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³⁸ Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹ The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.”

⁴⁰ With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.” ⁴¹ Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day. ⁴² They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. (Acts 2:37-42)

The Real Miracle of Pentecost

Today, we are the beneficiaries of a great coincidence. We’re celebrating our congregation’s 60th anniversary on the festival of Pentecost. I wish I could say I planned it that way, but I didn’t. This was just the best weekend in May to do it. But by the grace of God, today is a day that we recognize as the birthday not just of Peace, but of the entire New Testament Church. It’s a day in which we recall miracles. You heard about those miracles in our second lesson for today. Which one do you think was the most dramatic? That sound of the rushing wind certainly would’ve caused people to sit up and take notice. The appearance of fire on the heads of the apostles must have been a sight to see. But I bet that most of us would point to the speaking in tongues. Most of us at some point in our lives have probably studied some foreign language. Maybe it was French or German or Spanish in high school. I bet that most of us have forgotten more than we remember. If you’ve ever made a serious study of a language, you realize just how hard it is. Just think of the thousands of words you have to learn! But that isn’t even the hard part. The hard part is the grammar and the syntax. Figuring out how to change the forms and how to put them together and take them apart so that you understand what someone is saying to you and can actually give them more than a kindergarten level answer – that’s the real challenge. To people like me who’ve spent most of a lifetime dealing with languages, the fact that the Holy Spirit touched these men and instantly they could preach and teach in a language they had never studied, is an amazing act of God’s power.

But you know what? None of those things is the real miracle of Pentecost. The real miracle of Pentecost is something even greater, something that has continued to happen for two thousand years, something that God has done with his power for sixty years here at Peace. That miracle is what makes today worth celebrating, both as the Festival of Pentecost and as our anniversary here at Peace.

I.

The real miracle of Pentecost is repentance and faith. Neither of those things can happen unless the Holy Spirit works in our hearts. Luke, the writer of the book of Acts, says, **“When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, ‘Brothers, what shall we do?’”** Why were they cut to the heart? Because Peter had just told them, **“Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.”** Peter told them that they were responsible not just for killing an innocent man, but for killing the Savior that God had been promising to send them since the time of Abraham. Being cut to the heart means that they felt guilty for that sin.

The miracle here is that they took these words to heart. As a pastor, sometimes I have to tell people that their words or actions or attitudes are sinful. No one likes to hear that. Many times, people respond by attacking me, by being insulted, by raging against me for daring to speak those horrible, loveless words to them. Or they blame someone else for those actions or attitudes. Sometimes, they do both things at once. You know what? That’s the natural human response. We justify ourselves or we pass the buck. Why do we do that? Because of the pride of our sinful hearts. We’re all heroes in our own minds. We reject even the words of God rather than step up and take responsibility for our sin and kneel before God in repentance.

Have you ever reacted to the law in that way? When your spouse or your parent or a Christian friend or your pastor told you that what you were doing or saying was wrong and sinful, did you push back? Now, obviously, all those people can be wrong and it’s not sinful to point it out when they are. But did you stop and ask yourself if it was true or did your gut rebellion just set it? Did you cling in pride to the idea that no one gets

to talk to you like that and avoid the dealing with your real sins? Did you make every excuse possible and blame everything and everyone else for your sin?

That's not what the people in Jerusalem did. Peter told them that they had crucified the Savior God sent them, and rather than argue with him or deny their sin or blame someone else, they were cut to the heart. God's law convicted them. My friends, that's a miracle of the Holy Spirit. The truth is, even when we rage and pass the buck, that power of God's law is still working, still accusing and still convicting us. That's why we get so angry. We experience the guilt God's law makes us feel. But to hear that law and to kneel before God and ask him for mercy is more than just the natural human reaction. That's the Holy Spirit defeating our sinful pride. He takes away all our excuses so that he can lead us through repentance to faith.

God strikes our heart and leaves us gasping for his mercy. And then he brings it. He tells us that in Christ we are forgiven. Jesus died for every single one of our sins. He died for the sinful nature inside us that keeps falling into the same sins over and over again. He died and he paid for our unwillingness to hear the law or to examine ourselves. He died for all our excuses, for all the times we attacked the person God sent to call us to repent, for all the times we hated hearing what we needed to hear most. Jesus died and he paid for all that sin. And then he rose and proclaimed that we all those sins were washed away.

Peter told the people of Jerusalem, "**Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.**" Repent here means more than just be sorry for your sins. It also means to trust in Jesus for forgiveness. That's why he told them to be baptized for forgiveness. In baptism, God takes the life and death and resurrection of Jesus and he applies it to us personally. Baptism is more than a symbol. It's more than a statement of our dedication or our faith. It is the gospel in visible form. It is the power of God to wash our sins away, and not just the sins we committed before we were baptized. By a miracle of God's grace, our baptism washes away all that we have been guilty of and all that we ever will be guilty of. It gives us an eternal promise that we are forgiven, that we are loved, that we belong to God.

3,000 people heard the spoken gospel and in faith, they received the visible gospel of baptism that day. That's how God inaugurated the New Testament Church. As of today, 1230 souls have been baptized in this congregation. Every one has been a miracle of the Holy Spirit. And they haven't all been babies. Many were children in our school. Many were adults who came to faith like the people in Jerusalem did and wanted that gift of the Holy Spirit's work. But all of them were miracles.

And you know what? I have one more miracle of baptism scheduled for two weeks from today, and another one pending. The miracle of the Spirit goes on. Day after day, God proclaims Christ to us. That's why we built this building. That's why we started a Lutheran elementary school. That's why we ask Sunday school teachers to serve us year in and year out. That's why we have church services. We gather to hear the good news of Christ. And in every proclamation of the gospel, the Holy Spirit reaches into our hearts. He gives or he sustains faith. Our calling here at Peace is to proclaim that good news! For as long as God calls us to do that, his Spirit will work here.

II.

But the miracle doesn't stop when God brings us to faith. The miracle goes on because the gospel changes us. **The real miracle of Pentecost is a Christian life.** Luke said, "**They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.**" That's a pretty good summary of the Christian life, don't you think? Or maybe you don't. After all, where's the love for each other? Where're the deeds of faith and kindness to others? That's what Luke meant when he said that they devoted themselves to the fellowship. The fellowship was the body of believers. They devoted themselves to that body. We know from the rest of the book of Acts that they helped widows and orphans and those in need. They made rich offerings for the work of the Church. They worked out serious divisions caused by ethnic differences. All that is part of being devoted to the fellowship.

But notice what God mentions first: they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching. The Greek word that Luke uses here means both the act of teaching and what they taught. The members of the very first New Testament congregation devoted themselves to hearing the word. They came to church. They came to Bible class. They studied and listened and then they devoted their lives to what they were taught. God's people care about doctrine. God's people conform their lives to what God says.

Luke says that they devoted themselves to the breaking of bread. That isn't another way of saying "fellowship." It's communion. This morning, we're going to celebrate sixty years of God's grace by coming to

the Lord's Table together and receiving the body and blood of Christ for the forgiveness of our sins. They devoted themselves to this sacrament, this visible preaching of the gospel, too. And so they also devoted themselves to prayer. God's people take all that we face, alone and together, to him.

That's the model of the life of the first New Testament congregation. It's the model of the life *of the members* of the first New Testament congregation. Have we followed that pattern? Is our congregation devoted to doctrine, to the sacraments, to the fellowship and to prayer? Are we as individuals devoted to those things? Do we come and hear the word regularly? Do we take that word to heart and incorporate it into our lives? Do we put our brothers and sisters in faith here at the top of our list of priorities? Or does church come in a distant third or fifth or twentieth? Are we devoted to the fellowship? Or do we make it someone else's job? Do we contribute almost nothing to the fellowship here? Do we come faithfully to the Lord's Supper? Or do we dread those Sundays when communion adds twenty minutes or more to the service? Do we devote ourselves to prayer? Do we pray for our called workers? For our leaders in our congregation? For brothers and sisters here who face difficulty and trial? For the preaching of the gospel here and throughout the world? Or do we only pray for others when the pastor leads us from the front of the church? Do we commit our own challenges to God? Or is that only our last resort?

The New Testament Church exists in a sinful world. We will always struggle with these things. We need to repent when we haven't been devoted to the word, to the sacraments, to the fellowship and to prayer. We need to cling to Christ for forgiveness for that sin. And we need to ask God to change us, to make us more the Christians he wants us to be. And we need to come and hear his good news, because that's where God makes the change. My friends, Jesus died for all the times and all the ways we were not devoted to him or to each other. And he rose and wiped that sin away. As your pastor, I forgive you for all that sin. For sixty years, God has proclaimed that forgiveness here. For sixty years, you have heard the good news in sermons and liturgies and Bible Classes. For sixty years, you have received the very body and blood of Christ to assure you those sins are forgiven and God has taught you then to go forth and live for him.

Today, we are beginning what I hope will be at least sixty more years of God's grace, if the Lord does not come back first. Go home today filled with the good news that Jesus has washed all your sins away. Go home devoted to doctrine and to the sacraments and to the fellowship and to prayer. That is the best way to celebrate this anniversary. Every one of you is a miracle of Pentecost. God found you and claimed you and gave you faith. God feeds you and carries you and will bring you home to heaven. God gives you a part in the life of the New Testament Church and of our congregation and he calls you to be a part of his work of proclaiming the good news to all creation. All that is a gift of God. All that is a miracle of his grace. Celebrate that miracle and be a part of his work! Amen.