

Day of Pentecost (Whitsunday): May 28, 2023

“But You Will See Me”

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God, our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

There is a lot going on this weekend. There are several events that bring together all kinds of differing groups of people for a single purpose. The seniors of Grinnell High School, including our own Oliver, Jenna, and Alex will gather to receive recognition of their hard work, time, and dedication given to their academic careers for the past many years. They will pause to reflect upon the achievements made, recall memories made, and look forward with a mixture of joy and apprehension about what to do in the days, months, and years to come. As they gather to do this collectively, their thoughts will first be directed by our own Danielle McDonough, who has the task this year of speaking hope to crying parents and strength to fearful children. Blessings to you all on this celebratory day.

This weekend also marks the celebration of Memorial Day. For some this day has been overshadowed by the unofficial start of summer and outdoor activities. It is an important day to gather in remembrance, however. It is a time for the nation to gather and recognize the hard work, time, and dedication of our military men and women who have given their lives in service to our country. We recall the achievements made, recall memories and look forward to with a mixture of joy and apprehension about what to do in the days, months, and years to come. As the gatherings happen, there will be speeches made also to the grieving and fearful, mixed with notions of pride and confusion.

What a fantastic, mix of emotion weekend that we have to celebrate the Day of Pentecost. It was a day in which the nation of Israel was gathered to celebrate the Feast of Weeks. They had come from many different places for this gathering, and there was one message that they were to all hear. Among the many words shared that day, one stood out above the rest. Before we get to those words, The Gospel lesson sets our stage for reflection this day.

A very important question was asked by Judas, not Iscariot, in our Gospel text. Jesus had just told the disciples ***“Yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him.”***¹

¹ John 14:19–21

Judas, not Iscariot, asks the question on everyone's mind, "***Lord, how is it that you will manifest yourself to us, and not to the world?***"² If the world is going to see you, but then not see you; how then will we see you and not the world? How will you make yourself known so we will see you?

As a child, Jesus' answer frustrated me a lot. At first, on the surface, He doesn't seem to answer the question at all! They want to see Him. He is talking about leaving, which they know is His death; so, they want to know how to SEE Him and what does He say, "If you love me, keep, that is guard, my words. Don't worry. The Holy Spirit will come and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you. I don't give as the world gives. Don't let your hearts be troubled and do not let them be afraid."

What is the answer to Judas' question? How will Jesus manifest Himself? Through His Word! The Holy Spirit will cause the Word to be spoken, and will attach God's promises to water, bread, and wine; giving to His Church both invisible words and visible words.

This is the very focus of our celebration today. As you walk through this weekend, may God's words stand out above the rest. To help us flesh out the depth and importance of this day, recall with me the work and words of God. In the background for this day is the Feast of Weeks. The Hebrew word for week is simply the number seven; which makes this feast the seven of sevens, the week of weeks, or from the Greek, fifty, that is—Pentecost.

It was on this day for Israel, a multitude of sacrifices were prescribed. A wave offering, often with two pieces one waved up and down, and the other waved side to side—what does that look like? There was a sacrifice of the lamb, and burnt offerings for sin. There were also fellowship, or peace, offerings. These included food and drink, grain and wine, and were a mark of fellowship and peace both with God and with the neighbor. This marked the end of the wheat harvest, and so this festival was filled with much joy. This is part of the accusation towards the Apostles' of being drunk early in the morning, "Woah, those guys must have really been partying."

In a true sense, they were really partying. They were not drunk as you suppose; instead, they are living Psalm 4, "***You have put more joy in my heart than they have when their grain and wine abound. In peace I will both lie down and sleep; for you alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety.***"³

They dwell in safety and they have more joy and peace than the world can give, precisely because they have the Holy Spirit, who has brought to their remembrance all that Jesus has said.

² John 14:22

³ Psalm 4:7–8

Their minds are opened, and they see with clarity the point of Jesus' death and resurrection. Peace with God and fellowship with one another is found in this very death and resurrection. The Church is then launched into the world. The work is done. The wheat has died. It is now prepared to be given to the poor and the sojourner. They can't afford it; it is free. It is given to them out of the pure grace and mercy of our God.

Sadly, sin seeks to cause much destruction to the gifts of God. This weekend we are told to remember what it means to be an American, and others will be told to always remember they will always be a part of a particular high school. While having many differences, both groups that gather will be told of how these particular individuals made a unique and permanent mark. These are not necessarily bad things. We can, and should, rejoice in the work and sacrifices of others. Does it not make sense to give more glory, more rejoicing in the work and sacrifice of God? We can rejoice in the work of others more fully, more good and right and salutary, when we first recognize and rejoice in the work God has done and the mark He makes on us.

The sinful nature likes to jump quickly to our work and give only a tip of the hat to Holy Spirit, using Pentecost for justification. So let us consider the beginning of today's second reading, from Acts 2. All the disciples were together in one place, in a house, "***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.***"⁴

The Holy Spirit did two miraculous things. He gave them the gift to speak real languages that they had never learned, and He put His words into their mouths. St. Paul calls these gifts "tongues" and "prophecy."

The tongues are nothing other than real human languages, not the babbling of misguided Pentecostals, which has been proved to be no real language at all, and which the false prophets of other religions can do just as well. The true gift of tongues was the ability to speak real human languages that one had never learned.

Prophecy is related, but different. I personally have never met a real prophet, and you probably haven't met one either. So, we have to learn from the Bible what prophecy is. A prophet speaks words that the Holy Spirit gives him to say. The Lord said: "***If there is a prophet among you, I the LORD make myself known to him in a vision; I speak with him in a dream. Not so with***

⁴ Acts 2:1-4

my servant Moses. He is faithful in all my house. With him I speak mouth to mouth, clearly, and not in riddles, and he beholds the form of the LORD.⁵

Before we get too far into the weeds, it must also be said that there is more than one way to have the Holy Spirit and to prophesy: in a *holy* way and in ways that are *not holy*. Not everyone who prophesies is holy! When the people of Israel came out of Egypt, a pagan prophet named Balaam gave some true prophecies about how Israel would win great victories, and even about how Christ our Lord would one day be born.⁶ Yet Balaam was not a holy man; he had the Holy Spirit, yet was not holy.

At the time of Jesus Christ, the chief priest Caiaphas said that Jesus should be killed so that the people could be saved, and the Gospel says, ***“He did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the people.”***⁷ Caiaphas was not a holy man; he had the Holy Spirit, yet he was not holy.

King Saul received the Spirit, but himself was also not holy. When Saul was trying to kill David, he sent messengers to find him. When the messengers found the prophet Samuel, they prophesied instead. That is, they completely forgot about their job, and they stayed with Samuel. Then Saul sent other messengers, but when they came to Samuel, they, too, prophesied.

When this happened a third time, Saul finally went looking for David himself. But he, too, found the prophet Samuel instead. And then one of the most bizarre things of the Bible took place. We read in 1 Samuel 19: ***“And the Spirit of God came upon him also, and as he went he prophesied until he came to Naioth in Ramah. And he too stripped off his clothes, and he too prophesied before Samuel and lay naked all that day and all that night.”*** We would call this madness. This is losing your mind. This is a bizarre and dangerous way to prophesy. In fact, it is unholy.

When I say that these unbelievers “had the Holy Spirit,” that is totally different than “receiving the Holy Spirit” and “being *filled* with the Holy Spirit.” For Balaam, Saul, and Caiaphas, the Holy Spirit was using them to do His work. He was not filling their hearts; He was not hallowing their souls. What happened with them was completely different than what happened today, on the day of Pentecost.

On Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came to the disciples to make them holy, to make them saints. And here the Holy Spirit shows Himself as a sober, peaceful spirit, who causes them to speak the great works of God.

⁵ Numbers 12:6–8

⁶ Numbers 24

⁷ John 11:51

This is the true, New Testament prophecy, the kind of prophecy that St. Paul described with these words: “***The spirits of prophets are subject to prophets. For God is not a God of confusion but of peace.***”⁸

We have been discussing *what happened* when “They were all filled with the Holy Spirit.” We haven’t yet touched on the words “they were all.” If you look back to the first chapter of Acts, you’ll find that in those days after Jesus ascended to heaven, the apostles were not alone. “***All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.***”⁹ Therefore I see no reason to deny that they, too, were filled with the Holy Spirit.

What does this mean? It means that *everyone* needs the gift of the Holy Spirit. There are different gifts, different vocations, but the same Spirit. That day of Pentecost was very similar to one of our church services. We have a mixed group here—young and old, male and female—and we all have the words of God in our mouths, but only some men, the called ministers of Christ, do the teaching. In a similar way, there is a difference between a classroom teacher’s speaking and the students’ speaking.

All of God’s people would face trials and temptations. They needed the Holy Spirit, too. The gift of the Holy Spirit came to all the disciples without exception, and notice what Peter in his sermon quotes from the prophet Joel, “***I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy.***” This is not a special grace given to ministers, but a grace common to all the Christians at that time. The special gift given to pastors for carrying out their duties is a different gift of the Holy Spirit—something distinct from this.

So, that is prophecy, that is tongues. But now we need to know, does it still happen? The answer is *maybe*, and the answer is *yes*. First the *maybe*. Does God still give the miraculous gift of tongues? Are there still true Christian prophets? Maybe. Maybe God still gives these gifts. Our Lutheran Confessions mention a monk by the name of John Hilten who lived around the year 1500, who prophesied many things that actually happened. Many of Luther’s followers considered him to be a prophet. So, maybe these fantastic gifts of the Holy Spirit still happen. Or maybe not. St. Paul wrote to the Corinthians: “***As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease.***”¹⁰ That is to say, at some point in time, there will be no more prophecies, and no more miraculous gifts of tongues.

⁸ 1 Cor. 14:32–33

⁹ Acts 1:14

¹⁰ 1 Cor. 13:8

Have we reached that time? Maybe, maybe not, but it really doesn't matter. See, miracles are not important for our time. St. John Chrysostom, who lived in the early 400's, wrote some wise words about this. He wrote, "*One cannot find which is the true church either from miracles, which have been removed, or from the behavior of Christians, which has deteriorated.*" From this he concludes: "*Whoever wants to learn which is the true church of Christ, from what source shall he learn it except only through the Scriptures? Because the Lord knew what great confusion would occur in the last days, He commands that Christians, those who are in Christendom, who want to have the firmness of true faith flee to nothing other than to the Scriptures.*"

So, does this still happen today? Does God still give miraculous gifts? Maybe, maybe not. But if we're talking about being filled with the Holy Spirit, if we're talking about the Holy Spirit coming to you and living within you, if we're talking about the Holy Spirit giving you His best gifts of faith, hope, and love, then the answer is absolutely, unmistakably, categorically, YES.

Yes, this still happens. The Holy Spirit still comes to you. He comes to you through the Gospel and He comes through the Sacraments. The Holy Spirit comes to you and does two things: He forgives your sins because Jesus died for you, and He heals you. Those are the two things. Forgiveness and eternal life. The gift of the Holy Spirit isn't just behavior improvement. The gift of the Holy Spirit is not in any way some kind of babbling raving. The gift of the Holy Spirit is about salvation. He comes to save you who belong to Christ, you who have been justified, and He gives you the holy life of eternity.

What I'm saying is that the Holy Spirit is not just the hallower, He is also the enliver. He is the Lord and giver of life. We confess this in the creed. It is based on the Spirit's work in Genesis 1-2, and He keeps it going in an ongoing way even to this day. He is the Lord and giver of life, and just as the Lord Jesus did not remain in death, neither will His Christians.

His Word, His Spirit is for all people. While various gatherings happen this weekend, our gathering outshines them all. Here is not just you dear graduates and speakers, but here is Christ Himself for you. His Word is yours. His body and blood are yours. He has achieved forgiveness and eternal life for you. His work is done for you. As you do this in remembrance of Him, it is He who does the remembering of Christ's work and your salvation. He comes and you gather with angels, and arch angels, and the whole company of heaven and He gives eternal peace to parents and children alike.

On this celebratory day, we sing,
“Come, holy Fire, comfort true,
Grant us the will Your work to do
And in Your service to abide;
Let trials turn us not aside.
Lord, by Your pow’r prepare each heart,
And to our weakness strength impart
That bravely here we may contend,
Through life and death to You, our Lord, ascend.
Alleluia!”¹¹ Amen.

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

¹¹ Come, Holy Ghost, God and Lord LSB 497:3

Prayer of the Church
The Day of Pentecost
28 May 2023

Let us pray for the whole Church of God in Christ Jesus and for all people according to their needs.

Lord God, bless the preaching of Your Word throughout the world. May Your Spirit create faith in the hearts of the nations, that on the great and magnificent day of the Lord they may call on the name of Your Son and be saved. Fill our congregation, our Synod, and the whole Christian Church on earth with the Holy Spirit. Renew us, that the Sacraments may be administered faithfully and many more may be called by the Gospel, enlightened with Your gifts, sanctified, and kept in the true faith. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord of hosts, we give thanks for those who have served our nation through military service, and we remember with gratitude those who gave their lives for us and the cause of freedom. Help us to honor their sacrifice by using our liberty responsibly. Keep safe all who travel, bless our nation, and help us to protect and increase the privileges we have for those who follow us, looking always to You, from whom these gifts come. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Heavenly Father, You have promised to send Your holy angels to guard and keep Your children. We thank and praise You for the gift of life and for the protection and care you have provided as *Arnie and Elizabeth* celebrate their baptismal anniversaries, and *Julie, Stephanie, and William* celebrate their birthdays. Grant that they may grow in grace, continue to know Your loving-kindness, abide in the confession of Your care and protection, serve You faithfully all the days of their life and finally come to the fullness of Your joys in heaven; Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Heavenly Father, On this weekend of Graduation, we give you thanks for our high school graduates. We thank You for graciously bringing *Oliver, Alex, and Jenna* to this point of formal education. For all the efforts of parents and teachers through these years we praise You. We ask wisdom and guidance for them as they make decisions about their lives that will have implications for years to come. Give them a rich measure of Your Spirit as fields of study and opportunities for employment become available. Help them accurately assess the gifts and abilities You have given and bless the choices that they make. May they ever grow closer to You in faith and with their lives honor the name of Your only Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord; Lord in Your mercy; **hear our prayer.**

Lord God, Heavenly Father, we give thanks for the joy and blessings that You have granted *Steve and Pam* during the years of their marriage. Assist them always by Your grace that with true fidelity and steadfast love they may ever honor and keep their marriage vows, grow in love towards You and for each other, and come at last to the eternal joys that You have promised; Lord in Your mercy; **hear our prayer.**

Light of this dark world, You have sent the Holy Spirit to Your Church as the comforter. Soothe the wounds of Your people. According to Your will, bring restoration to broken families, heal the sick, uplift the depressed, provide for the poor, uphold the forgotten and answer the prayers of all who call out to You for aid *especially for Zoey, David, Jeri, Pastor Small, Debbie and those we name in our hearts.* Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord of love, give to those who weep the joy of Your presence, to those who grieve the hope of the resurrection, and to those who are alone or afraid the consolation of Your Spirit, that they may not despair but know the joy of Your presence and the love of Your Church. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Almighty Father, with Your Son, Jesus Christ, send Your Holy Spirit into our hearts through Your Word to rule and govern us according to Your will, comfort us in every temptation and misfortune, and defend us against every error, that we may continue steadfast in the faith, increase in love and good works, and — trusting firmly in Your grace for us by His death — obtain eternal salvation; through the same Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**