

PENTECOST SERMON for June 5, 2022 at Grace Lutheran**TEXT:** John 14:8-15, 25-27**TITLE:** “The Miracles of Pentecost”

The sensational demonstration of power on that first Pentecost, when God poured out the Holy Spirit on Jesus’ disciples, truly amazed the crowd gathered in Jerusalem.

But God’s awe-inspiring acts aren’t all locked in the past. They continue to happen all around us. We live in an age of mystifying marvels, both in the macro-universe, with its dark energy and black holes and cosmic rays travelling at light-speed, and also in the micro-universe, with its quantum mechanics and nuclear energy, with its protons and electrons, and particles that are extremely small yet extremely powerful. You can’t help but be amazed at the micro-technology that’s being used these days.

But with all the human energy and time being spent to explore the scientific mysteries of the universe, the profound spiritual mysteries are often left unexplored and under-appreciated. That’s because they are hard to measure in a laboratory, and in our scientific age we tend to focus on what is orderly, consistent and measurable.

God is the master of mystery. The book of Genesis describes God creating our mind-boggling universe with incredible ease. Just by uttering a word, God exploded the universe into being, which we now know was from a tiny bit of matter/energy into a universe so vast that it’s impossible to measure the size of it. It was a mighty “big bang”! The Holy Scriptures give us many marvellous insights into the mysteries of creation and the mysteries of our continuing existence. Marvels abound!

The biggest marvel of all was the incarnation: when God entered this world as a little baby. Every birth is miraculous, but when the Christ-child was born, it was another kind of “big bang”: a birth that split time in two. Since then, we have measured time as either before or after Christ.

Both the Old and New Testaments describe how God delved into the arena of human activity time after astounding time, age after age in history, and brought about monumental changes which left God's chosen people awestruck and gasping for breath.

The Day of Pentecost was one of those astounding times. It harks back to the story of the Tower of Babel in Genesis chapter 11, when the nations of the world were given the gift of a common language which they unfortunately used to "make a name for themselves" and to declare their independence from God. In loving kindness, God prevented their treason simply by touching their tongues (as the Scripture puts it) and causing such confusion that they "scattered abroad over the face of all the whole earth." This was a bit of child's play for the Spirit of God: to fiddle with the syllables of human language and change the course of history.

Thousands of years later, God worked a remarkable reversal of that miracle on the Day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit came in the rush of a mighty wind and created what looked like tongues of fire which "rested" on each one of the disciples. As they began to speak, the Spirit manipulated their words, and their message was understood by people from all over the known world: an amazing reversal of the Tower of Babel event! Our First Reading, from Acts 2, says that the people "were bewildered" because each one heard the apostles speaking in his or her own language.

With characteristic ease, God had brought about a history-making event, but in such a giddy way that some people thought that the disciples were drunk!

The new disciples, many more than 12 by this time, were given the gift of the Holy Spirit. This was a new power, by which the divided could be united, the alienated could be reconciled, the self-centred could become "other-centred". It was just what the early believers needed to jar them out of their ethnic, parochial view of God. It suddenly became clear to them that God's mission field was going to be nothing less than the whole world.

In the first few centuries following the Pentecost outpouring, the Gospel spread like wildfire throughout the Roman Empire. Acts chapter 2 verse 47 says that, already in Jerusalem, “Day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.”

Thanks to the Holy Spirit, missionaries spread the Gospel farther and wider, until today, about one-third of the world’s population is Christian. Remember that, if you ever feel like a “lone Christian”!

It's only from hindsight that we can see the beauty of God’s ingenious plan. God knew that the best way to spread an idea is to wrap it up in a person, and that person was Jesus of Nazareth. He was God’s entire message to the world, and we hear that message in the cycle of Sundays every church year.

Jesus was the keeper of the mysteries of God, with a capital K. But before Jesus left our planet, Jesus gathered his disciples and made an amazing announcement: God would send the Holy Spirit to open the hearts and minds of humans, and loosen the tongues of saved people. The Holy Spirit would empower them to be witnesses of the mighty deeds of God, how God’s amazing love in Christ would save people from their sins.

Jesus said: “You also are witnesses.” “As the Father sent me, even so I send you.” He also said: “Those who believe in me will do the works that I do; and even greater works than these.”

Isn’t it amazing that we, too, have been given the privilege, the responsibility, and the dignity of being God’s chosen vessels, empowered by the Holy Spirit to bring the message of salvation to the world.

We may not be on the front line in Jesus’ diplomatic corps, but we are all (as Paul says): “ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us.” Jesus promised that the dynamic power of the Holy Spirit would use our witness, meagre as it may be sometimes, to communicate God’s good news to a world which is continually assailed by bad news.

In our “witnessing” to others, we don’t have to be concerned about saying the “right” words or doing the “right” things, as long as we are somehow communicating the goodness and mercy of God. The Spirit can

take our simple offerings and transform them into experiences which shape, colour and warm the lives of others.

Gary Morris, who was 15 years old, had not been feeling well for several days, so his mother took him to the hospital in St. Louis where he was diagnosed with Leukemia. The doctors were blunt in telling him about this disease. For the next three years, Gary would have to undergo chemotherapy. They didn't sugar-coat the side effects. They told him he would go bald and his body would most likely bloat. Consequently, Gary went into a deep depression.

His aunt called a florist to send him an arrangement of flowers. She told the clerk that it was for her teenage nephew who had leukemia.

The flowers arrived at the hospital and Gary read the card from his aunt without emotion. Then he noticed a second card. It said: "Gary – I took your order. I work at Brix Florist. I had leukemia when I was seven years old. I'm 22 years old now. Good Luck! My heart goes out to you. Sincerely, Laura Bradley." His face lit up. "Oh wow!" he cried. "I'm going to be all right."

He was in a hospital filled with millions of dollars of the most sophisticated technological equipment. He was being treated by expert doctors and nurses with competent medical training. But it was a sales clerk in a flower shop, a young woman who took the time to care, who followed what her heart told her to do – that gave Gary hope and the will to carry on.

The early disciples, however, were commissioned to do more than lift up people's spirits. Their mission was to carry a special message, a message which needed to be spoken and written in every language so that all people might hear the Gospel in their own language, and hear the good news of how God saved us through Jesus Christ. The whole world was to be their congregation!

The content of the apostle's message was that Jesus was (quote-unquote) "to convince the world of sin, and of righteousness and judgment." That sounds confusing because we tend to think of sin and

judgment as only negative things. However, a word of judgment can awaken a sinner to their need for God and that may open their mind to the good news of God's forgiveness and grace.

So off the disciples went, with God's message of the Gospel, to fulfill a task that must have seemed impossible. I'm sure that some were tempted to give up before they even started. But Jesus stated clearly, that they were to begin where they were. Jesus said, "You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth." To help them to get a perspective on their mission, Jesus said: begin in your own backyard.

When we accept Jesus' commission to do mission, we don't start by taking on the whole world. The Holy Spirit wants us to start where we are, among our own members, in our own homes, in our own community. Even that may seem too difficult a task, too large and too threatening. But with the Spirit's blessing we can do far more than we imagine. In carrying out our mission, it's important that we don't let the enormity of the task keep us from doing something.

In a documentary film on the missionary and Nobel Prize winner, Mother Teresa, a young man who had gone to India to help her in her mission to the poor and sick was interviewed. He had been given the task of working with a small group of ten boys who were homeless orphans. He became a parent, a teacher, a minister and a friend to them – living with them, raising them. The reporter asked the young man if there were times when he felt discouraged because of the thousands of children he could not help. A look came over the young man's face which seemed to say, "What a stupid question!" What he finally did say echoed the words of Mother Teresa: "Here are some boys who need me. I am able to help them. That's all that matters."

Our task is to witness to Christ where we work, where we play, where we worship, but we also have the joy of banding together in a

congregation, to enlarge our ministry. With our support and offerings, the church is able to send others to go where we cannot go.

Jesus said his message is for the whole world. And the Holy Spirit is always seeking new disciples. We need to keep our ears open. We never know when God, with his a still small voice, might call us to some noble task in another province or in another part of the world. Meanwhile we should be open to wherever and however God is leading us.

Finally, we need to remember that our Lord is not asking us to do more than we can. Whatever we offer to God will be blessed, often in ways beyond our sight. We don't need elaborate words, just a willing heart. We don't need a lot of theology, we need to let those who share our lives know we care about them, for Jesus' sake. A loving spirit can do more for the kingdom of God than hours of preaching.

You have been commissioned by Christ, not to preach to others, but simply to share with them the joy of what God has done for you.

It's a great wonder, and a great miracle, that God should choose us to be the bearers of good news, good news that can change the destiny of people forever! We should be honoured and humbled that God deems us worthy to witness and to share Christ's beauty and love with the world.

Amen.