and unaware. AND WHEN WE COMBINE THE WORD WITH WATER, WE GET BAPTISM. What happens at a baptism? Once again, on the surface, it doesn't look like anything spectacular. But we know from what God tells us in his Word that in baptism, the Holy Spirit changes a person, causes a person, even a little person, to believe in Christ.

St. Paul admitted that what he did by the grace of God is always seen as foolishness in the eyes of the world! In I Corinthians 1:18, 21-24, ***"The Word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For since in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom; it pleased God to save those who believe through the foolishness that we preach. For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified; a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men!"***

AND WHAT HAPPENS WHEN WE COMBINE GOD'S WORD WITH BREAD AND WINE, AS JESUS DID ON THE NIGHT HE WAS BETRAYED? ONCE AGAIN, IT MAY NOT LOOK LIKE ANYTHING ALL THAT SPECTACULAR, IN THE EYES OF AN UNBELIEVER. BUT JESUS TEACHES US THAT WE ARE RECEIVING HIS TRUE BODY AND BLOOD IN THIS PRECIOUS SACRAMENT. BUT IT IS. Because as we partake of Christ's actual body and blood in this Sacrament, The Holy Spirit is working inside of us to change us. He strengthens our faith and he increases our love for Christ and our love for other people. The Holy Spirit can even cause us to find great joy in reading the Bible and in our prayer times spent alone with God. The Holy Spirit can cause us to deeply treasure those times that we are spending, while worshipping the Triune God in a place just like this beautiful sanctuary!

But even with the gift of the Holy Spirit, there are still some things that you probably will seldom hear even devout and faithful Christians say; faithful Christians who genuinely love the Lord Jesus Christ and call upon his name in obedience to God's own invitation and command. Here is a list of the **TOP SEVEN THINGS YOU NEVER HEAR PEOPLE SAY AT CHURCH** to Someone Else!

- (7) "Hey find another place to sit! It's my turn to sit on the front pew!"
- (6) "Hey, I really would love to teach the Junior High Sunday School class!"
- (5) "Hey, I decided to give the church that extra \$500 I've been giving to my favorite televangelist!"
- (4) "Pastor, I was captivated by your sermon that I never even noticed it was 20 minutes longer than usual!"
- (3) "Personally, I find witnessing to be much more enjoyable than playing golf!"
- (2) "I love it when we sing new hymns in church that we have never sung before!"
- (1) "Nothing strengthens my personal commitment to Jesus Christ more effectively than our annual stewardship campaign."

Do you want to be strengthened in your faith and spiritual walk?  
Do you want to be filled with peace with God?  
Do you want to understand the Bible better and be less confused about the Bible's teachings?  
Do you want to be able to share your faith more naturally and more confidently with other people?  
Do you want to be able to live the way God tells you to live in the Bible?  
Do you want your soul to be changed for the better?

This is what the Holy Spirit still does for us! He did that in a miraculous, unusual way on that first Pentecost. Today, he does it as you spend time being in the Word of God, by the preaching of the Gospel, by causing you to live in the power of your baptism, and by your receiving the Lord's Supper! These are some of the most important ways that God the Holy Spirit changes peoples' lives, changes you, changes me and turns you and me more and more into the kind of mature Christians that God wants us to be.

There is one prayer request that Jesus has taught us our Heavenly Father will ever answer for us with a yes. Jesus says in **LUKE 11:11-13**, *"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."*

### **Why is red the color of the Festival of Pentecost?**

There are all several different reasons. Red reminds us, of course, of Jesus' blood, which he shed as a payment for our sins. Red also reminds us of what looked like tongues of fire on the disciples' heads. Red reminds us of the invisible fire of faith that's burning inside of us, the gift that the Holy Spirit has given to us.

If we were to give the Holy Spirit a color, maybe the best color we could assign to him would be red, the color of fire. For every time we come into contact with God's Word and Sacrament, the fire of the Holy Spirit longs to enter our hearts to burn away more and more of our selfishness and confusion. This fire becomes the fire of faith, a fire which trusts and loves Jesus Christ as Savior.

IF YOU COULD SUM UP PENTECOST IN ONE WORD, THAT ONE WORD COULD BE "CHANGE."

May the Holy Spirit continue to work in you, to change you and to fan into flame the fire that is in each one of you! Amen.