

Pentecost – 2018

"God's Great Gift of Clarity"

Text: John 16:12-16

*"Thou holy Light, Guide Divine,
Oh, cause the Word of Life to shine!
Teach us to know our God aright
And call Him Father with delight.
From every error keep us free;
Let none but Christ our Master be
That we in living faith abide,
In Him, our Lord, with all our might confide. Hallelujah!" (TLH 224)*

Dear Fellow Christians:

Huh. Cloudy. As usual. In fact it seems like the clouds never leave – that they've always been here. Thinking back, it's hard – no, make that *impossible* – to think of a time when it wasn't cloudy, overcast, foggy. Hard to remember back to a time when we enjoyed unlimited visibility. How we long for things to clear up. How we yearn for our view of what we know is out there to be unlimited and unhindered, and to have the unfiltered, unrestricted light pour down upon us. Yet the clouds never seem to part, and the fog never seems to lift.

By now some of you are probably glancing out the window and wondering if the preacher has lost all of the wind out of his topsail. We did have a couple of cloudy days this week, but we're still in a *drought*. We would actually love to see a few more days of clouds and rain, so what, pray tell Pastor, are you talking about?

This morning we're not talking about something as fickle and transient as the weather, but about the great Christian event that is Pentecost, and the ongoing gift that our God gave to his Church.

Therefore to gain a sense of the priceless gift that we were all given on this day, read the opening paragraph again, but this time hear those words metaphorically - as the thoughts of Christ's closest companions prior to the arrival of the gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

Having done that, we are ready for the text that will form the basis of our meditation this morning. Those verbally inspired words from our God are found in John's Gospel, the 16th Chapter:

^{ESV} **John 16:12-16** *"I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. ¹³ When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. ¹⁴ He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. ¹⁵ All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you. ¹⁶ ¶ "A little while, and you will see me no longer; and again a little while, and you will see me."*

These are the very words of our Savior God. How meaningless, how pointless our lives would be without these live-giving words, and how meaningless these words without the gift of the Holy Spirit poured out at Pentecost. With confidence that that same Holy Spirit is still working powerfully among us and in us through these divine words, so we pray, **"Sanctify us by your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth."** Amen.

Lots of special occasions this time of year. Weddings, graduations, anniversaries, birthday celebrations – you name it. With so many "gift giving opportunities" we routinely find ourselves searching for the perfect present that will bring ongoing meaning and joy to the recipient, preferably without bankrupting the giver. What we are all looking for is that elusive "gift that keeps on giving."

On a much higher, miraculous level, Pentecost is like that. It is that rare gift that not only excites at reception; it continues to bless the recipient every single day thereafter.

Not everyone thinks that way, of course. Pentecost certainly has its detractors. In fact the worst offenders are often those who claim to place the greatest emphasis on this event. Interestingly enough those who profess to be all about Pentecost are, in reality, usually all about the lesser aspects of this day. In other words, they emphasize the outward demonstrations or manifestations of the Holy Spirit, often to the exclusion of the far greater gift. How like man to marvel at the speaking of a foreign language while ignoring the actual words that are being spoken.

Think of it this way: speaking in tongues or languages was to Pentecost what the wrapping paper is to a present. Know anyone who keeps the wrapping paper and throws away the gift? Me neither, except that's exactly what many Christians do with Pentecost. The greatest gift on this day was the outpouring of spiritual wisdom and

understanding. The "wrapping paper" (that which accompanied and identified the giving of the greater gift) was the miraculous speaking in foreign languages or "tongues" that was also evident on Pentecost. As far as you and I ought to be concerned, we want the gift, not the wrapping paper.

The heart of Pentecost was the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and with that gift came that which had eluded even Christ's closest friends and disciples – a parting of the clouds and a lifting of the fog that had so limited their vision and understanding. In its place there came a clarity that must have been truly remarkable. This dramatically enhanced understanding of spiritual truths is hard for Christians today to comprehend because most of us take it for granted. Most here have, after all, enjoyed such insight and understanding for as long as you can remember. Most couldn't remember back to a time when they *didn't* get it. Yet that's the stuff that ingratitude is made of – when we've enjoyed a priceless gift for so long that we no longer recognize its value and worth.

Think of it in terms of the gift of sight. How often do you wake from your nightly slumber, open your eyes, and gasp with amazement at your own ability to *see* the world all around you? Pretty much never. Why? Not because that particular gift isn't spectacular, which it is, but because you've *always* been able to see. Yet the gift of sight is no less amazing for our lack of appreciation. Imagine how different it was for those who, though born blind, were one day given the gift of sight by Jesus. Imagine the wonder at the colors, shadows, and lighting. Imagine the awe as they beheld clouds for the first time, or the stars, or the face of their own child.

Remember, blind men aren't dead; they just lack the ability to fully comprehend the magnificence of God's creation through the gift of sight. No matter what a blind man could *imagine*, nothing could possibly compare with the real thing when he finally witnessed it for the first time.

Compare that to Pentecost, where we were given not so much sight as insight. Surely the disciples that were gathered in that now historic room on the day of Pentecost were already believers. They had come to know Jesus as their Savior and were therefore heirs of heaven even prior to the events of Pentecost. Yet there were important elements of the Christian faith that they seemed unable to fully grasp. Their minds couldn't seem to penetrate the fog and clouds that had limited their sight and darkened their understanding. There were big gaping holes in their comprehension of even some very basic Christian doctrines. We know, for example, that they seemed unable to accept the idea of a kingdom of

the heart, rather than a kingdom on earth. They had all tried to prevent Jesus from doing what he came to earth to do, which was to offer his sinless life in a sacrificial death to pay mankind's sin debt. There were also deficiencies in their courage and enthusiasm. Time after time they showed themselves to be timid, fearful, and uncertain.

Then came that great outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and it was as though the clouds parted, the sun shone, and suddenly everything was forever different. From that moment on we hear nothing of the Apostles ***"hiding in the upper room for fear of the Jews."*** Instead we see them boldly proclaiming their faith on the street corners and in the market place. Suddenly they no longer seemed confused and saddened by the death of their Lord; they regarded it as the greatest source of comfort and encouragement in their lives. Suddenly they no longer thought in terms of a kingdom on earth; they spent themselves struggling to expand Christ's kingdom or rulership into the hearts of human beings around the world.

No wonder Jesus was so excited about the giving of this great gift while he walked the earth. No wonder he held up the giving of this gift as one of the greatest arguments for rejoicing at his Ascension. You will recall how (just prior to our text) he said, ***"Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you."*** (John 16:7) He then continued in our text: ***"I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now."***

The excitement of Jesus at this gift ought to teach us something. Pentecost truly is a priceless and all-too-easy-to-take-for-granted blessing. While it has always been the Holy Spirit that works faith, the fact that he has been given to God's New Testament Church in such a special way is truly remarkable. Because of that gift, the clouds that would otherwise have darkened our understanding have been parted, lifted, removed. The result is that we are able to regard countless truths that would otherwise have escaped us as true and obvious. We never want to allow the spiritual clarity that we have been given to go unappreciated or to take it for granted.

There is even more to be amazed at here. Once brought to faith, every single child of God becomes another source from which the waters of life flow; that is, every Christian becomes Christ's spokesman and possesses the power to bring the message of forgiveness and life to those still living in spiritual blindness. That gift,

once given, then also then carries to others the clarity and depth of understanding that our Savior promised.

Need more help appreciating Pentecost? Consider this. So many simple truths escaped the disciples prior to Pentecost. Were they believers? Of course. But there was so much that they still missed or lacked. What was even more frustrating or troubling was the fact that what they lacked they were simply unable to "get" – despite the fact that they lived with and learned *directly from the Savior himself* for a full three years. That's exactly why Jesus said what he did: **"Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away,"** and in our text: **"I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now."** Jesus obviously understood that the result of Pentecost would be an immeasurably enhanced understanding and insight into divine truth. It meant his men would finally *get it*.

That is also why you and I ought to be excited still today about Pentecost. The fact that we understand divine truth means that we have also shared in the benefits of this day, and continue to reap the benefits every single day we walk this earth. It means that the Holy Spirit has also been poured out into us. That which is foolishness to the world is not foolishness to us. That which the world dismisses as childish or backward or naïve, we treasure as the height of divine wisdom and truth. What the world demeans as a wandering path to nowhere, you and I – by virtue of the gift given to the Church on this day – rightly treasure as the only path to heaven. Pentecost was the only way that you and I could gain such clarity.

While the world struggles to justify itself and to earn its own passage to God, you and I have been given the faith and wisdom to know that we are saved by faith alone in Jesus Christ, and that while we had no power whatsoever to make up for even one of our sins by "doing good," God has forgiven all because of the good that Jesus did as our Substitute.

Clearly then this is a holiday – and a gift – that we take for granted, but shouldn't. May that same Holy Spirit that was poured out into the Church in full measure at Pentecost provide each of us with the wisdom and sobriety to treasure this day as we ought. What we were given on this day is, in every respect, truly amazing and absolutely vital. Amen.

Scripture Readings

^{ESV} **Genesis 11:1-9** Now the whole earth had one language and the same words. ² And as people migrated from the east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. ³ And they said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly." And they had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar. ⁴ Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth." ⁵ And the LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of man had built. ⁶ And the LORD said, "Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language, and this is only the beginning of what they will do. And nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. ⁷ Come, let us go down and there confuse their language, so that they may not understand one another's speech." ⁸ So the LORD dispersed them from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city. ⁹ Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of all the earth. And from there the LORD dispersed them over the face of all the earth.

^{ESV} **Acts 2:1-6** When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. ² And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. ³ And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. ⁴ And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. ⁵ ¶ Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. ⁶ And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language.

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Pentecost Sunday – May 20, 2018

The Opening Hymn – 224 (Red Hymnal)

"Come, Holy Ghost, God and Lord"

The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (Brown Hymnal)

The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

The First Lesson: (Genesis 11:1-9) Mankind sinned against God's command to "fill and subdue the earth" by attempting to build one grand, central city around the Tower of Babel. God frustrated this sin by confusing the languages of man. This set the stage for one of the elements of the event we celebrate on this day (Pentecost) and the gift of tongues or languages.

Psalms 51 (Supplement page 31)

The Gospel Lesson: (Acts 2:1-6) This is the account of Pentecost. Remember that speaking in different languages was not the great gift given on this day; it was an outward manifestation or proof of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on God's Church in the New Testament era. The gift of languages allowed people from all over the world to hear and understand the message of the gospel.

The Confession of Faith -

Nicene Creed – (Supplement page 5)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 226 (Verses 1-6) (Red Hymnal)

"Come, Oh Come, Thou Quickening Spirit"

The Sermon – John 16:12-16 (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

"Pentecost – God's Great Gift of Clarity"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Prayers

The Pre-Communion Hymn – 225 (Red Hymnal)

"Come, Holy Spirit, Come"

The Preparation for Holy Communion (Brown Hymnal page 17)

The Distribution

The Nunc Dimittis and Thanksgiving (Brown Hymnal page 20)

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn – 226 (Verses 7-9) (Red Hymnal)

"Come, Oh Come, Thou Quickening Spirit"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors worshipping with us this morning and invite you to join us each Sunday at this time. We are glad you are here! **To our Visitors seeking an altar at which to commune** – Since we desire to follow the words of our Savior, we practice "Close Communion" – a practice that is not new to confessional Lutherans. This practice stresses both our concern for others, not wanting them to receive the sacrament to their harm (1 Cor. 11:27-30) and the importance of unity in confession and faith (1 Cor. 10:16-17). For this reason we ask that anyone who has not established this unity through membership in a CLC congregation please first meet with the pastor to discuss this Scriptural doctrine before communing. This is a practice that we follow out of love and concern for you, and out of obedience to God's Word.

Attendance - Sunday (32) Average (41)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service w/ Holy Communion
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship and coffee time
Wednesday	-7:00 p.m.	– Midweek Bible Study
Next Sunday	-10:00 a.m.	– Sunday Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship and coffee time

CLC News – Luther Memorial of Fond du Lac, WI has called Pastor Mark Tiefel. Berea of Inver Grove Heights, MN has called Pastor Caleb Schaller. Teacher Ted Quade has returned the call to Faith of Markesan. Redeemer of Cheyenne has called Teacher Ann Sprengeler. St. John's of Okabena has called Teacher Nathan Wales.

Summer Schedule – A reminder that we are now in our summer schedule through Labor Day. The final midweek Bible Study is this Wednesday.

Church Council Notes – The Council met on May 15. Outgoing Treasurer McEnroe reported April offerings were \$3,155 less than budgeted needs. The new mower has been purchased and is working well. Two new sprinkler lines were run and kitchen cabinet/microwave project is complete. The utility shed will need some new siding this summer. A sign for the offering box has been ordered. It appears we have sufficient housing arranged for the upcoming WCDC. Phil Pfennig and Sam Meyer will represent St Paul (but will have to find their own housing). All members are encouraged to sit in on as many Delegate Conference sessions as possible, as well as the joint worship service on June 30. Communion will be offered in June on the 3rd (Confirmation Sunday) and the 17th (moved from the 24th due to Convention). The next Council meeting is scheduled for June 10.

Lutheran Spokesman – It is time to renew our annual subscriptions to the Lutheran Spokesman. Renewals are \$10, new subscriptions are \$5.