

Acts 2:16-21

Pentecost A Midweek + June 7, 2017
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church + Boise, Idaho
Pastor Tim Pauls
Between Judgment Days

The Word of the Lord from Acts 2:17: "And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh." This is the Word of the Lord.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

It's Pentecost, fifty days after the Resurrection of Jesus. There's a grand total of about 120 Christians in the world, and then the Holy Spirit comes upon those gathered together in the house. There's the sound of a loud rushing wind, and tongues as of fire appear and rest upon them. The Pentecost crowds of pilgrims are attracted to the noise and commotion, and they find the disciples preaching to them in their native tongues. It's difficult to explain how momentous this is: at a feast like Pentecost, the temple is the center of attention where all eyes are directed. But it's not so on this day, when the crowds are gathered around these uneducated disciples from Galilee. It's no wonder that there are voices in the crowd demanding, "What does this mean?!" Nor is it a huge surprise that there are cynics who quickly dismiss the disciples as being on a bender at eight in the morning.

It's then that Peter steps forward to speak. This is the first sermon of the New Testament Church. This is his make-or-break moment to set the tone, to define the vision, to demonstrate the importance and necessity of the "movement" he represents. So Peter stands before the vast crowds of expectant hearers, and he kicks off the era of New Testament preaching by quoting from...the prophet Joel? Yup. Peter explains Pentecost by saying:

This is what was uttered through the prophet Joel: "And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; even on my male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out My Spirit, and they shall prophesy."

This is the part that's obviously happening at Pentecost. The Lord has poured out His Spirit, and Spirit and Word go together: the first Christians receive the Spirit, and they start to prophesy – to proclaim the Word of God that they have heard from Jesus and the apostles. Not only that, but the Spirit works by that Word they proclaim to bring faith to others, too, including "Parthians and Medes and Elamites" and all the rest gathered in Jerusalem that day. Look carefully at the prophecy: God declared that He would pour out His Spirit on *all flesh*, people of all races and ages. This is a thread woven throughout the Bible: what Moses longed for in Numbers 11, and what God promised in Joel – what devout believers have been anticipating throughout history – is *happening* in Acts 2. And don't forget: just ten days before this when Jesus ascended into heaven, He told His apostles that they were to go and make disciples of *all nations – all flesh*. That begins at Pentecost, too.

So quoting that much of Joel's prophecy makes sense, but what about the rest? It continues:

And I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke; the sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the day of the Lord comes, the great and magnificent day. And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.

Wonders, blood, fire and vapor of smoke, not to mention a darkened sun and a moon turned to blood. That doesn't happen on Pentecost. It happens on the Day of Judgment. Both days of judgment.

These things happened on the Day of Judgment known as Good Friday, when Jesus Christ was judged on the cross for the sins of the world. There were wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below: the Lord blotted out the sun at midday and shook the earth when Christ died. Blood was shed – the blood of the holy Son of God, shed to atone for the sins of the world. And as for fire and vapor of smoke? Fire and smoke are often signs of God's presence in the Old Testament: for instance, remember when God descended onto Mt. Sinai with fire and smoke to give the Ten Commandments. There's no fire and smoke recorded on Calvary, but God is certainly present. He's the man on the middle cross, condemned by His Father in heaven for the sins of the world.

Good Friday is a day of judgment: there, God the Father says to God the Son, "I judge and condemn you for the sins of mankind," and the Son willingly bears the judgment and suffers hell on the cross for the salvation of the world.

Because of Christ's death on the cross, there's hope despite the Day of Judgment yet to come. That's the Last Day when the Lord appears in glory to judge the living and the dead. There will be signs and wonders: Revelation 6:12 describes that day as the one where the sun is darkened, the moon turned to blood and the stars fall from heaven as the world comes to an end. There will be blood and judgment: on that day, says Revelation, many will cry out to the rocks and mountains, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?" (Revelation 6:16-17) Who can stand on the great day of God's wrath? Those who are forgiven – those for whom the Lamb has no wrath. On that day, though all others want to get as far away from Jesus as possible, those who are saved by the grace of God will joyfully acknowledge Christ as their Redeemer. They will call upon the Lord, and they will be saved.

That's what the rest of the prophecy of Joel is talking about, and it's most fitting that Peter quotes it on Pentecost. Peter takes all of the rest of history – from Pentecost to the end – and boils it down to this: the world is going to end because of sin, but Christ has died so that you can have eternal life. The message of the Church on that day is this: the Day of Judgment is still coming, but you can still be saved for the sake of Christ, by the work of the Holy Spirit.

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Being chronological thinkers, we tend to think of Good Friday, Easter and Pentecost as three separate events. It's true that they are, but they are also a package deal that belong together because they are all about your salvation. On Good Friday, salvation is won. On Easter, death is clearly defeated. As of Pentecost, that salvation and victory are headed your way, because the Holy Spirit is given to the Church; and as the Lord's Word is proclaimed and His Sacraments are administered, the Holy Spirit works through the means of grace to give you grace.

All of history is centered on Good Friday, Easter and Pentecost. All of the Old Testament pointed to the Messiah coming, winning salvation and giving it to His people. All of the New Testament declares that Christ has come, and that Word offers His salvation to all people.

You and I live between Pentecost and the Day of the Lord – the Last Day, the Day of Judgment. Judgment is coming, and what are we to be about? The same things as those Christians were at Pentecost. If you read all of Acts 2, you find that after Peter's sermon, those who believed were baptized. Once they were baptized, they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching – they devoted themselves to the Word of Christ which the apostles taught them. Furthermore, they devoted themselves to the fellowship or the communion – to the breaking of the bread. They also devoted themselves to "the prayers;" not "prayers," but "*the* prayers," some of which you'll pray before this evening is over. And they sought to care for the needs of each other. Why did they do these things? It was because by baptism, they were saved from wrath and brought into the family of God. Rejoicing to remain in that assurance, they continued to hear the Word and receive the Supper so that they might be kept in the faith. They

didn't know when *the* End would come – and they didn't know when their personal end would come. But they knew that, whatever happened, they were saved because Christ had died for them and the Holy Spirit had delivered forgiveness and life to them.

That is what the Church is to be about today. When I was in high school and college, the common and popular student lament about the Lutheran Church was that it was stodgy and locked in tradition, and we “had to get back to what the first Christians were doing.” What were the first Christians doing? Being baptized, living lives of repentance, hearing the Word and receiving the Supper. This defines our worship today – this is what “the prayers” that we pray are all about. Furthermore, we proclaim this Gospel to others, so that they might have the hope of salvation.

This is vital, because Judgment Day is coming. This prophecy of Joel makes clear that all has been fulfilled in God's plan of salvation, and the Lord could return at any time. While He tarries, you do not know how long your life will last. But you can be sure that the End and your end are coming, and it is vital that you be prepared. But you can also be sure of your salvation, because the Lord has poured out His Spirit upon all flesh, and that would include you. By His Word and by His Sacraments, the Holy Spirit grants and works faith so that you might rejoice in Jesus Christ, crucified and risen for you. The day of wrath and judgment will come, but condemnation is not for you: because you are forgiven for all of your sins.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen