Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Easter and Ascension all revolve around the life and work of Jesus Christ. We rightfully observe them because of what they tell us about our Lord and what they mean to us personally. But without Pentecost - or perhaps more accurately - without the One who is center stage on this day, all the other church festivals and holidays would mean little to us.

Let me put it this way: Just as a body without breath is a corpse, in the same way the church without the Holy Spirit is dead. As it relates to us individually, without the work of the Holy Spirit our lives and our outlook on life would be quite a bit different.

Today, as we review the historic account of the first Pentecost, we have the opportunity to consider the wonderful work of the Holy Spirit. So let’s talk about THE SPIRIT OF PENTECOST - with a capital “S” and with a small “s”.

Our text is quite lengthy so we will have to limit ourselves to working through it in highlights and broad strokes.

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. We think of Pentecost as being 50 days after Easter, but we should note that the Christian Church has essentially lifted this name from what was originally an Old Testament harvest festival with that same name celebrated 50 days after Passover. It was one of three main religious festivals observed by the Jewish people and explains why there were so many Jews from different backgrounds and national origins in Jerusalem at that time.

Jesus’ disciples were also in Jerusalem because that is where Jesus had told them to stay until they would be clothed with power from on high. Having been told previously by their Lord that something special would soon happen, we find them gathered together waiting for the arrival of the promised Holy Spirit. And when he came, there was no mistaking it.

First, he came with an audible sign - a sound like the rushing of a violent wind. We know all about tornadoes and hurricanes from pictures and news accounts. The sound of a mighty wind is the sound of power. Besides being highly symbolic, this sign also served the practical purpose of bringing the masses to the disciples gathering place.

Next, the Spirit came with a visible sign. They saw divided tongues that were like fire resting on each one of them. Here we see the fulfillment of a something John the Baptist said even before Jesus entered his public ministry. When asked if he was the Messiah whom they were waiting for, John replied: I baptize you with water. But one who is more powerful than I will come, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

Why fire? One possible explanation is that fire illuminates and purifies. That pretty well describes the work of the Holy Spirit. Let’s digress for just a moment and explore that.

He first of all illuminates our thinking. Those in our world who deny God or have no use for him are left to draw the rather depressing conclusion that human beings are simply the products of random chance. If there is no Creator or no bigger plan involved, then each life is essentially an unplanned cosmic accident. There is no big picture.

The Holy Spirit, working through the Word, lets us know that there is indeed a big picture and how we fit into it. He brings us to an understanding that God is the one who created us, but that we have fallen short of his just and rightful demands. But rather than punishing us for our disobedience, he came up with an alternate plan.
That plan was Jesus Christ. He successfully lived the perfect life we were asked to live, then voluntarily died the death we deserved to die. This perfectly righteous life and death which wholly satisfies our just and perfect God is then transferred to the acct of any and all who look to Jesus as their Savior. Through trusting in his work, we are purified. The illumination of our minds and purification of our souls is symbolized in the fire of Pentecost.

Thirdly, the Holy Spirit showed his presence in a combined auditory and visual sign. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, since the Spirit was giving them the ability to speak fluently. Wherever there is faith, there is evidence of the Holy Spirit, but on Pentecost the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples in a fuller and richer measure than before and enabled them to do miraculous things, such as speaking in other languages.

As we can imagine, this caused quite a stir as well as considerable amazement among the crowd. Our text tells us that people from no less than 15 different countries, all with different languages, heard the followers of Jesus declaring in their own languages the wonderful works of God.

Here we see the universal scope God intends for the Gospel message. The message of Jesus Christ is no one nation’s exclusive property. It is for all the world - for every nation, tribe, language, and people. As it was brought to us, so we are to bring it to others through mission work at home and abroad and through-out a world which is becoming more and more of a global community.

Nevertheless, although this was clearly a miraculous event, there still were, and always will be, those who scoff at and reject God regardless of the evidence. Pentecost was no exception: But others mocked them and said, They are full of new wine.

Using that as the lead in, Peter follows with his Pentecost sermon. He explains to the bewildered crowd what was going on and how God was at work fulfilling Old Testament prophecies, and that the last days - meaning the time between the first and second coming of Christ - are now upon us. He talks about how God will use all his people - young and old, male and female - to live and proclaim the Gospel message so that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

So in broad strokes, manifesting himself through images of power and purity and universality, we see the Spirit of Pentecost at work 50 days after Easter.

Let’s now turn our attention from the Spirit (spelled with a capital “S”) of Pentecost to the spirit (spelled with a small “s”) of Pentecost. We will do this by examining the attitude – or spirit - the Holy Spirit produced in the hearts of Jesus’ disciples on that first Pentecost - and which he continues to work in the hearts of his modern disciples. We see in the disciples a spirit of peace, confidence, and boldness.

The truth is, without Christ there can be no peace. Certainly there can be peacefulness in the sense of the absence of conflict or the attainment of a certain lifestyle that means you do not have to worry about certain things - like having enough money to live on, etc. That kind of peacefulness is open to anyone, Christian or non-Christian alike.

But true inner peace - the knowledge that we are part of a plan and that we are loved and cared for and forgiven and in a right relationship with God now and forever - that kind of peace only comes through Christ. Let me try to illustrate this with a real life example.

The name Augustine is probably familiar to some of you. He is one of the most famous historic and religious figures in the early centuries of Western civilization. He had a great impact not only on the church but also on the world in which he lived. He was a brilliant man and grew up with a devout Christian mother. But did you know he was not always a Christian?

He was exceptional already as a youth and at the age of 17 struck out on his own in
search of truth. Along the way he dabbled in many things, got involved in a religious philosophy called Manichaeism that catered to the deep thinkers of the day, took up with a mistress, fathered a child without the benefit of marriage, and generally did what he wanted to do.

But in an intellectual lifestyle, he found no peace. In an immoral lifestyle, he found no peace. Finally he found it. Where? Listen to the opening paragraphs of his autobiography: You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you.

When the Holy Spirit illuminates our thinking so that we see ourselves for who we are - sinful human beings unable to perform our way into a right relationship with God - and when we see Jesus for who and what he is - the one who restored that relationship with God through his doing, dying and rising - the result is peace.

And peace leads to confidence. Because we know our greatest need has been met in Christ, we can be confident that God will meet every other (lesser) need as well. That, too, is the work of the Holy Spirit, who continually strengthens us through Word and Sacrament.

It is the confidence of knowing that whatever our present circumstances might be and no matter how many clouds are on the horizon for us personally, we live out our lives under the umbrella of Romans 8:28: We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

It is the confidence of not just believing in God, but believing God when he assures us that he will never leave us or forsake us or that he will never allow us to undergo testing or hardships beyond what we, with his help, can endure.

It is the confidence of knowing that even when he leads us down paths we would not have chosen for ourselves, the rivers and waters and fires of adversity will never sweep over us because he simply will no let that happen.

It is the confidence of knowing that when Satan drudges up our past sins and indiscretions, we know as far as the east is from the west so far has he removed our transgressions from us. In other words, in the eyes of God they are no more.

And confidence leads to boldness and gratefulness in living our lives for Christ. Even in difficult situations.

Certainly we see this progression in the disciples. If you read through the rest of the Book of Acts you will discover how the disciples at various points in their lives would be persecuted, imprisoned, vilified and eventually martyred. What kept them going? The understanding that they had a message and a reason for living and an allegiance to Jesus Christ that was worth it.

Peace, confidence, boldness – that is the Spirit produced spirit of Pentecost. And all that is ours. May God continue to fill each of us with the Spirit of Pentecost so that we may enjoy and display the spirit of Pentecost in our lives. Amen.

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