

Pentecost – May 31, 2020
Text: John 7:37-39
Theme: Rivers Don't Just Sit There

Pentecost is the day we celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit. Before he ascended into Heaven, Jesus told his disciples to wait in Jerusalem for the Holy Spirit, and 10 days later, we hear the account that was read from the book of Acts a few minutes ago. There is no doubt that it was an amazing, miraculous day; people speaking in foreign languages they had not studied, tongues of fire dancing on heads, but you have to get to the "so what." The Holy Spirit came and a bunch of people heard about Jesus and that was about 2,000 years ago, so...so what?

There are two equally wrong errors with regard to the Holy Spirit. One is to overemphasize him in your life. Some Christians make the mistake of treating the Holy Spirit as though he is the focus of Christianity. Their religion becomes a religion of works, proving the manifestations of the Holy Spirit in their lives. They want to know which spiritual gifts you have, and they love taking those spiritual gift inventories. Some insist that in order for your faith to be valid, you have to remember the moment when you became a believer, that is, the moment the Holy Spirit first worked within you. There are some who demand that you exhibit signs of Holy Spirit working within you such as the ability to heal, speak in tongues or even walk on hot coals and

handle snakes. We Lutherans are rarely in any danger of this error. Those who fall into this error are called enthusiasts or charismatics, and it takes a great deal to get us Lutherans enthused about anything and charisma is normally not our gift! The second error is much more likely for us.

The second error is to all but completely ignore the Holy Spirit. Since he is a disembodied spirit and we can neither see him nor touch him, we just ignore him. I'm sure he's there doing something, but he doesn't really make any difference in my life. I don't think we are supposed to ignore the Holy Spirit. Jesus was very pointed in bringing him up frequently. The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Holy Trinity, and though he is not as central in the salvation drama as is the Father and the Son, he has a key role to play in your life. Yet he is neither to be overemphasized nor ignored.

Think about the Gospel according to John for today. Listen to what Jesus says.

"If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'" Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

He said this on the last day of the feast of Booths. This was an Old Testament feast day that God instructed the Israelites to celebrate every year to remember their pilgrimage from Egypt. The feast lasted for 8

days. It began and ended with a celebrative worship service and in between the people camped in booths and remembered the time when they had no home and were wandering in the wilderness, completely depending on God for all their provision. It was to remind them that they continue to depend completely on God for all they need.

It would be good for the Church today to have this celebration. It seems as though a great many people have forgotten who we are to depend on. Someone asked me how I remain so calm about this virus and the lock down and all the hysteria brewing all around us and I said very simply, I depend on God. If he wants me to serve him at this altar, he'll protect me from the virus and if he chooses not to protect me, there is not a thing in the world I can do about it. I will simply have to figure out how to serve him from my home, or my hospital bed or if I die, I get to really go home! Why would I be afraid of viruses when I serve the King of Creation? We serve the God who spoke the world into being, split the Red Sea and raised the dead. Why would a virus scare us? Don't let people who love drama whip you into a frenzy for their own amusement and ego. Don't allow the unfounded and unproven fears of those around you to dominate your life. Ignore them all, and calmly serve our God to the best of your ability.

At one point in the worship service during the feast of booths, the priests would encircle the altar and pour water onto the altar to both

remember when God provided water from the rock for them in the wilderness and to remember that God continues providing water for them even now. This event always happened at the climax of the worship on the last day of the feast. And that was when Jesus stood up and shouted,

“If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’” Blasphemy! Jesus had just publicly announced that he was God. The priests were shocked. The Pharisees were on the warpath. This could not be allowed to stand. But it did. Jesus made it clear that the Messiah, whom they were all awaiting at the Feast of Booths was there. And he would use his Holy Spirit to make the water alive and flowing. There is the proper work of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit always works behind the scenes and always points to Jesus, not us. Jesus provides the living water and the Holy Spirit delivers it to us, fills us up and puts us to work doing what the Messiah asks. He is the deliverer and we are the conduit for the living water provided by the Messiah. Stagnant water is never good. It breeds bugs both of the usual type and the bacterial type. It smells bad. It makes people and animals sick. Eventually it dries up and disappears. Living water is flowing. It is fresh and constantly replenishing. That’s why salvation is not just water but living water. Salvation does something.

When the living waters enter us, we become the vehicles through which the Holy Spirit delivers water to others.

In Revelation, John is shown the river of life flowing from the throne of God. Jesus is the River of Life, not the stagnant drainage ditch of life. He saw a river for a reason. Rivers go somewhere and do something. Pentecost is the day we celebrate being conscripted into the Kingdom of Heaven. The Holy Spirit will fill us up with God's Word and Jesus' body and blood. He will wash us clean in Holy Baptism and he will set us off upon the path he has determined for us to flow. We were not made part of the river to just sit here and stagnate. When the Holy Spirit entered you, you were empowered to serve Christ. How you might serve Christ is as varied and as rich as you are, but you are called to serve as his river of life and the Holy Spirit will see to it that you flow. You will flow over both the people who never knew him and over the people who have forgotten him.