

Acts 2:1-21

June 4, 2017

“The Waiting is Over”

-last week our sermon centred around waiting for the Spirit whom Jesus had promised to send

-now, most of us hate waiting ... you know those dreaded words

-“Your call is important to us, please wait on the line for the next available agent who will be pleased to assist you”

-after more than a few minutes of waiting it starts to dawn on you that the recording actually means, *“Our bottom line is more important to us than hiring enough staff to answer your phone call, so get over it”*

-it's the day of Pentecost and it's a great day, an exciting day

-five young people get confirmed today!

-we get to witness what God has done as his Word and Spirit has planted faith in their hearts and caused it to grow

-we acknowledge God's faithfulness in keeping the promises he made to each one of them when they were baptized

-we acknowledge God's faithfulness to us as parents, as teachers and pastors that he would use our humble efforts to bring this day to reality

-God's promises get confirmed today!

-as we celebrate the Day of Pentecost, I want to ask, “What's the greatest thing about Pentecost?”

-is it the wind?

-is it the tongues of fire?

-is it something about the languages?

-does it leave you wishing and wondering if Pentecost might happen to you one day?

- the wind and tongues of fire and other languages were indeed extraordinary
 - they catch your attention, just like they caught the crowd's attention that first Pentecost
- but as extraordinary as these things are, they can easily distract us from the important things

- as we look at what happened that first Pentecost, I want you to notice that the extraordinary things weren't the most important
 - when strange things happened in the Book of Acts, they didn't all happen each time, and they didn't all happen the same way
 - not always wind
 - not always tongues of fire
 - not always different languages
 - when the Holy Spirit does work, there is something that always happened
 - people were brought to faith
 - people grew in faith
 - every time the Holy Spirit works, there is repentance, and faith
 - there are changed hearts
 - there are changed lives
 - there is celebration both here on earth and in the halls of heaven

- the Spirit works through God's saving Word
 - on that first Pentecost, the wind didn't convert anybody
 - the tongues of fire didn't convert anybody either
 - but the Word Peter preached certainly did!
 - those who heard the Word were cut to the heart
 - what must we do to be saved?
 - they weren't worried about things like how do we get flames on our heads, or how do we speak in other tongues?

- as Peter preached that day, the Law of God confronted them and convicted them ... what must we do to be saved?
 - that was the first part of the working of the Holy Spirit
- then Peter told them, “repent and be baptized ...”
 - you will receive the Spirit, you will be saved
 - and they believed and they were saved ... 5,000 of them
 - and there was celebration both here on earth and in the halls of heaven

- so what was the greatest miracle that Pentecost day?
 - not the wind
 - not the flames
 - not the speaking in tongues
 - 5,000 dead hearts came to life
 - 5,000 lost souls found salvation

- it's sad when you think about how so many people want to focus on the wrapper and not on what's inside when it comes to the work of the Holy Spirit?

- there are some extraordinary examples of the outpouring of the Spirit in the Book of Acts
 - but each extraordinary example was given for a specific purpose
 - in Acts 8 when the mission of the church dared to cross the border and bring the Gospel to the Samaritans, the Spirit's presence was evident for all to see
 - in Acts 10, when the mission of the church took the next step and began bringing the Gospel to the Gentiles, the Spirit's presence was visible again
 - Cornelius and his household praised God and spoke in other languages as a sign that the Spirit was again leading the church into new realms

- but for all those extraordinary happenings, there are many, many more examples of the Holy Spirit working the way he usually does
 - through the preaching of the Gospel
- sometimes there were other miracles and signs present
 - the disciples performed healings, they raising the dead
 - but those miracles were never for their own sake, they always accompanied the preaching of the Gospel
 - Mark 16:20 ... “Then the disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it.”
 - they confirmed the word of the Gospel, but never took the place of it
 - the power for repentance and faith, the power to change hearts always came through the Word
- we call that work of the Holy Spirit “sanctification”
 - he brings the power of God to make us holy
 - he plants the gift of faith and brings forth the fruit of new spiritual life
 - he uses God’s word of the Law to convict sinful hearts
 - then he uses the promise of the Gospel to bring forth faith in the forgiveness of sins for Jesus’ sake
 - then he uses the Law again to guide us to know what works please God
 - then he uses the Gospel again to give us the power to do them
- but how does the Holy Spirit do it?
 - he uses the Word of God and the sacraments
 - when he does, great miracles happen
 - miracles that are greater than the wind and the fire and the speaking in tongues

- think about what changed in Acts 2
 - there was a Spirit-inspired change in all those who were brought to faith that day
 - they devoted themselves to the Apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer
 - their hearts changed, and with it their lives
 - their lives displayed a love for the Word of God
 - a love for the people of God
 - a love to celebrate together the gifts of God
 - a love of prayer
 - in Acts 8 ... those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went
 - in Acts 11 ...began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus
 - in Acts 13:2-3 ... Barnabas and Saul sent off to do even more missionary work
 - there was within the hearts of the early Christians a desire to share the good news of the Gospel in ever increasing ways

- if you examine the extraordinary events in Acts, you will see that they happened because of extraordinary circumstances

- what was the purpose of the visible signs in Acts 2?
 - it created an opportunity for Peter to speak
 - it confirmed that the promise of the coming of the Spirit had been fulfilled
 - it enabled a multitude of people to hear the Gospel in their own native language
- in Acts 10 ... Peter was unsure what he should do with a Gentile ... so the Holy Spirit gave to Cornelius and his household the gift of tongues
 - Peter concluded from this that they should be baptized

-when Peter is called on to defend his actions, in Acts 11:15 he says that they saw the Holy Spirit come on them *just as he had come upon us at the beginning*

-that confession tells us two things

-Peter and the others with him needed some extra-special convincing that the Gospel wasn't just for Jews

-this was not the ordinary or usual thing ... otherwise Peter wouldn't have said what he said

-this was an extra special, beyond the normal, unusual event

-as we come to this Day of Pentecost, we don't want to become so focused on wanting to see and experience those secondary, visible signs that we miss the truly great miracle that is happening

-on this day, hearts are being changed and sinners are being brought to salvation

-on this day, we see God's promises fulfilled and we can rejoice

-think about the important things that the Holy Spirit does

-no one can say Jesus is Lord, except by the Holy Spirit

-only the Holy Spirit can bring us to faith in Jesus as our Saviour

-conversion is totally the work of the Holy Spirit

-we do not co-operate at all ... we are not just weak and wounded, we come into this world spiritually blind and dead ...

-you he made alive when you were dead in your trespasses and sins

-and then, for us to remain in faith and become stronger Christians, we also need the Holy Spirit working in our hearts and lives

-he does it through the means of grace, the written and spoken word and the sacraments

- he uses those same tools to give us power to resist and overcome sin
 - and to live a Christ-pleasing life
 - and to do Christ-pleasing good works

- the devil's delights to distract us from what is important by drawing our attention to things that are unimportant

- his Pentecost distraction is to draw our attention away from Christ and focus on ourselves instead
 - ... I want to experience tongues
 - ... I want to feel the presence of the Holy Spirit
 - ... I want the room to shake
- so people look for something tangible as their source of confidence
 - and when they don't get it there's trouble

- one lady doubts if she is a Christian, because none of those Acts events has happened to her
- another person builds their confidence on a warm feeling they've had
 - they feel chills down their spine
 - they are convinced that they don't need to worship together with other Christians
 - they don't need regular time in God's Word because they have this internal "spirit connection" with Jesus

- let me take you on a mission trip of sorts ...
 - Paul and his companions are on their second missionary journey
 - they've stopped at the ports of call from Paul's first trip
 - now they're looking for direction as to where to go next
 - Asia, Bythinia?
 - the Holy Spirit gives them a vision and leads them to Macedonia
 - they go to Thessalonica, then on to Berea

- now, pretend you live in Berea and Paul has just arrived
 - he talks about his miraculous conversion on the road to Damascus, and how Jesus appeared to him
 - he talks about God's blessing on the church in Antioch
 - he talks about his first missionary journey and more blessings from God
 - he talks about his second journey and how the Spirit has led them into Macedonia through a vision

- the Bereans listened intently and took in all that Paul had to say
 - what did they do then?
 - they went home and checked it out with the Scriptures

- yes, Paul had such an inspiring story ... God spoke to him in a flash of light ... the Holy Spirit spoke to him in dreams and visions ...
"then they went home and checked it out with the Scriptures"
 - they were not about to rest their hope on anything but a firm foundation

- dreams and visions, flashes of light, feelings and emotions sound great
 - but the real foundation is found somewhere else
 - the real foundation is in the living and abiding Word of God

- one of the devil's most effective tricks is to deceive people into believing that the Holy Spirit speaks to them apart from God's Word
 - that he speaks directly to them through their feelings, emotional experiences, or even in visions

- it's true that what God communicates to us does affect our feelings and emotions (joy at the good news of forgiveness)
 - but our feelings are the result, not the cause of God's communication to us

- the devil disguises himself as an angel of light
 - he tries to deceive us by saying that God speaks to us apart from his Word
 - this satanic deception goes back to Eden where the devil lured Adam and Eve into doubting the revealed will and word of God
 - still today it is the cause of most false teachings and popular heresies
 - did God really say...?

- how do you know who to trust?
 - how do you know who to listen to ... your salvation is at stake
- we know for sure that the Holy Spirit comes through the Word of Scripture, and Scripture cannot be broken
 - “all Scripture is God-breathed ...”
 - anything else is uncertain and should be treated as tainted and suspect

- should you trust Mary Baker Eddy?
- should you trust Ellen G. White?
- should you trust Joseph Smith?
 - these all have something in common
 - they all claim a special revelation from God that goes beyond Scripture

- if someone tells you they have a special revelation, don't believe it
 - don't listen to it
 - Paul writes in Galatians 1:8, *“But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned!”*

- you already have the greatest blessing ... you have something better
- the word of the prophets and apostles
- the gift of the sacraments into which God has poured his saving power
- these are what bring us to faith and salvation
- these are what strengthen our faith and enable our hearts to rejoice
- these are the tools, the means that the Holy Spirit has chosen to accomplish his work in your heart