



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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May 23, 2010
The Festival of Pentecost
[Genesis 11:1-9](#)
Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: [Genesis 11:1-9](#)
Psalm of the Day: [Psalm 51b](#)
Second Lesson: [Acts 2:1-21](#)
Gospel Lesson: [John 15:26-27](#)

The life of the Church is empowered by the Spirit of God

Someone help me out. I can't remember. What is the traditional Pentecost dinner? Is it turkey or ham? It's kind of interesting when you come to the third major festival of the church year. It's maybe not something you anticipate like you do the first two major festivals of the church year, Christmas and Easter. Did you ever wonder why that is? Why don't we anticipate this festival? Is it because we think it's not as important? I don't think that's the case because without the Holy Spirit working faith in our hearts, we, who are wretched poor miserable sinners, wouldn't know that the baby born in Bethlehem was our Savior or that his resurrection on Easter assures us that our sins are forgiven and heaven is open to us. So obviously it can't be that we don't think it's important.

The Israelites had their challenges in the Old Testament. They had false gods. They had Baal and Ashteroth. Some of their kings even gave in to the pressure and sacrificed their own children to the false god Chemosh. The false gods influenced them to do things they knew they shouldn't have done. They led them away from God.

In the New Testament, there was the false god of Caesar claiming to be divine. They were to bow down and worship Caesar or else be killed. That was a challenge that they had to do what they knew to be right. It's a good thing we don't have any false gods pressuring us to lead us away from God today.

I would say to you one of the reasons that we maybe don't focus on Pentecost so much is because we are influenced by a false god. I would say it's the false god of culture, our society. Do you have your Pentecost box of decorations out at home and have the house all decorated for Pentecost? I'm guessing most of you have a Christmas box and an Easter box filled with fat men in red suits and bunnies and eggs. Are we shaped by our culture in our anticipation and our celebration of these festivals in the church year? Because our culture doesn't celebrate Pentecost, maybe we disregard it also. Let me ask you another question. Could you ever fathom having the annual picnic on Easter? Do you think people would be up in arms?

I remember in Minnesota we had a choir that we struggled to get going and had it going and I asked them to sing on Christmas. I was told in no uncertain terms, "Christmas is not about church and God, Pastor. It's about family. We need to be with our families, not singing in your worship service." Sometimes we get shaped by culture.

Mind you, I don't care that we are having the picnic today. I think it's great. Paula is out of town, and I don't have to cook. I think it's a wonderful thing to have the church picnic today. I'm not saying we shouldn't do it. I'm just saying, ask yourself...are we shaped by culture and how we approach some of these festivals sometimes?

I think the answer obviously is "yes." Sometimes we are shaped by the false god of culture around us. So then maybe we don't focus on the things we really could be focusing on. Maybe in a sense, because we don't have so much cultural baggage at Pentecost, we can stop and celebrate it more fully and more faithfully and focus on the true spiritual blessings that we get. Sometimes as Lutherans we are accused of undervaluing the Holy Spirit because we don't emphasize speaking in tongues or things like this that others say are the signs and the marks that the Spirit is active in you. We'd say the Spirit is active in us and we value and treasure the Holy Spirit because we say he works through the means of grace. He works through the Word. He works through the water. He works through wafer and wine to take wretched sinners like you and me and say to us, "You are forgiven. Christ lived and died in your place." I'd say that we truly value the Spirit.

But sometimes, when we aren't guided by the Spirit, we build the wrong buildings. Isn't that exactly what happened in those paragraphs I just read to you? God had told them after the flood...this is awhile after the flood. Everyone was gone, except for those eight people. Now they had begun to repopulate the earth. God had told them to spread out and fill the earth. That was the command he had given to them. So they start spreading out to the east. They get to Shinar and look around and think, "This is pretty nice. I kind of like this. Fertile fields, I suppose. Abundant gain. Lots of good meat. I'm getting tired of gnawing on berries all the time. There is a lot of good meat here to eat." So they decide "Let's not keep moving. Enough moving. Let's stay. This is nice!" You wonder if some said, "But God said we should move" and they said, "Yes, but this is nice." Shaped by what was around them.

So they decide, "Let's build a tower. We'll make a name for ourselves. That tower is going to be a skyscraper so that we can always see it. We won't have to keep spreading out. We can always come back to this place and it will be a great and glorious place. It will have all that we need and all that we want. It doesn't matter what God said. We still have to live some place, so let's just live here."

Left on our own, when we aren't guided by the Spirit, we start building on the wrong foundations. Quite often on the same foundation they built on, right? The foundation of "me, I like, it seems to me." That's what they were building on, right?

You and I get really interested in staring at our belly buttons, not literally, not physically, but we spend a lot of time and energy on what we like and what we think. We do it in our worship life. "I like that tune." "I don't like that tune and because I don't like it, I'm not going to pay attention to these incredibly powerful words that God is speaking to my heart with." We do it in our daily life with the things we like and don't like. "I don't like putting myself on the line and telling someone else that what they are doing is wrong

before God. I'm not going to do it. I'll just let someone else do it, hopefully. And if they don't, then they haven't served God, because that's not my job." God has been pretty clear. He says to teach and admonish one another. He calls us to put ourselves on the line out of love for other people so that they don't drift away from God or that they don't ever meet God. He wants us to put ourselves on the line and reach out to people with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. But sometimes we want to build on the foundation of our comfort and what we like, so we build a house that doesn't include everything that God has told us to do. We say to ourselves, "At least I'm doing this for God," or "At least I'm doing that for God, and he should be happy with that." Do you really want God to deal with you on the basis of being happy with who you are and what you do for him? Are we that foolish?

You have to know in your own heart, we are just like these guys. We chase after ourselves. We don't love God perfectly at all times. We don't deserve his love and his forgiveness. We can't stand before God and say, "God, you owe me this, this and this. You can withhold this because I haven't been perfect, but you owe me these other things for certain." That isn't how it works. I don't want it to work that way, and neither do you. You and I need it to work completely on the basis of the Lord, the Word that God uses when he says he's going to come down and see for himself what is going on in that plain of Shinar. It's the LORD. In your NIV Bible it's all in capital letters. It's the Hebrew word Yahweh. It's a word that emphasizes the God of grace, the God of mercy, the God who keeps his promise to forgive for the sake of himself.

You might think to yourself, "That's kind of weird. He said 'the LORD,' the God of grace came down and saw what it was and the LORD confused their languages and the LORD made their life a big pain from that point on. How could that be an act of his love or his grace or his mercy?" The Lord had to spiritually wake them up. Left on their own, they are going to continue down their own path and not turn back to God. So he spiritually woke them up by saying, "You don't want to obey me? I'm going to make it a little tougher on you to disobey me. You are all going to start speaking different languages."

It's hard enough at times in life to understand what someone else is saying to you when you are speaking the same language. Husbands and wives don't always seem to speak the same language, do we? Men and women, we don't always speak the same language, and we're talking the same language. Can you imagine being there and asking for another brick and the guy that you are speaking to doesn't understand your language anymore? Can you imagine what happened when that took place? Knowing our sinful nature, you have to think punches were thrown somewhere along the line, things were thrown, thinking someone is making fun of them or whatever the case may be. But it probably created an awful lot of problems.

So the people started gathering together with people they could understand, which is only natural. Then they go and spread out because they don't want to stay with those people that talk that jibberish that they can't understand. They are a little suspicious of

them and think they are talking about them or plotting against them. You know how our sinful nature is. We always suspect the worst of each other, don't we?

So then they ended up having to do what God called them to do. God woke them out of their spiritual sleep by allowing this difficulty to come into their lives, in fact by sending this difficulty into their lives.

That's how God acts. He acts in love and mercy toward us with eternity in mind, not just the good of the here and now, but eternity in mind. Sometimes our God is the same way with us today. He allows, or sometimes he even sends, some difficulty into our lives so that we get spiritually slapped across the face so that we wake up and snap out of it. I've seen him do it, in my life and the lives of others.

I never thought in my life I would ever be thankful that cancer came into someone's life, but there was a woman I served in Minnesota that I thanked God nightly when she developed cancer because when I got to that church, she wanted nothing to do with that church. She was upset with some of the things that church had done, that was right before God, but she didn't like it. I went with her and talked with her a number of times. Her husband wanted to come back but he didn't because his wife said, "I'm never setting foot in that church again."

I talked with them over the years, but eventually the Lord sent cancer into her life, and then when we talked about the God of grace and full and free forgiveness. She was happy to hear it. She was happy to hear it in that church again.

Sometimes the Lord has to send difficulty to us to wake us up because we become so self centered. He's not doing it to punish us. He's doing it out of love for us to lead us back to him. One of the things the Lord does is put a whole army of people around us, especially in a congregation. A whole army of people around us that he has designed to be there to reach out to us, to comfort others with the comfort we ourselves have received from God, to point people back to Christ again and again and again.

Here's the beauty of it...we don't have to wait for this rushing wind or what looks like tongues of fire to come on us so that we can speak a language that someone else can understand. We are all speaking English around here for the most part, right? We can speak to each other now, and God has already given us his Spirit in our Baptism. He gives it to us daily in the Word, and today he gives it to us in the Sacrament where he gives the Son's very body and blood for the forgiveness of our sins so that we find the strength to do what he has called us to do, to be guided by that Spirit to love and encourage one another, to forgive one another, and to point one another back to Christ.

We don't have to wait for these incredible signs that drew attention. God has already given us his Spirit, and now he wants us to be guided by that Spirit and to speak and build on the foundations that he wants us to build on...the foundations of love, mercy and forgiveness, and the foundation of speaking those words and trusting that the Spirit will bless them.