



Day of Pentecost  
28 May 2023

Ascension Lutheran Church  
Rev. Christian W. Marien

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus, the Christ. Amen.

A little boy had to write a report for school, so he went to his mother and asked, “Mom, where did I come from?” Surprised at hearing such a question from her child, the mother discreetly answered, “Um, the stork brought you.” “And where did You come from?” the boy continued. “Well, the stork brought me, just like he brought you. Now go to your room. No more questions, please.” But the boy persisted. “What about grandma? Where did grandma come from?” “Look, the stork brought grandma, the stork brought me, the stork brought you! Now go to your room. I do not want to talk about this anymore!” So the little boy went to his room and began writing his report. “Our family hasn’t had a normal birth in three generations...”

There is little that is normal about today. It is Pentecost. The gifting of the Holy Spirit to the world. There are stories of flames of fire dancing over the heads of the disciples as they speak in the book of Acts. *2:1 When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. 2:2 And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. 2:3 Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. 2:4 All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.* The story of Pentecost comes after Jesus ascends into heaven. We remember what Jesus said in John, chapter 16: *But I am telling you the truth (says Jesus): it is better for you that I go away, because if I do not go, the Helper will not come to you. But if I do go away, then I will send him to you.*

Yet the words of invitation we hear Jesus speak today are from earlier days, just weeks after Jesus turned water into wine, spoke to a Samaritan woman, and healed the son of a royal official. As Jesus was still introducing his message of God’s love for us and telling us that the Kingdom of God has come near. Today, Jesus stands in the crossroads of the world in Jerusalem, at the festival of tabernacles or booths (hear Thanksgiving for us today). It is the time of harvest and people come together to give thanks to God. The tabernacles were a reminder of the temporary dwellings the Israelites lived in while they journeyed through the wilderness. It was a hugely popular week-long festival – when Jerusalem would swell to many times its size – when families would gather to celebrate and remember – parades to the temple happened each day which culminated in worship. On the last day of the festival, the final day in the Jewish calendar year, Jesus chooses this moment to tell a new story to the people of God. *On the last day of the festival, the great day, while Jesus was standing there, he cried out, “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, <sup>38</sup> and let the one who believes in me drink.*



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Is it any wonder that God the Holy Spirit enters the world as fire dancing over the heads of the disciples? It is as if Jesus knew all along the promise of living water would not be enough to inspire God's people to new things. God uses water in wondrous ways to show God's power. It is at Jacob's well that Moses meets a woman who will one day become his wife. Water quenches the thirst of the Israelites, from the gushing rock, during the Exodus. Naaman, the commander of an enemy army, bathes in the Jordan river and is cured of his leprosy. Jesus is baptized in that same river centuries later. At a Samaritan well, Jesus speaks to a woman and offers her living water. Jesus heals a paralyzed man at the pool of Bethesda – when the paralyzed man cannot make it into the pool first after the angel stirs the water. Jesus heals a man born blind through the waters of the Pool of Siloam. All this water used to help us imagine God's power. Yet it will be on the last great day of the feast of tabernacles that Jesus stands in the temple and speaks a word of invitation, *“Let anyone who is thirsty come to me.”*

The last day of the Feast of Tabernacles (Booths) had a water ceremony. Worshippers would follow the high priest to the pool of Siloam and gather water and then in procession move to the temple and pass straight to the altar. They would then pour their water down into a silver funnel that stood high above the altar and went down to the altar. It was a grand display, and the water would flow from the high level of the temple, like a fountain, through the silver funnel, and eventually to the altar. It is here where Jesus tells the people, “let anyone who is thirsty come to me.” In the Old Testament the Jews believed that the water or libation ceremony primarily represented the pouring out of God's Holy Spirit (Isaiah 12:3). *“With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.”* It is God's promise to every single one of us, that finds life in the Holy Spirit's entrance into the world.

*“In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. <sup>18</sup> Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy. <sup>19</sup> I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke. <sup>20</sup> The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord. <sup>21</sup> And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’*

I am holding on to that promise tightly today. I expect many of you have received my letter sharing the news of my upcoming surgery. I have waffled on my decision, wavered on the timeline, wondered about the promise of pain relief, weakened at the thought of the recovery, and finally welcomed the relief of the decision



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to move forward. I have been washed in the waters of baptism trusting in the invitation of Jesus. I have come thirsty to the promised waters of eternal life on more days than I can count. And my friends – Jesus has never disappointed me. Yes, there have been days when the waters overwhelmed and days when I could have stayed longer at the wellspring of life, but still Jesus has never let me down. *“With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation,”* the prophet Isaiah reminds me. And from the disciple Peter, “and everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

I trust in the God who calls me in the waters of baptism. I trust in the God who dies on the cross and rises from the dead to promise me the joy of eternal life. I trust in the God who moves among us – who helps us – who walks alongside us. So many of you have shared your own stories of faithfulness. God’s faithfulness to you. Your faithful trust in God. In so many ways, your faithfulness is a living example – witness – testimony of God’s presence among us. For all the things that are not normal on this Pentecost day, let me tell you what is normal, for me, today. This community of faith. Each of you – sharing the stories of your lives – reminding me and anyone who will listen – that the God who invites us to quench our thirst is the same God who lights the fires of faith within us and all around us.

We have an old mantle clock in our home. It is twice as old as I am. Everything inside is mechanical – no microchips, no batteries. For the clock to run and the chimes to sound it must be wound. When we first inherited the clock, my wife would make me go down in the middle of the night to stop the pendulum so that it would not chime on every quarter hour. In the nights when you could not sleep, the clock would remind you every fifteen minutes how the night was moving towards morning and you were not any closer to sleep. For awhile, we let the clock wind down until it stopped so we would not have to start and stop and restart the clock and change the time while we patiently waited for each quarter chime to ring. I like the sound of the clock – it reminds me of family members who are no longer in this life and countless family gatherings where this clock kept watch and time over the proceedings. Now the mantle clock chimes and we have become accustomed to its ringing. We hear the clock chime when the house is quiet or when we are in the dining room. We do not always hear it sound in the middle of the night anymore. It could be that our hearing is going. But I like to think we have become familiar to the chiming of the clock as one might become comfortable with a friend who stays after everyone else has left. The mantle clock has become a reminder of the presence of the Holy Spirit in my life. Sometimes I notice. Sometimes I do not. Yet the Holy Spirit is present – our helper, our counselor, our comforter – in this life and the next. Thanks be to God! Amen.



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