

**SERMON FOR MORNING PRAYER
Pentecost, commonly called Whitsunday¹**

Lessons:

The First Lesson:² Here beginneth the twenty-eighth Verse of the second Chapter of Joel.³

“And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions: And also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my spirit. And I will shew [SHOW] wonders in the heavens and in the earth, blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and the terrible day of the LORD come. And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the LORD shall be delivered: for in mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance, as the LORD hath said, and in the remnant whom the LORD shall call.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson:⁴ Here beginneth the second Chapter of the Acts of the Apostles.⁵

“When the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven. Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language. And they

² *Psalms and Lessons for the Christian Year* (1943), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxiv (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

³ Joel 2:28-end (KJV).

⁴ “Upon any Sunday or Holy Day, the Minister may read the Epistle or the Gospel of the Day in place of the Second Lesson at Morning or Evening Prayer.” *Concerning the Service of the Church*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER viii (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

⁵ Acts 2:1-11 (KJV).

⁶ Acts 2:1-8 (KJV).

⁷ Genesis 11:9 (KJV).

⁸ St. Mark 16:17 (KJV).

⁹ I Corinthians 12:10 (KJV).

¹⁰ I Corinthians 12:30 (KJV).

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were all amazed and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galilæans? And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born? Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites [**EE-lumb-ights**], and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judaea, and Cappadocia [**kap-pa-DOE-she-uh**], in Pontus, and Asia, Phrygia [**FRIDGE-ee-uh**], and Pamphylia [**pam-FILL-ee-uh**], in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene [**sigh-REE-knee**], and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes, Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Lesson for the Epistle: “*When the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven. Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language. And they were all amazed and marveled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galilæans? And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born?*”⁶ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Homily:

Last week we heard of our Lord’s command to His disciples to go to every place on earth to spread the word of God. The disciples surely wondered how they could achieve such a thing. Where would they find the words, the inspiration, and

understand and interpret tongues, according to St. Paul, who notes that to one may be granted “*the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues.*”⁹

Also, as Paul asks us, “*Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?*”¹⁰ Each person has different gifts given them by the Holy Spirit, and each has a different calling to perform. The gift of tongues was particularly appropriate for the Apostles, who would be called on to carry the Gospel throughout the world – to peoples of many tongues across the world.

Their charge extends down to us today. Just as they were called on to spread the Gospel, so too are we. The words, the inspiration and the wisdom still come from the Holy Spirit. As the Spirit gave to the Apostles the gift of tongues, the same Spirit gives to us the words to speak today.

Let us pray.

O Holy Spirit, continue to bless us each with the ability to spread to our fellows the glorious word of the Gospels. Give us the words, the wisdom and the inspiration to carry to the world the truth of Jesus Christ and His mighty resurrection, salvation and ascension. As you came to the gathered disciples on Pentecost so many years ago, come to us when we gather today. This we ask in Jesus’ Holy Name. Amen.

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The Rev. Mr. Larry Wagoner, MSW¹¹
Sunday, May 27, 2012

¹ This sermon was originally written on the Lesson for the Epistle at Mass on Whitsunday, 2012.

the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.” They spoke with the charge of the Holy Spirit, proclaiming the Gospel and the Lord Jesus Christ.

As word of this got around in Jerusalem, people came by to see what was this new thing the Apostles were doing. They had heard of these men, followers of Jesus Christ, who were suddenly able to speak to people in languages those speakers could not have known. And so many of these learned Jews in Jerusalem came to see if the reports might be true, *“And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven. Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language.”*

A remarkable thing, indeed. The Apostles, Galileans—that is, native speakers of Aramaic—speaking in a multitude of languages to which they had never been exposed. And not just babbling, but instead speaking with wisdom and insight into the Gospel of Jesus Christ. They spoke, St. Paul says, *“as the Spirit gave them utterance.”* They did not speak of their own thoughts, but of the works of God. They had become the ministers who could deliver the Gospel to the uttermost parts of the earth.

Those who came to hear them were amazed at what they heard. *“Behold, are not all these which speak Galilæans? And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born? Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judaea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia, Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes, Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God.”*

The gift of tongues is one of many provided by the Holy Spirit to the people of God. The gifts are many, but not everyone receives the same gifts. Indeed, some may receive the ability to speak in tongues, while another may receive the ability to

the wisdom to convert people from all over the world and from many backgrounds to faith in Jesus Christ? How could they speak to others when people from other places spoke different languages? Today we read of our Lord giving to the disciples the tools to do what He asks.

On the Day of Pentecost, or the “fiftieth day” after Our Lord’s Resurrection, as the Apostles sat together, the Holy Spirit came to them with *“a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind,”* which filled the house and surrounded them. This was only ten days after the Ascension, when Jesus had promised He would send the Holy Spirit to act as a Comforter and to give them power to fulfill His commands that they take the Gospel *“unto the uttermost parts of the world.”*

This passage contains an inadvertent pun and to understand it in its fullness, we need to be aware of that pun. Acts, like the rest of the New Testament, was written in Greek and Greek shares a peculiarity with the Hebrew of the Old Testament. That is, in each of those languages, there is one word that has two simultaneous and different meanings, one word that we would translate into English as “breath”, or “wind”, or “spirit”. In Greek this word is *pneuma* [NEW-mah] and in Hebrew it is *ruach* [RUE-ach]. So our passage here could just as properly be translated to say *“a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty spirit”*. With these dual meanings of *pneuma*, the breath or the wind is a natural metaphor for the spirit, one that constantly reminds us that the breath is the very essence of physical life, just as the spirit is the very essence of non-physical life. To stop a being’s breath is to stop its living.

As Jesus had promised before His Ascension, He sent the Holy Spirit to comfort the Apostles and to grant them power and abilities to complete the tasks He had assigned them. As the Holy Spirit settled on each of them, they were *“filled with the Holy Ghost.”* Among the powers granted to the Apostles by the Holy Ghost was the ability to speak in languages they did not previously know.

“And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them,” Paul states. These “tongues of fire” represented the tongues with which they would be endowed to give them the ability to communicate with others who did not speak their own language.

It is said that Pentecost marks the birth of the Church, because it is from Pentecost that the Apostles go forth to establish the Church beyond the small group who personally experienced the ministry of Christ and deliver Our Lord’s message to a wider audience who did not see or hear the words of our Lord at first hand. From the Pentecost on, the Apostles would be involved in the business of growing and building the Church. Starting in Jerusalem, then moving outward, they were carrying out the charge of Jesus Christ to convert the world. To do this, they relied on the miracle of the power of the Holy Spirit given to them.

This miracle was extended to them from heaven. Our Lord had already ascended, and as He promised, He sent the Holy Spirit to the disciples. The Holy Spirit sanctified, inspired and empowered the disciples by the provision of many gifts. The gifts brought by the Holy Spirit, and the power the Holy Spirit granted to each, came from heaven.

Just as the Church would in time grow to encompass the entire world, so the rushing wind of the Holy Spirit encompassed the whole house where the disciples were—and also served as a symbol for the way that “wind” or “spirit” would fill the entire “Household of the Faith”, the world-wide Church. As our Lord had given the Apostles His commission to go out to the entire world, He now gave them the power and ability to accomplish that task. Without that power, that inspiration, and those gifts, they would have been unable to carry the Gospel to the world; with those gifts, the Gospel spread throughout the Roman world in just one generation.

On that first Pentecost, the disciples received the amazing ability to speak to others in the languages of their hearers. They could now bring the message throughout the world, regardless of the language spoken by their hearers. The power to speak in the language of the hearer is the power to touch the heart. When the heart is touched by the words spoken, then the message given can be freely and fully received.

This is the miracle of tongues. Speaking in tongues is not some simplistic babble that no one understands. It is not gibberish without meaning. Instead it is the Word of God conveyed to each listener in the language the listener understands. The Apostles were given the ability to speak to others in their own languages – which they understood. If someone who was listening was Greek, then they heard the message in Greek. If they were from Cyprus, they heard the Gospel message in Cypriot. Each person hears the message in his own native tongue.

Speaking in tongues is the promotion of communication and the reversal of the act of the Father reported in Genesis, where at the City of Babel, *“the LORD confused the language of all the earth; and from there the LORD scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth.”*⁷ At Babel, the Father spread the peoples across the earth, and in Isaiah decided, *“For I know their works and their thoughts, and I am coming to gather all nations and tongues; and they shall come and shall see my glory.”*

Later, St. Mark would report the words of Jesus as He predicted the very miracle exhibited at Pentecost: *“And these signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues.”*⁸ Believers in the Lord would cast out demons because they believe in Him. They would speak in new tongues to carry His word to the world because they believe in Him.

So now at Pentecost, the Apostles were given the gift, and began to show the new talent, *“And they were all filled with*