

Grace Lutheran Church

The Rev. P. Stevens Lynn – Sermon

Sunday, May 20, 2018

Day of Pentecost - John 15: 26-27; 16:4b-15

*Grace to you and Peace from God Our Father and
Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen*

Today is Pentecost. In the life of the church, Pentecost is one of the big three festivals – along with Easter and Christmas. Pentecost was a Jewish festival celebrating the harvest. Pentecost was celebrated fifty days after Passover. Jewish folk from all over the Roman Empire came to Jerusalem to celebrate Pentecost. That's why our first lesson from Acts speaks of so many people in Jerusalem that day. Well, like God often does, God used that opportunity to pour God's Holy Spirit on all those people from all over the Roman Empire.

Now, what is this Holy Spirit? The Holy Spirit is none other than God – God's spirit, God's essence, God's liveliness, God's power, God's love, placed, planted inside us. It happens at Baptism, and for those not baptized, or baptized later in life, it can happen at other times. The most obvious and dominant sign of the Holy Spirit's presence is that one believes and trusts in Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit empowers its bearer to have faith in Jesus, to pray, to be interested in gleaning God's word from the Bible, to sacrifice and serve, to love selflessly, to support causes that help others, and to care for God's creation – because in so

doing you are caring for God's people. Without the Holy Spirit, you wouldn't be here today, and you would not be interested in the life of the church.

How did the Holy Spirit affect the first disciples who received it on that first Pentecost day? The Book of Acts says it came upon them like a mighty wind. The Greek word (New Testament) for wind is "pneuma," the Hebrew word (Old Testament) for wind is "Rhua" – both words literally mean the "breath or life of God." Rhua is that power of God we heard about in Genesis when God breathed life over the chaos and eventually breathed life into Adam and Eve. On Pentecost, God breathed that same life – that same power – that same breath into the fearful disciples. Remember the disciples were hanging around their homes – hiding, worrying, brooding, grieving and then God breathed God's liveliness – God's breath of power into them in the form of the Holy Spirit; they, all of a sudden, were on fire and had to tell the world about Jesus. In fact, the first thirty years of their outreach turned the world upside down for Jesus, and the church became a prominent force, and the world has never been the same. Before the Holy Spirit – hiding and afraid; after the Holy Spirit – powerful, brave – the dominant force in establishing the church. Would that have happened without God breathing life and power into them – not on your life!

So, how does the Holy Spirit affect us? It can affect us in the same way, for it is the same breath and power and life of God breathed into us when we receive

the Holy Spirit. And for most it happens at baptism, for others not baptized as babies or for some not baptized at all, the Holy Spirit can be breathed into one at any time in life. But in most instances, the Holy Spirit won't influence you greatly unless you want it to. You can block the Holy Spirit in your life if you don't nurture and nourish it with God's word – hearing sermons, studying the Bible, receiving Holy Communion, praying daily, serving people by loving and caring and acting selfless, less thinking about self and ego and possessions and more outward thinking about others. Without those things and behaviors in your life, the Holy Spirit's presence and power in you will grow dim and weak. But by nurturing and nourishing the Holy Spirit, it can grow and become stronger. The Holy Spirit also gives you gifts of differing abilities – the Holy Spirit can empower you to do things you normally couldn't and certainly wouldn't do without the Spirit in you.

The Holy Spirit empowered our fifteen confirmands and probably more so their parents to take two years of time to study on line and together with their parents at times, to take sermon notes and to come together for class. What teenager would do that and what parents would make them come, if it weren't for the Holy Spirit's influence? Somehow you knew it was the right thing to do. And how about all of you? You're here right now – you could be sleeping, or having an easy Sunday morning, reading the paper, taking a walk, having brunch somewhere – but you are here. The Holy Spirit's influence had a hand in bringing you here.

Why do you think belonging to the church is important? Why do you pray, help with Sunday School or Youth Group, or Campus Ministry, or help with Super Wednesday, or host a lunch for shut-ins or grieving families or ride your bicycle to Washington, or stay here to help with Out of the Cold or serve on council or be a coordinator? Why? Because it's such fun and so popular? No – It's because of the Holy Spirit. And how about this weekly or monthly thing called offering? Why do you give your money to the church and today, you who come to the annual meeting will vote to give your money away again according to our budget. Believe me – you give your offering because that's the work of the Holy Spirit to help you do that. And to be honest, I'm praying for a little more of the Spirit's influence there. Our giving has been about the same for several years – we need to do better and pay off this building debt so the \$191,000 we give to the bank each year can be used for hands on ministry. Please Holy Spirit help motivate us there.

And in the last three years we have had a change in the way we see and treat people. Grace – our congregation has openly become more accepting of all people. Grace made decisions that said all God's people – all of us just as we are and just who we are – are loved and accepted by God and by us – and everyone – just as they are – are welcome here. But that decision to stretch and grow and be inclusive caused some people at Grace to be uncomfortable and about 35 people left. But I believe that decision to welcome and accept all people and let people be

who they are was a powerful display of love and boldness on your part – living like Jesus did. And that decision to love and accept and be inclusive couldn't have happened without the Holy Spirit's influence on you -- and you know I believe it is exactly what the Holy Spirit – God wanted us to do. Thank you for making it happen.

At 10:30 at this point I will say some thoughts to our confirmands. But here at 8 and 9 I speak to you who affirmed your baptisms – were confirmed – made promises years ago – or those of you who were never confirmed but joined here as adults – and then you made a promise to be a faithful member of Grace. I ask you – how are you doing at keeping your promise to be faithful to Jesus? I think you are doing well – but really only you know the answer to that. Jesus loves you. All of us can do better at responding to Jesus' love. I certainly can. So today – on this Pentecost day, let's make those promises or let's renew and reaffirm our promises to Jesus and his church. Jesus is always there for you. Jesus' Holy Spirit – Jesus' breath, Jesus' power, Jesus' liveliness is in you. Let it bubble in and around and over you. Come Holy Spirit. *Amen.*

Special Words to Confirmands

And now a few words to our confirmands. We are proud of you. You are such a part of us. At your baptism, your parents promised God they would raise you in the Christian faith. Your coming to catechism classes and your presence

here today is a sign that your parents kept their promise. It wasn't always easy. There have been discussions about the best way to keep those promises – but today, you affirm those promises your parents made – and today – you say yes and make your parents' promise your own. I say to you – the Holy Spirit is in your life. Don't block it. Work at nurturing it. Please keep coming to worship; today you are saying your faith is important to you. You are promising to be involved in the church. Know we need you here – your energy, your enthusiasm. If you think we are not listening to you, come and tell us. God needs you. This church needs you. You have talents, time and a little money. God is watching how you use them. And last, confirmands, you are loved and accepted by Jesus. God will never let you go. You may move away from God – but God will never move from you. You are loved by God and by us. No matter what, you can always come here. We are your family – called Grace Lutheran Church. *Amen.*