

*“When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me. <sup>27</sup> And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning.”*  
(John 15:26,27)

### Why Celebrate Pentecost?

You’ve been waiting for weeks for today, right? Your kids have been excited, thinking about the holiday. You have all your shopping done and your gifts wrapped. You probably have a special meal planned and family in from out of town. You probably have all kinds of family traditions that you observe every year for this holiday, right? Right? Or are you wondering what I’m talking about? Today is one of the most significant holidays of the church year: the Festival of Pentecost. We’re celebrating the famous event we heard about it in the reading from the book of Acts just a few minutes ago. But this holiday goes almost unnoticed in our society. There is no Pentecost bunny or Pentecost Claus – and I’m OK with that. But even many Christians don’t realize it’s coming until their pastor makes a big deal about it. That’s not true everywhere in the world. In some parts of Germany, tomorrow and Tuesday are legal holidays – Pentecost Monday and Tuesday. But I don’t think your boss will be terribly understanding if you don’t show up for work tomorrow. What is this holiday all about? **Why celebrate Pentecost?**

#### I.

**To celebrate God’s love.** All church holidays celebrate God’s love. Christmas celebrates the love of God the Father in giving us his only begotten Son. And it celebrates the love of God the Son who was made flesh to live our lives and save us. Easter celebrates the love of Jesus who died and paid for our sins and then rose to assure us that we are forgiven and that we will live with him forever. We could go through all the holidays of the church year and point out God’s love in each one, but you see the point. Pentecost fits right into that pattern. Love is certainly something worth celebrating. But God’s love is different from the kinds of love we often celebrate in this life. Valentine’s Day has come to be a celebration of romantic love. Last Sunday was Mother’s Day, when we celebrate the love mothers give to their children. That love is perhaps the closest to the kind of love we celebrate in our church holidays, because God’s love is all that he does for us and all that he promises us. God’s love does what’s best for us and serves us in our need.

Pentecost is one more example of God seeing what we need and then putting his love to work. The unique thing about Pentecost is that it focuses especially on the Holy Spirit and his role in that love. Jesus says, **“When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me.”** The Spirit of Truth, the Counselor, the Holy Spirit comes from the Father and the Son to us. There are really two great truths behind Jesus’ statement. The first one is the mystery of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Next week is another church holiday, Holy Trinity, and we will talk much more about that truth then. For now, it’s enough to say that all three persons are eternal – they have no beginning or ending. But still Jesus is begotten of the Father and the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. That’s an eternal truth and mystery. But the other great truth is the way that first truth applies to our lives. Jesus sends the Holy Spirit to us from the Father.

He did that in the richest and fullest way on the day of Pentecost. Maybe we don’t give Pentecost presents like we do Christmas presents, but God most certainly did. God poured the Holy Spirit out on his Church on that day. There was a sound like a rushing wind. In both Greek and Hebrew, the word for spirit and the word for wind are the same. So God chose to send a wind when he sent the Spirit. Then tongues of fire appeared on the heads of the apostles and suddenly, they could speak in languages they had never learned. That was a tremendous gift. It showed the even greater gift God was giving: his Spirit.

Why does the gift of the Spirit matter? Because he makes everything that we do work. I will never accomplish anything as a pastor on my own. I will never accomplish anything as a Christian husband and father on my own. All the gifts I have for ministry and for service come from the Holy Spirit. All my preaching and teaching – all our efforts as a congregation to educate our children, to spread the good news, to counsel the troubled and comfort the hurting – they are all meaningless if they depend on what we sinful, broken human beings can do. So God gave us his Spirit so we could do all those things.

That gift comes from God's love. I said before that a mother's love comes closest to God's love. I said that because a mother works and sacrifices for her children. Day after day, she puts what she wants in second place to do what her children need. She walks the floor in the middle of the night when she would rather be sleeping because her baby needs her to. She cooks and cleans and often has a job besides so that her children have a clean, safe place to live, and food to eat, and all that they need. She sacrifices herself for them.

God does that for us, too. Of course, the supreme example is Jesus on the cross. But that's not the only example. God gives the Holy Spirit to us in the gospel and the Spirit works in this sinful, disappointing world for our good. Day after day, he serves us because we need him to. And do you think it's always rewarding? How many of us parents have had the experience of working all day for the good of our children and then they failed to appreciate our efforts? Outside of Mother's and Father's day, they don't even seem to notice? Love is not always rewarded in this sinful world, but it keeps on giving. The Holy Spirit lives in our hearts because he loves us. But the Bible warns us against grieving the Holy Spirit. Every time we choose to sin, the Holy Spirit is an eyewitness from our hearts of that horrible choice. He sees every lustful or selfish word or thought or action, and he grieves, just like a mother would grieve if her children were expelled from school or sent to jail.

Yet, the Spirit continues to work in our hearts through the gospel. He continues to comfort us when we're guilty with the good news that we are forgiven. When our lives hurt, he comforts us with the promise of a new and better life to come. The Holy Spirit strengthens us to stand up against the attacks of the devil and the unbelieving world and even that sinner that lives in our own hearts. He is our best ally in a world where we have very few. He lives in us and changes us and causes us to grow in faith. He does all that through the gospel in word and sacrament, but he does it because he loves us. Our Father in heaven sends him to do all that because he loves us. Jesus sends him to do all that because he loves us. That love existed before the world began. It will continue for all eternity. That's what we're celebrating today.

## II.

God gave us a tremendous gift on the day of Pentecost. We often call it the birthday of the New Testament Church. After centuries of focusing on one people in one tiny country, God turned his attention to the entire world. From that moment on, the gospel went out into the world, and the world would never be the same. God sent the Holy Spirit to equip the Church for its mission, so it's really the Spirit's work. So **why celebrate Pentecost? To celebrate the Spirit's testimony.**

When we think of testimony outside of church, we usually think of courtrooms, right? People testify at trials. Of course, the jury always has to decide whether they believe the testimony or not. Is the person lying? Is the person honestly mistaken? You would be amazed at some of the work that psychologists have done with eyewitness testimony. In experiment after experiment, they have proven that people can insist that they saw things that didn't happen and that they didn't see things that did happen. So how do you know what's true? We know what's true because the Holy Spirit is the one who testifies.

Jesus said, **"He will testify about me. And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning."** Jesus wanted the apostles to testify – but not until after they had received the Holy Spirit. They were eyewitnesses of all Jesus had done and said. But our Lord knew better than any psychologist how weak eyewitness testimony can be. So before they wrote one word of the Bible, before they preached the great sermon on Pentecost or began to spread the gospel throughout the world, the Holy Spirit came to them to work through them. In this same conversation, Jesus said that the Spirit would remind them of everything he had taught them. I've been teaching catechism class for a long time. While I am thrilled to confirm students every year, I would be afraid to quiz the kids from three years ago and ask them what I told them about this or that doctrine. How accurately would they remember? Jesus didn't depend on imperfect human memory. The Holy Spirit worked through these men and gave us the New Testament. The Holy Spirit gave us the Bible. Over 1600 years, he told dozens of men what to write and how to write it. So today, we have his testimony, the only testimony you will ever have that is one hundred percent true and accurate. That's a great gift.

What is that testimony? Jesus said that **"He will testify about me."** The Holy Spirit does not just drop on us out of heaven, like he did the day of Pentecost. He works through the gospel, through what we call the means of grace. That's what the message about Jesus is, the good news that we are free. In truth, he begins his work with the law. He accuses. He testifies about our sin so that we can't escape it. How many times have you sat in church and felt guilty because whoever was standing up here managed to hit just a little too close? That's

the Holy Spirit working through the law. He condemns every selfish word and action, every egotistical thought and feeling. When we hear him doing that, we squirm because God wants us to see our sin.

But he's not done when he makes us squirm. Then he tells us about Jesus. That's the amazing thing about the Holy Spirit. He doesn't call attention to himself. He focuses on Christ and his work for us. He reminds us just when we begin to squirm that Jesus has taken all that sin away. Jesus lived a life without sinful pride or lust or selfishness. He was perfect in his heart in our place. That perfect heart and the perfect words and actions, the perfect life that flowed from it, all that is ours. God gives us credit for it all. Then Jesus died. He sacrificed that perfect life on the cross. He paid all that we owe. He suffered hell itself and died so that our egotism and our selfishness and our lies and coveting and greed would all be washed away. The Holy Spirit comes to us every time we hear that good news and he comforts and strengthens us. He gives us joy. That is a very great gift.

Through it, God reminds us of the greatest gift of all: eternal life. The Holy Spirit has made us alive through the gospel. He gave us our faith. He sustains that faith all through our lives here. When we stand before Christ on Judgment Day, he is going to see that we had faith in our hearts and he is going to declare that we were perfect all our lives long, that we never sinned, that we never were selfish, that we never lied or lusted or hurt anyone. He will say that because we trusted in his life and death to make us holy in God's sight. Because we have that trust, that faith, we will indeed have eternal life. The Spirit gives us that faith, so the Holy Spirit truly gives us eternal life.

All that is what we're celebrating today. There's a part of me that wishes we had Pentecost vacations and Pentecost dinners and family gathering and traditions. Someone should've invented Pentecost baskets or stockings or something. But then our society would just commercialize one more Christian holiday. I certainly don't want that. But I do wish we treasured this holiday more. I wish we all looked forward to celebrating this day because of all that it means: God gave us a tremendous gift of love on the day of Pentecost. Whether we ever see this holiday like that, whether you ever circle Pentecost on your calendar and look forward to it, the gift is here. And it is real. And it is ours. It is God's plan to carry us through a life in a sinful world and to sustain our faith in all the attacks of the devil and the world and our flesh. You will reach heaven because God gave you the Holy Spirit through the gospel. Celebrate that gift. Amen.