

The Feast of Pentecost
5 June, Anno Domini 2022
St. John 14:23-31
Pr. Kurt Ulmer

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Dear people of God,

In verse 22 of John 14 we read “Judas (not Iscariot) said him, ‘Lord, how is it that you will manifest yourself to us, and not to the world?’”. Judas asked this question because Jesus had said to His disciples “And he who loves Me will be loved by my Father, and I will love Him and manifest Myself to him.”

Jesus’ answer to this question is of the utmost importance for any who wish to know Jesus, who desire to know the true character and work of God. The problem is that we don’t like the answer Jesus gives. It’s not satisfying to the flesh. And it’s definitely not satisfying to flesh which is deeply entrenched in the culture of feelings and self-created pseudo-realities where the only truth is the one I just imagined for myself.

Jesus’ answer to Judas’ question lies in the preaching of Judas and his brother apostles. Jesus, now, is known always and only in His Word. As Jesus said “If anyone loves me, he will keep (better translated as “guard”, like the Marines who keep watch over the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier) my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with Him.” Jesus doesn’t want you to look for special revelations or listen for voices. He definitely doesn’t want you looking down in your heart or waiting for visions or seeking Him in the beauty of a sunrise. As He promised, our Lord manifested Himself to us and abides with us wherever His Word is purely proclaimed. That is the only place we are to seek Him because that is the only place He will be found. To love Jesus is to love His Word, to love what He commands and promises, to keep our eyes fixed upon it, to read it, study it, learn it, and meditate upon day and night as the psalmist says. The healings, the miraculous feedings, even the raising of dead people - all that stuff was great but that’s not where Jesus directs your attention. It is always to His Word. All of these were only the fruit and confirmation of what Jesus spoke.

There were definitely some incredible displays taking place that Pentecost. There was the sound like that of a loud rushing wind. Then tongues of flame from

heaven divided and settled on the disciples. It was a bizarre and maybe even terrifying few moments. And this is so often what we look for. We want proof. We want visible, measurable demonstrations that God is at work. We want God to send us miraculous signs to show us the way because we think those are better and more reliable. We assume that the divine only wants to or only should operate in the fantastic and supernatural. Very often this is even how people choose a church. They look for the spectacular, visible manifestations that God is working - lots of people, lots of activities, lots of emotion, lots of happiness, lots of excitement. And many churches believe that if they could only jam some of the extraordinary into their worship then people will be drawn to them.

But Holy Scripture doesn't seem to indicate that either the rushing wind or the tongues of flame were the things that drew the multitudes. There are only a few instances of anything like that happening again. But what does happen again and again and again throughout Scripture? The preaching of Christ crucified for the salvation of sinners drawing people to faith in Christ. When the devout men from every nation under heaven gathered to the disciples that day they were amazed at the mighty works of God being proclaimed in their own language! It certainly wasn't the silly and useless nonsense babbling of those who claim to still receive the gift of speaking in tongues. These claim to have the Spirit but it is definitely not the Spirit of God because they aren't preaching Christ. Their speaking in tongues is nothing more than an arrogant show that benefits no one but themselves. St. Paul roundly condemned such foolish displays of vanity in his first epistle to the Corinthians. Those who pride themselves in the gift of whatever gibberish they claim to be speaking do not love the Word of God but themselves. They believe that speaking in tongues proves that they have somehow achieved a level of super spirituality that you haven't. It has nothing to do with Christ and Christ has nothing to do with it.

God is a speaking God. That's why there is language at all - because that is how God desires to communicate with us. It has been that way from the beginning. God is known by what He says. It's how He reveals Himself and His will to man. It's how He has provided that we can know Him. It is the Word of God, the good news of our salvation in Jesus Christ that gathers people and creates faith. Nothing else. It is the simple declarative Word of God "your sins are forgiven" that removes your sins as far from you as east is from west. It is the Word of God which strengthens and comforts God's children in the midst of their afflictions and trials and sorrows.

The ministry of Jesus was dominated by preaching - teaching man that he has rebelled against God, that he stands under God's strict judgment, and that we are completely unable to merit salvation or save ourselves; teaching us that He is a God of mercy who does not desire our damnation but that instead He has offered up His Son, Jesus Christ, as the atoning sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. It is only through this preaching and teaching that we are able to know that God applies the saving work of Christ to sinners through the washing of Holy Baptism and there makes us His children and pours out the Holy Spirit upon us. It is only through this preaching and teaching that we know that Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper to be a daily pasture for us so that we might be strengthened and confirmed in the true faith by the very Body and Blood which He offered on the cross to atone for our sins.

To love Jesus is to love His Word and treasure that Word above everything else. It is to place all our trust, hope, and confidence in what our Lord has spoken. To love Jesus is to submit ourselves to His Word, to acknowledge our own wisdom and reason and desires to be filled with sin. You cannot know or love Jesus or be kept in Him apart from His Word. He manifests Himself to you by His Word. He saves you by His Word. He teaches you by His Word. He forgives you by His Word. He makes known His will to you by His Word. He doesn't point you anywhere else so don't look anywhere else. It is by this word, which Jesus speaks from the Father, that the Holy Spirit saves you.

That's what Pentecost is about. It's really not about the Holy Spirit as though He needed to get His own special day too. It is the definitive demonstration that the apostolic preaching of Jesus Christ as the Son of God and Savior of the world is the will of God, that the work of Jesus continues through the witness of the apostles, and that God desires salvation in Christ to be proclaimed in all languages so that all may come to the knowledge of the truth and be saved. It is God's demonstration that you are to give your attention to the preaching of Christ and that you can be certain that the preaching of Christ Jesus is God's will. Like the crowds of Pentecost, we have been gathered here today by this preaching for the purpose of hearing this preaching so that by this preaching we may be brought to repentance and be forgiven of all our sins. You have been called by the Gospel. You have been gathered by the Gospel. You have been enlightened by the Gospel. You have been sanctified by the Gospel. You will be kept by the Gospel.

Hear again these beautiful words of St. Peter preached on Pentecost as those who heard his preaching believed what they heard, words which were given to him by the Holy Spirit and are therefore pure and true will of God: "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. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.” This is the sum and substance of the true work of the Holy Spirit - calling sinners to repentance and proclaiming to them the Lord Jesus Christ who bestows the salvation of His cross through the washing of Holy Baptism.

The third commandment is God’s insistence that we hold and cherish the hearing and the preaching of what He has spoken. “Remember the Sabbath Day by keeping it holy.” The Sabbath Day is the day of rest when we put aside the work we do and our busy schedules and obligations in the world and gather together as God’s children at the table of our heavenly Father to hear Him and feast on the rich food of salvation which He has prepared and set before us. Our Lord commands us to gladly hear and learn the Word of God, not as a simple exercise of obedience but so that we may be filled with His Word of life and truth and peace. This is the purpose behind the Faith in the Word devotion which is published every week. It is meant as an aid to make the treasure of God’s Word a central part of our life at home and so that we might as a congregation all be reading and hearing the same portions of Scripture throughout the week.

Let us repent of our hardness of heart and our reluctance and even outright refusal to diligently hear and read the Word of God which is able to save us and lead us into all truth.

May God grant us daily His Holy Spirit so that we may be drawn to love and hear the Holy Word of Christ which saves us and that we may firmly believe it and live holy lives according to it. May we teach it diligently to our children, talk of it when we sit in our homes, when we walk by the way, when we lie down, and when rise that it may bear much fruit in us.

In the Name of +Jesus.