

The Festival of Pentecost
June 3-4, 2017
Acts 2:1-21

“Amazed and Astonished”

Do you remember a time when you found yourself amazed and astonished? There are many things in the world and in our lives that might make us have such a reaction. You know what this looks like: our eyes get big, our mouth drops open, our shoulders may slump, and we find ourselves at a loss for words as we try to take in whatever it is that is so amazing and astonishing. That’s what is happening to all those people in Jerusalem on that first Pentecost as they heard the disciples speaking in foreign languages – their own languages! All these **“devout men from every nation under heaven”** (Acts 2:5) were hearing their own mother tongue being spoken. With the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, language barriers that separated and divided people were giving way to one common and overarching purpose: **“... we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God”** (Acts 2:11). And that is what we celebrate today on this fiftieth and final day of the Easter season, the Festival of Pentecost; we celebrate and rejoice in the presence, the power, and the peace of the Holy Spirit, by whom we both hear and speak the mighty works of God made known in Jesus Christ. The message for today is entitled, “Amazed and Astonished.” May the Lord’s rich and abundant blessing rest upon the preaching, the hearing, and the living of his Word for Jesus’ sake.

Pentecost is the fulfillment of what Moses’ hope and prayer was in today’s First Reading (Numbers 11:24-30). After those seventy elders of Israel received a portion of the Spirit that rested on Moses, it was discovered that two of them were AWOL (absent without leave): Eldad and Medad. They were not with the rest of the elders gathered with Moses in the tent of meeting, the tabernacle. But by the grace of God they, too, received this same Spirit. There was a bit of a kerfuffle about all of this because it wasn’t following regulations, and some people get really amazed and astonished when something doesn’t follow all the rules and regulations. Joshua, who would actually become Moses’ successor in leading God’s people, was one such person and he said: **“My lord, Moses, stop them”** (Numbers 11:28). “You’ve got to reign this in, Moses. You need to curb this outburst before it gets completely out of control. Do something!” There is this kind of being amazed and astonished when tension and anxiety levels are on the rise because things seem out of order as boundaries are being pushed. I love Moses’ response here: **“Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the Lord’s people were prophets, that the Lord would put his Spirit on them!”** (Numbers 11:29). And that is exactly what happened on the day of Pentecost. That same Spirit was poured out on God’s people, equipping them to tell the mighty works of God to all people everywhere. This same Spirit continues to be poured out on God’s people today in the cleansing waters of Holy Baptism and in the good news of Jesus Christ that is the Word of God. This is the very Spirit who has been poured out upon you and me. Because we cannot by our own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ as our Lord, or come to Him, the Holy Spirit has called us by the Gospel, enlightened us with His gifts, sanctified and kept us in this one true faith (Luther’s Explanation of the Third Article of the Creed).

When we find ourselves amazed and astonished, some word of explanation is needed in order to unpack what happened so that we can understand what took place. Although some of the people on that first Pentecost were amazed and astonished at what they heard and saw, others were more cynical and said: **“They are filled with new wine”** (Acts 2:13). We still have naysayers today who will seek to put a negative spin on the mighty works of God. They will sarcastically scoff at what the Spirit is accomplishing among Christ’s people, potentially leading others down the pathway of doubt and disbelief. It is then that the Spirit moves among Christ’s people, raising someone up to offer that word of explanation which is rooted in confident faith and joyful hope. Peter was that person on the first Pentecost, and led by the Spirit, he testifies that what had just occurred was not some drunken babbling,

but a direct fulfillment of God's promise through the prophet Joel (Joel 2:28-32): **"I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh... And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved."** Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved – not just a select few; not just those who look like us; not people who meet our criteria and standards, but *everyone who calls on the name of the Lord*. Pentecost manifests the wideness of God's desire that all peoples, nations, tribes, and languages come to the knowledge and truth of salvation in Jesus Christ. No one is to be excluded or left out. So if this is God's clear desire, who are we to put up any obstacle, barrier, or impediment to those who do not yet know the Lord Jesus? If anything, we all ought to be amazed and astonished that God's grace and mercy extends to all and includes even you and me. And being thankful that God's salvation in Jesus extends even to sinners like you and me, we must be ready to stand up and say what needs to be said by the power of the Holy Spirit. We must, like Peter on that first Pentecost, always be ready to give testimony to the hope that is within us, doing this with gentleness and respect (1 Peter 3:15).

Sometimes in life – maybe oftentimes – we make things harder than they have to be. I think this is definitely true when it comes to the Person and work of the Holy Spirit. As Lutheran Christians, we are far more comfortable with the Second Article of the Creed, which is all about Jesus. All these tongues of fire and speaking in other languages makes mild-mannered Lutherans rather nervous. But the truth is this: the purpose of the Holy Spirit is to lead us to Jesus and all that He has done for us through his life of service, his innocent suffering and death, his glorious resurrection from the dead, and his ascension into heaven. It is through what Jesus has done for us that we have forgiveness of sins, life and salvation. If we're only in a state of being amazed and astonished, and that doesn't translate into faith and trust, then we still have work to do – or rather, I should say, the Holy Spirit still has work to do! At the end of the day, it is the Holy Spirit who will convict us of sin, lead us to repentance, and turn our hearts to faith and trust in Jesus. This is why that word of explanation, like what Peter did on the first Pentecost, is so necessary; so that people who find themselves amazed and astonished don't remain in a state of uncertainty. That's where you and I come in as we strive to join Jesus on his mission in daily life. As we get to know people in our neighborhoods, in our places of work, in the places where we go for coffee or work out, we may find that there are folks who for a variety of reasons are amazed or astonished at things going on in their lives. They are struggling to figure all of this out. You and I may be the ones whom God has called, like He did with Peter at Pentecost, to speak that word of explanation and help connect the dots – the dots of faith – for them. As we live out those five mission practices of seeking the kingdom, hearing from Jesus, talking with and listening to people, discovering what good we can do around here, and ministering through prayer, it is the Holy Spirit who is leading and guiding all of this, opening doors of opportunity.

On this Day of Pentecost, as well as every day, may we continue to be amazed and astonished, as well as grateful and joyful, at what the Holy Spirit is doing in our lives and in the Church here and throughout the world. "Come, Holy Spirit, come, and fill the hearts of your faithful people with the fire of your love. Amen."