

GOSPEL: JOHN 14:8-27

Pentecost! The birthday of the church, and if you knew today was Pentecost you would have worn red in celebration!

When I was a kid my mom would have a birthday celebration for me, she'd bake whatever kind of cake I wanted that year, and most always it would be angel food because it's my favorite, and my grandparents and great aunt and uncle would come to celebrate. When I was in Denver in seminary, during our phone conversations I kept joking with her that she was going to send me a cake through the mail to celebrate my 50<sup>th</sup> birthday. She didn't realize that I was joking; she took me seriously and called my friend Jan. She asked Jan to please get me a cake and if any way possible have a cow put on it, because at that time I collected cows. The bakery had no idea how to put a cow on a cake, so my friend looked for a toy cow. She couldn't find one, but she found a bag of toys with miniature zoo animals that had a zebra in it and stuck the zebra on my cake. She brought the cake to seminary and the group we hung out with just laughed and laughed over the zebra on the cake.

With every birthday there would also be a lot of birthday gifts, and to tell the truth, I can't remember what I received for my birthday. But I know what gift was received for the birthday of the church. Anyone want to take a guess? The gift of the Holy Spirit. It's true the Holy Spirit was present before Jesus came to earth however there was not an internalization of the Holy Spirit until after Jesus ascended into heaven. And so, we now have the Spirit living in us.

With the Spirit we sing praise to God. When we sing the Cantic of Praise, the Holy, holy, holy, the Lamb of God, we are joining our voices with the Holy Spirit as we sing praise to God. We are celebrating the presence of the triune God with us here on earth. Our thanksgiving, our praise, is associated with the Eucharist, the Lord's Supper where we join with the angels in their adoration of God. That is where heaven comes down to earth for us so we have access to the heavenly sanctuary here on earth through Christ's flesh and blood.

The Spirit empowers us in our worship, according to Martin Luther, because the Spirit gives gifts to the faithful through our worship as we hear the Word proclaimed. That proclamation is not just in hearing the Word through scriptures but also through the absolution, it is proclaimed in the sermon, sung in the songs of the church, confessed in the creeds. It is the word that is enacted in baptism and in the Lord's Supper. God's word in all its forms is the means of the Spirit. Therefore, not only is every Sunday a little Easter, but it is also a little Pentecost, because in every service Jesus gives the Spirit to those who listen and put their trust in him. Whenever God's word is faithfully enacted and proclaimed, the church can be sure that the Holy Spirit is at work.

Paul tells the Christians in Ephesians 5:18 to "be filled with the Spirit". Even though we have been baptized and "sealed with the promise of the Holy Spirit" it isn't a one time gift. It is a gift that is given over and over again. It's like a spring constantly flowing from Jesus and we can drink from it over and over again.

In his Large Catechism, Luther makes this claim about what we receive in Holy Communion: "Here in the sacrament you are to receive from Christ's lips the forgiveness of sins, which contains and brings God's grace and Spirit with all his gifts, protection, defense, and power against death, the devil, and all troubles" (LC v, 70). So, as the church hears God's word and receives Christ's body and blood, it prays for the Spirit and receives the Spirit.

In our gospel reading today, the part that puzzles me, and perhaps you as well, is that Jesus told us whenever we ask for something to be done in Jesus' name, it will be done. That can just simply be hard to believe because how many times have we prayed for something in Jesus' name, and we haven't received what we asked for?

I believe the answer to this is found in verse 27, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives." Perhaps our prayers are being answered, perhaps we are being given what we're praying for but not in the way we expect to receive. The peace of Jesus is not found in the world. The peace of Jesus is found in our hearts, knowing that no matter what we will not be separated from God through Jesus Christ our Savior. The peace that comes from Jesus is that we do not need to be troubled, we do not need to be afraid.

Yet there is the dichotomy that we are troubled by the violence in our world. We are troubled when we are afraid to send our children to school because there is the unthinkable chance that they may not return home. We are troubled when we are afraid to gather too closely in large crowds because we may get a virus that will take our breath away, or one that gives us a painful rash. But we cannot live out of fear. Perfect love casts out all fear.

Now I don't know about you, but I know I do not love perfectly. Not only did God give us the gift of the Spirit, but God also gave us the gift of free will. Free will that allows us to make our own choices about what thoughts and actions we choose to have. God gave us free will because it would mean nothing if we were forced to love God, but it means everything when we choose to love God. When we have the Spirit in us, we choose to do what is right in God's sight, we choose to follow the commands that Jesus gave us to love our neighbor as ourselves. Yet, I know that I do not love perfectly at all times.

I get envious when I see someone with something I'd like to have. I forget that I have more than 80% of the people in this world. There are times when I really want that something I can't eat, forgetting that 80% of the people in the world don't have enough to eat. I complain when I have to pay 5.00 for a gallon of gas, when I have met preachers in Africa who travel 30 mile circuits and are thankful to own a bicycle. So no, I do not love perfectly. But God does. And God showed that love to us by taking away our sin, forgiving us for not loving perfectly, by sacrificing the only human who never sinned. And then sending us the gift of the Holy Spirit so that we can have those fleeting moments when we do love perfectly. So that we can have times of worship when we know the Spirit is present. So that we can know the perfect peace of Jesus even when we are troubled by the world.

This world will never be perfect, but God has promised us a new creation, a new heaven, and a new earth, where there will be no more death, no more violence and no more tears. Until then, we celebrate the Spirit's presence in our world.

All glory be to God.