



PENTECOST 2020

By Rev. Will Nelken

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Pentecost is to the Church what Sinai was to the Israelites. Judaism celebrates Pentecost in remembrance of the giving of the Law from Mt. Sinai, during their journey from Egypt to the Promised Land.

God, in His wisdom and irony, chose that very day of celebration—Pentecost—to pour out His Spirit on the Church, delivering us from slavery to rule-keeping into the liberty of the Spirit-led life.

We are revisiting that occasion at such an appropriate time in our lives: the midst of a global pandemic, requiring additional universal rules for health and safety. Many people, including Christians, have groaned under the weight of the shelter-at-home orders, while others have discovered that true freedom is not gained by the absence of law, but by the shedding of rebellion.

The liberty the Holy Spirit gives is not lawlessness; lawlessness is sin. Our liberty is the result of inspiration—the Holy Spirit, whom God has given us, writes God's laws in our hearts; He inspires us to do what the law would require, without the external pressure or the internal guilt for our shortcomings.

Here's the record the first Christian Pentecost in Acts 2:

¹ On the day of Pentecost all the believers were meeting together in one place. ² Suddenly, there was a sound from heaven like the roaring of a mighty windstorm, and it filled the house where they were sitting. ³ Then, what looked like flames or tongues of fire appeared and settled on each of them. ⁴ And everyone present was filled with the Holy Spirit and began speaking in other languages, as the Holy Spirit gave them this ability.

⁵ At that time there were devout Jews from every nation living in Jerusalem. ⁶ When they heard the loud noise, everyone came running, and they were bewildered to hear their own languages being spoken by the believers.

⁷ They were completely amazed. "How can this be?" they exclaimed. "These people are all from Galilee, ⁸ and yet we hear them speaking in our own native languages! ⁹ Here we are—Parthians, Medes, Elamites, people from Mesopotamia, Judea, Cappadocia, Pontus, the province of Asia, ¹⁰ Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt, and the areas of Libya around Cyrene, visitors from Rome ¹¹ (both Jews and converts to Judaism), Cretans, and Arabs. And we all hear these people

speaking in our own languages about the wonderful things God has done!”¹² They stood there amazed and perplexed. “What can this mean?” they asked each other.

As Peter preached to the crowd that day, he spoke forcefully of their violations of the Law and the will of God, and he commanded them to repent, yet with the grace of God given through the Spirit the result was not their shame, but their liberation—their salvation in Christ!

The Acts narrative is so poignant!

First, consider the group of disciples Jesus had hand-picked for this momentous event—fishermen, farmers, a despised tax collector, a militant zealot, disregarded women—some former demon-possessed, others thieves, some thirsty for prestige or power or money—at least 120 of them (people of all stripes and flavors).

Then, consider the crowd that rushed to the scene of the outpouring—Jews from Africa, Europe, and Asia (red and yellow, black and white), who had come to celebrate in Jerusalem. They identified at least 15 languages or dialects, plus their common language of Hebrew.

If Pentecost represents anything, it represents the variety of people God has invited into His Kingdom. His Church is multi-ethnic, multi-national, and multi-lingual! It includes children and adults—adults who are single, married, and divorced—people from all walks of life—poor, rich, feeble, strong, sickly, healthy, illiterate, educated, slaves, and free.

Pentecost represents such unity of humans as only God could imagine and provide. And this is just why we are urged in no uncertain terms to “bend every effort to maintain the unity the Spirit gives in the bond of peace.”

It is not optional; it’s our mandate.

As Pentecostal people—those who have received the baptism with the Spirit from Jesus Christ—we are familiar with the miracle of speaking that began that day: *“They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit enabled them.”* Those languages were first and foremost for communicating with God (speaking to Him on His level, circumventing the limitations of reasoned speech).

But they soon spilled out into the streets, and their conversation shifted toward the crowd that gathered. And then, another miracle took place, for they said, *“We hear them speaking in our own native languages!”*

I don’t know if those who spoke actually spoke in human languages that they had never learned (I know of occasions when that DID happen), or if those who heard simply understood

in their own heart languages (nor does it matter). The end result was the same: communication of God's truth and love at the heart level, in ways that EVERYBODY present—and again, that was all kinds of people—could understand and absorb.

Faith, you see, is a matter of the heart. What you believe in your head cannot take you very far. Head-faith usually withers at the first sign of serious difficulty or pushback, or soon thereafter.

Heart-faith, on the other hand, is not easily shaken. It's persistent. It's resilient. If it gets buried by circumstances, you may still expect a resurrection, because heart-faith was "born of the Spirit." It is "the faith of the Son of God" living in you. It is supernatural. It is the God-kind of faith.

And because true faith in Jesus persists, it works its way out into our common behaviors—we are changed. We discard things we used to pursue. We love things and people that we used to despise and avoid. Our lives become characterized by the ways of God and the works of God. That's what becomes of real faith.

And it is not because we have adopted a certain creed and are stubbornly determined to practice it. Instead, it's because the Holy Spirit never leaves us, and repeatedly inspires us with love and wisdom to do what please our God and Father.

Paul said, *"Knowledge puffs up (with pride), but love lifts up."* Let me tell you how love and knowledge part ways.

Luke 10:30 "A Jewish man was traveling from Jerusalem down to Jericho, and he was attacked by bandits. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him up, and left him half dead beside the road.

³¹ "By chance a priest came along...

What is the job of a priest? Isn't a priest called to represent the people's needs to God and to represent God's faithfulness to the people?

Luke 10:31 But when he saw the man lying there, he crossed to the other side of the road and passed him by.

He "crossed to the other side."

Perhaps he thought, "I don't know how he got in this sad condition, but perhaps he deserved it."

He "crossed to the other side."

Or maybe he thought, “I have my own reputation to think of. How would this reflect on my family?”

He “crossed to the other side.”

Or he could have thought, “Surely, there are people more qualified than me to deal with this. Is it really my responsibility?”

He “crossed to the other side,” while the man lay bleeding and dying.

Luke 10:32 A Temple assistant walked over and looked at him lying there, but he also passed by on the other side.

The Levites were assigned to help the priest in their daily ministrations, preparing the sacrifices, cooking, cleaning, and serving in a variety of ways. This one actually walked over to look at the man’s condition—and he was not afraid of a little blood—but he also “passed by on the other side.”

These two spiritual leaders could both find reasons and excuses to ignore the man’s plight, and they left him to die.

Luke 10:33 “Then a despised Samaritan came along, and when he saw the man, he felt compassion for him.

The Samaritans were not despised by the Jews because they were beastly or savage; they were despised because they were a mixed race—part Jewish and part Gentile. Therefore, the Jews were not to intermarry with the Samaritans, nor to eat with them, nor to visit their homes, nor even to speak with them. Mind you, the Samaritans were as religious as the Jews, and worshiped the same God of their ancestors. Yet they were despised. The Samaritans were the “oppressed blacks” of the Jewish culture.

Nevertheless, “when he saw the man, he felt compassion for him.”

Who was the kinder person in this story? Who was the friendlier person? Who was the more godly person?

Luke 10:34 Going over to him, the Samaritan soothed his wounds with olive oil and wine and bandaged them. Then he put the man on his own donkey and took him to an inn, where he took care of him. ³⁵ The next day he handed the innkeeper two silver coins, telling him, ‘Take care of this man. If his bill runs higher than this, I’ll pay you the next time I’m here.’

³⁶ *"Now which of these three would you say was a neighbor to the man who was attacked by bandits?" Jesus asked.*

³⁷ *The man replied, "The one who showed him mercy."
Then Jesus said, "Yes, now go and do the same."*

The one who showed him mercy.

You, too, have been called to the Christian priesthood—but not a priesthood that follows that example!

^{1 Peter 2:9} *You are not like that, for you are a chosen people. You are royal priests, a holy nation, God's very own possession. As a result, you can show others the goodness of God, for he called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light.*

¹⁰ *"Once you had no identity as a people;
now you are God's people.
Once you received no mercy;
now you have received God's mercy."*

And I'm sure you remember that Jesus said, *"Freely you have received, freely give."*

God spoke to Israel through Micah:

^{Micah 6:8} *O people, the Lord has told you what is good,
and this is what He requires of you:
to do what is right, to love mercy,
and to walk humbly with your God.*

When you prefer to do something religious, instead of showing mercy—that should be a big red flag for you!

Micah wrote:

^{Micah 7:2} *The godly people have all disappeared;
not one honest person is left on the earth.
They are all murderers,
setting traps even for their own brothers.*

"...even for their own brothers."

Such is the tragedy of sinful humanity. And nothing proves our lack of sanctity so much as our lack of mercy.

The circumstances of this hour have humbled us, haven't they? (Or they SHOULD have). Our fragility has been highlighted. And perhaps our stubbornness, too.

The path for you to walk is plain:

- Do what is right
- Show mercy
- Walk humbly with your God
- Repeat...

The only way to develop consistency in this regard is to be continually being filled with the Holy Spirit.

Life is too heavy, too large, for you to do it on your own with significant consistency.

The Holy Spirit is your Helper. He is your Inspiration. He is your Courage. And He is your Power from God.

Pray with me now...

Lord, we repent... of being too religiously timid... of not being courageously merciful...

Father, forgive us, and fill us afresh with the might Holy Spirit.

We invite You to bend our will to meet Yours.

We invite You to fill our emptiness with Your fullness.

We invite You to pour Your love into our hearts, because we just don't have what we need without You.

We thank You for Your goodness to us. We give You our praise!

And most of all, we give You our hearts. Make them Your Mercy Seat, the Throne of Your Grace.

That Jesus may be glorified by our lives. Amen.