

Pastor T.C. Arnold
Pentecost (Confirmation)
Acts 2
May 20th, 2018

According to the ancient church historian Josephus, on the day before the Festival of Pentecost, the priests began to gather at the inner court of the Temple. Jewish people from around the ancient Near East would already have filled the city, because they could not travel far on the precious day, the Sabbath – there was such a thing as a “Sabbath’s day walk” which limited observant Jews to about 2/3 of a mile on the sacred Holy Day. Otherwise, the journey would be considered work and there is to be no work done on the Sabbath.

So, on Pentecost morning, farmers from around Jerusalem gathered baskets with several types of food. Pentecost was also known as the festival of the harvest. A flute player led the farmers up Mount Zion as they sang the Psalms of Ascents (Ps 120-36). This was called the *Hallel Hagadol* and was a celebration of God’s creation, the deliverance of the people out of Egypt, and conquering the Promised Land from which the farmers gathered their offerings.

And now you know why there were so many people in Jerusalem when this grand event of the Holy Spirit fell upon the people and they began to speak in different tongues. So many were gathered together and the noise... it says a mighty rushing wind filled the entire house where they were sitting... must have been quite frightening. As the Spirit descends upon them, so many more who were gathered from all over could now hear the Word of God spoken in their own language. This is transformational. This now gives the church legs to move out into the rest of the world because God chose to use language to communicate his message of life and salvation to His creation.

For the church today, when we think of Pentecost, we think about this event described in Acts 2. But before this event, Pentecost was an important time for the people of God. It was a time of gathering and thanksgiving – for offering and singing praises of redemption to their Lord who had mercy on them, who delivered them. And now, the mercy and the deliverance would take on a new persona... and it would be the Savior Jesus. The Spirit came to testify about the one who is at the center of our faith – Christ Jesus the Lord. And for that reason... from the day of Pentecost until this day, the Spirit testifies in the language of the people. The Spirit works through His Holy Word to bring you knowledge of Salvation. The Spirit shows Christians how to live and act... not to earn salvation... but because God has given us His law to live by for the sake of our neighbor. Today, praise and thanksgiving and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit all come together for the sake of God’s people. It all comes together here, in this place... this place that we share in common.

In the Epistle text, God’s people had one “place” in common. And so do we. I’m very grateful for that. God’s people gathered in one place – receiving His precious gifts. Of course, we not only have this place in common but we also have this faith in common. That faith is confirmed upon us by the work of the Holy Spirit. We live in this Spirit of truth together – no wise doubting but firmly believing that God’s Word is truth. We have and celebrate and enjoy a Church together – Christ’s Church. What a blessing.

And for that reason, we also share our Church – our “Christ-likeness” outside of this place as well. What does that mean? Well, I hope you know what that means. It means that our community established by Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit poured out on His Church goes beyond these walls. Confirmation class, you are not just a Christian today. You will be, and

have been, a Christian when you leave here and that has been your identity since your baptism. What this means is that you are a Christian when you have words to say to your friends. Choose them carefully. You are a Christian when you have an opportunity to set an example or help someone you might not like so much right now who is in need. Christians are not just Christians for an hour a week. Being confirmed in your faith today points you back to the Baptism granted to each of you a long time ago. This is the place where you began your faithful journey. The Lord began it in you – as you were brought to that font by the people who knew you would one day be here. That font is the place where our Lord poured out His goodness on you – not for just a time for your life – but for your entire life.

Beloved, when your days are lonely and sad, remember what this day was for you. You are confirmed in the faith. That means you are not alone. Lean on those who are with you, who love you. You are loved. When you are hurt and despondent, you are not alone. The Church's anniversary day... this day of Pentecost is a day includes you and your fellow believers. The Christian Church and her anniversary are set before us as a reminder that we are included in the celebration. We are the ones who have an inheritance that will go far beyond this day and age. We are the ones for whom there is more. There is more than this fallen world. There is more for you.

Be confirmed in your faith on this special anniversary day. Be not confirmed in your sins. The confirmation today is your confirmation. You are confirmed into the Holy Spirit. To be confirmed in your sins would be to live as if Christ does not matter. To be confirmed in our sins would be to live as if you matter the most. Looking inward selfishly can divert our eyes away from living out this grand anniversary. That can be dangerous – so I not only warn those who are being confirmed this day – I also speak to all of you. Stay away from that which diverts your eyes away from the anniversary celebration of gathered guests. Jesus unites us by His saving grace in this world of stanch individualism, in this world of ideas that being independent means having no ties that bind us together. We need a common strand. We desperately need the more – the more that is Jesus, the Savior of our souls, in this world where so many of us find ourselves consumed with that which tears us apart. I need you, brothers and sisters. We need each other.

The believers were, "*Gathered together in one place.*"

That's real community. The "Gathered together" part as well as the "believers" part. In ancient days Pentecost drew people together – to give thanks and praise and to give offerings. They came to be together. This is so important. It's important to this community of believer that are in Christ Lutheran this morning as well. Here is your sustenance for each day. Here is the place where the Lord makes you His very own. Here is the place we celebrate anniversaries. Here is the place where we truly celebrate life – life everlasting. Be a part of it – parents, confirmation kids – all of us together – each week to receive His gracious promises and blessed holy meal. You're not going to want to miss it. He has much to give you. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.