

What a glorious day! I don't know how the day itself started out. A day in May in the Holy Land. Let's assume the weather was beautiful.

120 Christians had been together—who knows how many days prior. This is the entire Christian Church in that day—gathered in one place, men and women as Luke makes clear.

The last thing this group had done, as recorded in Acts, was witness the replacement of Judas. And now Matthias makes 12. 12 apostles ready to match up with the 12 tribes of Israel. They were now ready for what was to come.

The mechanics and logistics of Pentecost are unknown. Apparently, not too important. Are they in the upper room and then spill out? Are they in one of the atria of the outer courts of the Temple? We don't know. We don't even know for sure who are the "they" in "they were all together." Probably the 12, though, since that is the last particular reference to a group.

But the "they" began to speak in languages they had never studied. They spoke the languages of the people who were gathered there for the Pentecost, devout Jews from all over the known and civilized world. These men were hearing in their own language about the mighty works of God.

Take note, everyone was hearing about the mighty works of God in their own language. No one had an excuse. All were without excuse. It was obvious something was happening here. People were hearing these men speaking their language, knowing they had no training in it. They heard what God had done.

These were Jews who had come to the Pentecost celebration. They came expecting one thing. Now they were hearing something completely different. They were hearing about how God had rescued His creation, namely the crown of His creation, man himself, and He had done it through the events that had just happened a couple weeks earlier.

It was a glorious day, but not all were too crazy about hearing it. They tried to explain it away. They tried to make excuses for why they wouldn't listen.

They were without excuse but they tried to make them anyway. "Oh, they're just drunk."

No, they knew better. They knew something was happening. Something divine was taking place. God was doing a new thing. The Holy Spirit was being poured out in a way the world had never seen before. Babel was in the process of being reversed, turned back. But they didn't want to acknowledge it, so they said these men were drunk.

I've been thinking about what happened in Minneapolis and now the reaction that's happening all over, including even here in Buffalo. It started with the four cops who were responsible for George Floyd's death. Once he was apprehended and in handcuffs, what was the point of staying on his neck? What excuse would Derek give or the three that watched him?

There was no excuse, but you know they will have one. Their defense team will find something. I can't imagine it could be anything but flimsy, but that's what people do when they can't admit what they've done. They come up with flimsy excuses, just like those who claimed these men were drunk.

But that's not the end of anticipated flimsy excuses. What happened to all the mayors and governors who said churches can't meet or businesses couldn't open because it was sure to cause a fresh outbreak of the virus? Were they expressing deep concern about the lack of social distancing even when protesting was peaceful? I haven't heard it.

As I recall, when there were peaceful protests about opening businesses and getting back to work, some governors said they would have to lock down their states even longer because those protests were surely going to bring on another outbreak. I haven't heard any concern about that with this.

If someone were to ask them what happened to their deep and extremely troubling concerns about the virus, what would they say? Because if peaceful protests about getting back to work or gathering in churches are so likely to spark another

outbreak, these protests are even more likely do that. Are they deeply concerned and extremely troubled about another outbreak from this because I haven't heard anything like it, and if they are not, and they were asked why not, I'm confident we'd get some flimsy excuse for their inconsistency.

Which is exactly what was going on there at that Pentecost celebration. It was a flimsy excuse to explain away what was happening. "These men are drunk!"

Come on! It was like when Jesus cast out demons and some of the crowd said He was doing it by the prince of demons (Lk 11:15).

Come on! Do you really expect us to buy that! They just didn't want to face what was happening. They didn't want to let the Holy Spirit do His work.

This event had been in the works for a long time. Before time even began, the Lord saw it happening. But several hundred years earlier, He revealed that it was to happen this day.

The prophet Joel had talked about it and it was happening exactly as he had described it. The Holy Spirit was being poured out. The Holy Spirit wasn't dripped; the Holy Spirit wasn't dropped; the Holy Spirit wasn't squeezed out; He was poured out, gushing like a fountain, drenching everyone. Drenching everyone with the Life-giving Word.

Just as Paul describes the Holy Spirit to Titus and as we have it memorialized in our catechism. "He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal in the Holy Spirit whom He poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior." And people were hearing the wonders of God and miraculously believing it!

People who had been there 40 days earlier, who might have been part of the crowd yelling, "Crucify Him!" or those who wondered at the sights and signs, recognizing something weird was happening in the heavens, an earthquake, and an eerie darkness that could not be explained as an eclipse, because no eclipse could possibly happen when the moon was in its current location. Blood and fire and pillars of smoke, recalling the plagues of judgment on the Egyptians in their land and their end with the pillar of smoke at the Red Sea.

These people who had witnessed it, had gone back home, and heard probably nothing more. Now they were back. And the Holy Spirit was doing what the Holy Spirit does—creating faith. They were hearing the words and the wonders of God. They were hearing the wonders had been done for them. As Paul reminds us in Rom 10, Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God. The people heard the word, and the people believed it!

It wasn't the flames of fire; it wasn't the rushing wind louder than a tornado; it wasn't the speaking in languages never studied so people could hear these wonders, it was the faith that was created. That was the biggest wonder of all. As Joel had said, and all who call on the name of the Lord will be saved. They will call on the name of the Lord. Wonder of wonders!

Peter read the text for his sermon and began to preach it. He explained what Joel was talking about. He explained what was happening here, but the Holy Spirit was already being poured out. The people were already hearing this Word and believing it. Faith was created.

We take faith for granted. We think faith is so easy. I believe. What's the big deal? Lots of people believe. Ya gotta believe in something. I believe I'll have another beer.

Sometimes we don't take it any more seriously than that. But this faith being created is on the par and even greater than the first creation of light.

When God created the world, He created it out of nothing. He spoke and the things that were not came to be. That's an amazing thing. Truly an amazing thing! But there wasn't a force in place to prevent these things from being brought into existence. In other words, the Lord didn't have to reverse what was already there, so they could be created.

He does to create faith. He must reverse what is already there. There is enmity between us and God. A deep hatred. Like one of our Lutheran confessions puts it, you can't understand how deep it is until you see it revealed in His word. The Holy Spirit must reveal it to us. But before we understand how deep that hatred is, or even care how deep that hatred is, that deep hatred must be removed.

The fact is, we don't naturally love God. We don't naturally want God. In the place of faith, there is that hatred.

A hymn that was suggested to be sung was one that would have gone with our first reading. Look it up to think deeper about what it says later. It's 569. In Adam we have all been one, one huge rebellious man. We all have fled that evening voice that sought us as we ran.

We run. And when we can't run anymore, we stand up and fight. Never mind that we are no match for God. Adam didn't really think he was going to get away with blaming God for giving him Eve and that's why he sinned. But that didn't stop him. He tried it anyway. He ran and when he couldn't run anymore, he stood up and fought.

The voices of those who claimed these men were drunk were the more natural voices. They were behaving more like we all are naturally. They fought. They behaved as they are naturally.

Naturally, before God creates faith in us through our baptism. Before the Holy Spirit creates faith in us that takes a hold of these things and says, "I know God loves me in Christ."

Yes, a lot of people will say they love God. They will say they believe in God. But is their love and faith based on a knowledge of what they are? If they do not see that they are by nature sinful and unclean and that they deserve God's present and eternal punishment; if they do not see that they sin, not just by what they do, but by what they leave undone; if they do not see that they sin not just in deeds, but in words, and even in thoughts, even in the very motives of the things they do; if they don't see those things, then they can't know a love for God. They can't know God's love for them.

If they don't see this about themselves, then they can't believe that God has paid a terrible price so they could be loved, they can't believe that without Him paying that price, there would be no love for them. They can't see that He became a human being, to suffer rejection and even hell, for them, because they don't see their need.

No, if they don't see that, if they don't see that He had to pay that price for them, if they don't see that He did pay that terrible price for them, then they can't love God. They don't believe in Him. They may tell themselves they believe, but they don't. They may say they love God, but they can't. And if the Holy Spirit has revealed this to them and they still refuse, then they are without excuse.

But you. You have experienced His grace. You have known His mercy. But first, He has shown you over and over what we deserve. Over and over we have said it ourselves.

We will never be able to find the full depths, but neither should we search for it. To go that deep is to defy our God who wants us to confess what we are, and then immediately in faith embrace His love and mercy in Christ. The Holy Spirit wants us to enjoy all He has for us.

He also wants to keep us in His gifts, so we never revert back to our natural condition. That would be to embrace death. He would not have that, so He keeps coming to us, giving His gifts, keeping us in His gifts, nourishing our faith, fortifying it against doubts and false ideas about Him. He wants to keep coming to us so we will keep calling out to Him and so like those naysayers of Pentecost, we too can see, we are without excuse. AMEN