

Pentecost Sunday & Mother's Day
May 11, 2008

St. Mark Lutheran Church
Pastor Alan Wolkenhauer

Acts 2:1-21 When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. {2} And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. {3} Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. {4} All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability. {5} Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. {6} And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. {7} Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? {8} And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? {9} Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, {10} Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, {11} Cretans and Arabs--in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power." {12} All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" {13} But others sneered and said, "They are filled with new wine." {14} But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, "Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. {15} Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. {16} No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel: {17} 'In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. {18} Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy. {19} And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist. {20} The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day. {21} Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'

Filled with the Holy Spirit

Those first Christian believers who we read about in Acts sure had a tremendous Pentecost experience! Imagine the power of the Holy Spirit they witnessed that day: the room where Jesus' followers were gathered was suddenly filled with the noise of a violent wind; the sound of conversation, song and prayer was abruptly drowned out by a rushing sound from heaven. After the wind filled the room, tongues of fire rested above the believers' heads; it was then that the followers of Jesus began to speak in every language under heaven – no one was present in that

great city of Jerusalem who did not hear the gospel in their own native tongue. What a marvelous experience for those who were there when the Holy Spirit first came at Pentecost!

There are times when we long to experience the Spirit of God in such remarkable ways. There are times when we wish God would catch us off guard and interrupt whatever we're doing with the sound of a rushing wind – a deafening noise that leaves no doubt that it comes from heaven. There are days when we wish we could be filled with the power and certainty of those first disciples, knowing the Spirit's guidance and direction for our lives. Sometimes we long to hear the Spirit of God.

What we are given to hear are the voices of God's people. We hear words of wisdom and faith from older believers who have experienced God's faithfulness through good times and bad and who face their closing years of this life with the dream and the hope of eternal life in heaven. We hear the voices of Christian friends and relatives who listen to us and pray with us when we long for God's guidance in tough decisions we must make. We hear the voices of other members of the church sharing the peace of God with us – a peace that grants the forgiveness and acceptance we so often long for, but so seldom hear. We hear the voices of our young people, who see visions of a better tomorrow and who try to

follow God's Spirit as their Lord directs their paths in Christ's service. We hear the voices of children – crying, laughing, singing, playing. And on this Mother's Day, we remember that God's Spirit often speaks to us in our families – through our mothers and through others who, like good mothers, care for us with tender love. We long to hear the Spirit of God and we are given the voices of one another. It is the sound of God's own Spirit, speaking the Gospel to us in our own language, in a way that we will understand.

Sometimes when we're gathered together like those first Pentecost disciples, we long for some sign to assure us of God's presence. We want to point to something concrete – like the tongues of fire given on that day or the heavenly dove appearing at Jesus' baptism, or the burning bush encountered by Moses. It would be great to hold onto something solid and be able to say, "Look, here's the Holy Spirit." We want to feel God's presence. What we are given to feel are the waters of baptism – waters that have united us with Christ, waters that have joined us to our Savior's death and resurrection. For in these waters and by God's word, the Holy Spirit has been poured out with power on all God's children. In that gift of water and the word, the Spirit has made us all children of God and inheritors of eternal life. We have been filled with the Holy Spirit.

And as God's children, we are blessed to feel the Spirit's presence whenever we share the bread and wine of Holy Communion. As this bread fills your mouth, as you taste the sweetness of this wine, Jesus himself is filling you with his own body and blood. You hear the words, "Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins," and as you receive this gift of life, the Holy Spirit is assuring you of your Lord's eternal presence. Sometimes we long for the assurance that God is with us. In the water and the word, in the bread and the wine, God comes to be with you and to claim you as his forgiven child.

Long ago, the sound of God's own Spirit was heard by the prophet Joel. God promised his prophet, "In the last days, I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh." On Pentecost, that prophecy was fulfilled. Today, that prophecy continues to be fulfilled among God's people: mothers, fathers and caring friends; the old and the young; the rich and the poor; the sick and the well. The breath of God is being breathed into our lives as we pray and sing and celebrate together. The Spirit guides us and empowers us through the voices of our brothers and sisters in Christ. The Spirit gives us forgiveness and hope, acceptance and the promise of eternal life. The Spirit anoints you in the waters of baptism. The Spirit feeds you with the body and blood of Christ.

The writer of Acts describes the Pentecost disciples by saying, “Filled with the Holy Spirit, they began to speak.” Today these words can again be used to describe a group of Jesus’ disciples – a group of believers gathered at St. Mark Lutheran Church in Dunedin on this Pentecost: Filled with the Holy Spirit, they began to speak. The signs of God’s own Spirit can be witnessed all around us. Listen and you will hear. Come to the table and be filled with new wine. Remember your baptism and live as God’s child. Be filled with the Holy Spirit. And, like the first believers, you will be empowered to speak God’s Word. The Spirit that fills you will lift you up and carry your voice, helping you to show others the presence of God’s Holy Spirit. As the Spirit speaks and acts through you, others will know God’s presence in their lives and in the midst of Christ’s people.

God has poured out his Spirit on you. Listen and you will hear. Come and you will receive. Speak and you will show others their Savior. You have been powerfully filled with God’s own Spirit. Amen.