

Mount Olive Lutheran Church
5327 W. Washington Blvd.
Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53208-1798

Pentecost Sunday
May 27, 2007
Acts 2:1-21

"The Spirit of the Nations"
by Pastor Mark E. Wangerin

Introduction

Pentecost is one of the four major festivals of the Christian church. It is interesting that three of those festivals occur in a fifty day span of the year—Easter, Ascension, and Pentecost. This morning we will focus our attention on the miraculous and inspiring account of the events of that first Christian Pentecost as it is recorded in the book of Acts, chapter 2. As we do so we will see that the same Holy Spirit who showed Himself so powerfully on that day is still at work in the church as he continues to reveal himself to us as "THE SPIRIT OF THE NATIONS".

I. A Three-Fold Manifestation

For the disciples of Jesus who had gathered together on that Pentecost day, there was no doubt at all that the promise that Jesus had made to them regarding the Counselor, the Comforter, the Spirit of truth, was being fulfilled. We read in the text: SUDDENLY A SOUND LIKE THE BLOWING OF A VIOLENT WIND CAME FROM HEAVEN AND FILLED THE WHOLE HOUSE WHERE THEY WERE SITTING. THEY SAW WHAT SEEMED TO BE TONGUES OF FIRE THAT SEPARATED AND CAME TO REST ON EACH OF THEM. ALL OF THEM WERE FILLED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT AND BEGAN TO SPEAK IN OTHER TONGUES AS THE SPIRIT ENABLED THEM. All of their physical senses were involved in this unforgettable experience. They may have felt the rush of the wind. They heard the sound which filled the house. They saw the tongues of fire which came to rest on their heads. All of these manifestations of the Holy Spirit came together on that day so there would be no question of what was happening. And then the text relates that they began to speak in other languages. Indeed they must have gone out from the house where they were gathered for the following verses relate that in Jerusalem were staying God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. WHEN THEY HEARD THIS SOUND, A CROWD CAME TOGETHER IN BEWILDERMENT, BECAUSE EACH ONE HEARD THEM SPEAKING IN HIS OWN LANGUAGE. 'ARE NOT ALL THESE MEN WHO ARE SPEAKING GALILEANS? THEN HOW IS IT THAT EACH OF US HEARS THEM IN HIS OWN NATIVE LANGUAGE?

II. The Spirit of the Nations

Here we come face to face with the first great miracle of Pentecost. For the tongues or languages that the disciples were speaking were not gibberish, but they were understandable by the people gathered from so many places in the world. Several commentators have said that what occurred on that day was the reversal of the curse of the Tower of Babel. It is noteworthy that in this years' lessons, the account of the tower of Babel is the Old Testament

reading. For at that time the nations were separated as their speech was divided, so now the Spirit, using the chosen followers of Jesus, speaks in the many tongues of the world of the reconciliation of God in Jesus Christ. The Spirit is truly the Spirit of the nations. And in the following words of the text, we have a listing of some of the nations present on that day. Indeed, it is a sweeping circle that surrounds Jerusalem from northeast to north to west to south and back east again. Parthians, Medes, Elamites, Mesopotamia, Judea, Cappadocia, Pontus, Asia, Phrygia and Pamphilia, Egypt and Libya, visitors from Rome, Cretans and Arabians. Most of these listeners were Jews, others were Gentile converts. But all heard the wonders of God proclaimed in their own tongues. What a marvelous witness to the power of God took place on that day. And as those visitors returned to their homelands, they took the message with them. So it was that when St. Paul wrote his Epistle to the Romans, even before he visited there, there was a thriving congregation in Rome itself. What better way to spread the message than to have the pilgrims to Jerusalem be the witnesses of the Gospel. The Spirit was at work.

Yet there was opposition to the message. Some mocked what was happening. They simply said these people are drunk. They have had too much sweet wine! But Peter the spokesman for the Apostles in the first sermon of the new era, silences them. He says that what is taking place is the fulfillment of the words of the prophet Joel: "In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. ... I will pour out my my Spirit in those days and they will prophesy." Peter quotes the word to them. He says that word is now fulfilled. It is really the announcement of the last days, for the age in which we now live is the last days, before the return of the Lord, before as the prophet Joel reminds us, "the sun is turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord."

What results that sermon had! The Spirit worked mightily and on that day, 3000 came to faith in Jesus Christ through the witness of the disciples and the preaching of Peter.

III. The Spirit at Work Today

And as we consider the work of the Spirit in our day, we are reminded that He is still at work in his word and in the church. He is still witnessing to the nations. We can become so narrow in our thinking. We tend to think of the church in terms only of a local congregation or our area. So much of our energy seems to be directed that way. But thank God that the Spirit is still the Spirit of the nations. On this day, the Gospel of Jesus Christ will be proclaimed in Pidgin in the highlands of New Guinea. It will be preached in Mandarin Chinese in the shadows of the Hall of the People in Beijing. It will be sung in Russian not far from the walls of Red Square in Moscow. And in how many other places will it be spoken--in how many countless tongues. In Berlin, and Paris, and London. In Ghana, Liberia, and Sierra Leone in Africa. In Seoul and Tokyo and Hong Kong. In the great metropolises of the world, in the remotest locations of the wilderness, the Spirit is at work

today. The Bible or portions of it has been translated into over 1800 languages. Some of those languages have been placed in writing for the first time so that the Word of God could be given to those people that they too could hear the wonders of God declared in their own tongues. A recent publication from the Lutheran Bible Translators reported the completion of the translation of the New Testament into the Anufo language in Ghana, West Africa and the Kwanja language in Cameroon, West Africa. The Spirit works today through such organizations as the message of the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ is made known.

It is easy at times to get down about the condition of the world or the state of affairs in our own land. But it is also vitally important that we look and see and hear that the Spirit is powerfully at work in his church. For He is the one who calls, gathers, enlightens and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith. The Spirit is calling through the Word, the invitation is still going out. And we too can be the witnesses.

IV. The Spirit at Work in Us

Finally, the Spirit of the nations is also at work in us. That should also be the affirmation of this Pentecost Sunday. As St. Paul reminds us in his first letter to the Corinthians, "No one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit." The Holy Spirit has called us by the Gospel as well. We, who were spiritually blind and dead and enemies of God have been made alive by the power of the Spirit. What a blessing that week after week we can hear the wonders of God declared and that in worship week by week we can call on the holy and blessed name of the Lord. The Spirit never draws attention to Himself. He witnesses to the saving work of our Savior Jesus Christ. It was Christ who promised His disciples the Spirit. It was the Spirit which emboldened them to proclaim and witness to Christ even in the face of imprisonment and death. For how could they not proclaim the wonders of God?

Pentecost has rightly been called the birthday of the Christian Church. But Pentecost, though a unique event, continues to exercise its influence even to this day. For the growth of the Christian church continues each and every day that people are called by the Gospel and come to faith in their Savior Jesus Christ by the power of the Spirit. The growth of the Christian church continues at every baptism of regeneration performed in the name of the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The growth of the Christian church will continue until the last day, until the last soul has been redeemed. For then the Spirit of the nations will have completed his work.

When it appears that the work of the church is waning, that the hearts of men grow cold, that the interest and dedication to the work of the Lord does not seem to be what it should, pray fervently that the Lord would give us his Holy Spirit, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, of grace and prayer, of power and strength, of sanctification and the fear of God. It is the Lord's church. It is the Spirit's word that enlivens it. It is God's work among us just as he powerfully worked on that first Pentecost day.

O Spirit, who didst once restore
Thy church that it may be again
The bringer of good news to men.
Breathe on Thy cloven church once more
That in these gray and latter days
There may be those whose life is praise
Each life a high doxology,
To Father, Son, and unto Thee.

Amen.