

## Pentecost Sunday

**Sermon Text:** Acts 2:1-21

**Theme:** “*Holy Spirit – Delivering Salvation*”

Grace, peace and mercy to you from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Today we join together with the whole Christian Church as we celebrate Pentecost – the coming of the Holy Spirit. It may surprise some to hear that Pentecost has its origins in the Old Testament history of the Israelites. Prior to leading his people out of Egypt, the Lord gave instructions as to how the Israelites were to celebrate the Passover on the night when he struck down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt. Fifty days later, their journey through the wilderness brought them to Mt Sinai. Here God gave them the Law through Moses, and here they were commanded to annually observe this event of the Law being given to God’s people. So ‘Pentecost’ means fiftieth day and has its origins with the giving of God’s Law to his people.

So it is fitting against this background to consider the Christian understanding of Pentecost over and against its original purpose for the Jews. This will help us to see the work of the Holy Spirit as he delivers the salvation Jesus Christ won for all people on the cross.

Heavenly Father, sanctify us in the truth, your Word is truth. Amen.

### **The Work of the Old Testament Law**

The Israelites celebrated Pentecost as the coming of God’s Law but it is ours to celebrate as the coming of the Holy Spirit. The Law was written on tablets of stone and the responsibility lay with the Israelites to keep the laws that were given. We call these the Ten Commandments. The aim of the Law was for God’s people who were tainted with the guilt of original sin, as were all people, to be able to live in the presence of God who is perfectly good. The Law was given as a *gift* to God’s people.

The problem was that no matter how hard they tried, the written Law dictated what was to be done and human nature then is conscious of obeying through obligation rather than natural desire. Instead of receiving the Law as a gift, human nature received it in fear of punishment if the wrong thing is done. Because of the punishment people fear, they soon became enemies of God, they recognised they were sinners and unworthy to stand before him.

As this was true for the Israelites, it remains true for us today. The Law, so long as it is only words that describe what must be done to please God, will never make anyone righteous before God. The work of the Law then remains to convict us of our sins and to reveal to sinful people that we are in need of a saviour, one who stands in our place, making us right with God.

### **The work of the Holy Spirit**

Luke writes in his history of the early church given to us in the book of Acts, “When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a might rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance” (Acts 2:1-4). Here we have the Holy Spirit pouring into their hearts, making them different people. From trying to earn God’s blessing by being obedience to the written Law, they transformed into people who loved and willingly obeyed God.

No longer was God’s Law written on stone tablets, written to be an external burden that was to be carried by the people of God. The Holy Spirit has written God’s Law on our hearts so the Law isn’t something we do to please God but instead is something that is deep inside us and now wells up out of us, out of our hearts. The work of the Holy Spirit fills our hearts with the light of Christ, and it is this light that we now shine into the lives of one another and into the lives of others around us.

Remember that on the first Pentecost after Christ’s death, resurrection and ascension, the disciples were still waiting together in a little ‘holy huddle’. Certainly Jesus’ appearance after his resurrection would have calmed their nerves and their fear. The recurring words Jesus brought to his disciples were, “Peace be with you.” But now the disciples were waiting as Jesus had instructed them to, not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father. Whilst the disciples were encouraged when Jesus was with them, we heard in the gospels how time and again, they would make blunders whenever they were left to their own devices.

Surely Peter is the best example of wanting to do the right thing, but always seeming to muck things up. Jesus, knowing the limitations of people, even, maybe especially those who love him, told the disciples to stay put until the Holy Spirit came, as promised by his Heavenly Father.

As truly human, Jesus could not remain here on earth to rule over all creation. Like any person, Jesus was restricted by the human limitations of time and space. He simply could not be in all places and at all times so it was necessary for him to ascend into heaven. But rather than leave us to our own efforts and energy, God's promise was to send a 'helper' and paraclete or better understood as one who stands beside you, guiding and helping you as you live out God's Law which is now written on your heart.

Luther preached one Pentecost that, "It is not enough that Christ be preached; the Word must be believed. Therefore, God sends the Holy Spirit to impress the preaching upon the heart." The faith that is created by the Spirit coming through God's Word is brought to individual people. No one person's faith can save anyone else. A parent's faith does not write God's Law on a child's heart. A faithful husband or wife, does not put God's Law into the heart of their loved one. This is the work of the Holy Spirit.

In our confirmation classes we talk about Jesus dying on the cross to save all people from their sins but as you have heard, this crucifixion took place in Jerusalem about 2000 years ago. For a teenager living in Cairns in 2009, the crucifixion may as we have been on Mars, so remote is it for them to imagine. But when we understand that it is the Holy Spirit who delivers this salvation and He works through God's Word connected with the water of baptism, then we can understand how this all connects with each one of us individually.

Then as we grow in faith and understanding we are blessed to receive the Lord's Supper which again brings us nourishment for our Christian journey. Our human nature wants to still walk away from God, to try and remain the masters of our own destiny. But again the Holy Spirit is working within us to bring us back to God's Word and to his saving grace which comes to us through his holy meal. Once more we are feed with the bread of life and we receive God's forgiveness as we live as his Christian people.

### **The work of the believing heart**

Our natural heart is to trust in ourselves, trust in our bank account, trust in the goodwill or nature of people around us to do the right thing. Whenever we have a disaster of any magnitude, we hear the media fawning over the goodwill of volunteers or those give money to help others out. This is a wonderful gesture, but we also hear of the other side of human nature which loots, which steals money generously given, or we hear of volunteers and emergency workers who also get caught out doing the wrong thing. Human nature can be a fickle thing to put ones trust in. As we have seen in the past year, a person's financial wealth is also something that can easily be taken away. And even if they die with great wealth – they still die, just the same as the poorest person.

As faithful Christian people, you are called by the Holy Spirit, not to put your trust in such worldly things, but to put your trust in God alone. Trusting in God means no longer fearing being thrown into hell but believing that God loves you and he is gracious and forgiving towards you. Now your hearts are filled with joy and confidence in God's grace and mercy and you can truly reach out in love towards others, not because you must, but because you can.

The disciples were told to wait until the gift of the Holy Spirit came to them before leaving Jerusalem. But once God's helper did come, the disciples didn't remain safe and secure in the one place. With boldness and confidence in God's Word, they took this good news from Jerusalem, to Judea, to Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. You are inheritors of this good news and the Holy Spirit fills you with his same power and love for God and for people which empowers you to share this with the world around you.

And the may the peace of God which passes all understanding keep guard over your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.