

Mission Festival
Glen Ullin and Hannover
Sermon Text: Acts 2:1-21

Sermon emphasis vv. 1-4: “When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. And divided tongues of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.”

Are We Missing Something?

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

Are we missing something here in the church? That's a question that may run thru our minds at times, especially as we hear the words of our reading from the book of Acts. We hear about the loud rushing wind, the tongues of fire descending on the disciples, the multitudes hearing the message in different languages, and about 3,000 people were baptized on that day. They must have been excited for, that's a good day's work of evangelism.

So are we missing something? After all, I haven't heard that life here at **Zion, St. Peter's** Lutheran is quite as exciting as that day of Pentecost, and you may be tempted to be disappointed about that. Is there something that you're doing wrong? Have you somehow gone off course? There are plenty of people out there who would add to your discouragement by telling you that yes, you have gone off course; yes, you are missing something; and yes, you need to leave lots of that "Lutheran" baggage behind and get back to the early church.

But is it true that you are missing something? Has **Zion, St. Peter's** Lutheran

Church departed from the Scriptures, becoming so focused on doctrine that it's forgotten about missions and evangelism? Our reading from the Book of Acts for today gives us a wonderful opportunity to talk about mission and outreach, so let us do so in two parts. First let's look at "What you're missing, and what you have," and then "What you have and what you do."

First: Are you missing something from that first Day of Pentecost? Yes. You're missing wind and fire. Today the church is not filled with a loud, rushing wind (other than from me). Nor are there tongues of fire dancing on top of the heads of anyone in the room (although some of you may be steamed about something). So, you don't have wind and fire like they did at that first New Testament Pentecost. That's what you're missing, and it's not a big mystery why: When something big happens in the Lord's plan of salvation, He kicks it off with something special. At the crucifixion, there was darkness, an earthquake, and a torn curtain in the temple. At the Resurrection, saints are raised from the dead and testify. And now, at the first Pentecost, there is loud rushing wind and fire.

You don't have wind and fire. But, what do you have? For one thing, you have the Word of God; you have the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Good News that He has died to take away your sins. You don't have any living apostles, but you do have their teachings in the New Testament. It was this same message that St. Peter proclaimed to the crowds that day; the same message that saved 3,000 that day. It is the same message that is proclaimed here at **Zion**, **St. Peter's**.

Do you have anything else? You bet! You have Holy Baptism. The same Baptism received by 3,000 that day is the same Baptism that has washed away your sins. It is the same Baptism that grants forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation.

So, you don't have loud wind and tongues of fire. But you do have the Word and Holy Baptism. It's alright that you don't have wind and fire; they don't take sins away; whereas, God's Word and Baptism do.

But maybe you are missing something here? After all, 3000 people were baptized that day. 3000! After one sermon! Something was happening there so powerful that 3000 people were baptized into the faith; and without 14-16 hours of adult instruction or 2-3 years of confirmation. Surely this means something, doesn't it? You may be tempted to think so. You may be tempted to believe that the Holy Spirit was acting stronger back then, or else that you're not making use of the Holy Spirit as you ought to be, that you're somehow hindering God's work. (Or you may be tempted to think that you place too much emphasis on confirmation instruction.) But let's not speculate. Let's see what the text has to say.

The text declares that there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men, from every nation under heaven. This makes sense: Pentecost was a major festival, and any devout Jew who could was supposed to come to Jerusalem for worship. In fact, the population of Jerusalem at such times could have swelled to a million or more. Who came to Jerusalem? Devout Jews! This meant that these were men who were well-taught in the Old Testament. They had been taught throughout their

lives of God's promises of the Savior to come. In fact, from the Old Testament, they knew everything about the Savior except for one thing: His Name.

When Peter preaches his Pentecost sermon, what does he do? He tells them the Savior's name. He declares that the Savior they have been taught about, and the One they have been waiting for, has come. He declares to them that Jesus, whom they crucified, has died to take away their sins. For these devout men waiting for the Savior, Peter fills in the last piece of the puzzle. Quoting from the Old Testament again and again, he proclaims that Jesus is the long-expected Savior, and He has accomplished their salvation. These men have had more than 14-16 hours of adult instruction; they've had a lifetime's worth of careful instruction. Rejoicing that the Savior has come, 3,000 of them believe and are baptized.

Now, I don't wish to take away from the miracle of those 3,000 baptisms at all; each time someone is saved, it is a miracle for it is solely the work of the Holy Spirit. But think of this for a moment: If a million devout men are in Jerusalem, and 3000 are baptized, that means that only 3 one-thousandths of one percent of these devout men were baptized that day. This would receive criticism from many a church-growth author.

I'm trying to make two points. The first is this: From a human perspective, missions have always been tough, often slow and difficult. St. Paul preached sometimes and many believed; at other times they stoned him nearly to death. Missions and evangelism can be discouraging to us because we expect the Lord to

act according to our schedule, producing results quickly and steadily. But that means that we are trying to impose our will and schedule upon the Lord. From a human perspective, mission work in some ways is easier and tougher today than it ever has been before. To our advantage, we have a lot of modern technology and help to learn the Word and get the Word out. To our disadvantage, we don't have that Pentecost pool of devout believers, just waiting for the last puzzle piece to fall into place.

The second point is this: Whether mission work from a human perspective is easy or tough, the Lord remains the same. By remaining the same, the Lord remains faithful to His promises, continuing to grant salvation by His means of grace, all for the sake of His Son who died for us. Some mission fields are fertile, while some are nearly barren; but the Word of God is the Word of God, and this is how He comes to us in order to save us from our sin.

Often when we think of missions we think about overseas missions. In the ND District we have two such missions that we support. One is in Chile and the other is in Kenya; we support those mission endeavors with \$20,000 a year to Chile and \$25,000 a year to Kenya.

We also have mission work here in North Dakota. We have Wittenberg Chapel on the UND Campus in Grand Forks; which takes a yearly support of about \$110,000 to support a full-time pastor and provide a parsonage for him and his family, plus up-keep of both facilities.

In the next few years I would like our churches to start looking also within their four walls when it comes to mission and evangelism. How many baptized and confirmed members do we have in the community that have grown lax or gone from attending church to be kept and strengthened in the faith for this life and eternal life? The focus of this endeavor is called Generation to Generation. As Martin Luther has said, “The church is and has always been just one generation from extinction in this place.” In other words, if we do not share and encourage members to remain in the Word of God and receiving His Sacraments the next generation of the church is gone.

These are the things that your offerings to the District support. With us working together to do mission work we are more than a finger or a hand or an arm; we are a body working together to accomplish this joyous work that the Lord has allowed us to participate in with Him.

Therefore, what a great comfort this is for you the Church; rather than trying to measure the mission and evangelism work by the year's-always-changing statistical report, you have God's holy Word to tell you whether you are on track or not. You don't have wind and fire. You do have Word and Sacrament, and that is how the Lord saves-when and where He wills.

Now What You Have and What You Do: What you have today, you want to rejoice in. You have the goodness of God in the forgiveness of sins that He grants you in His means of grace, (those are His Word and Sacraments) for the sake of

Jesus. I pray that you are encouraged, for one of the greatest obstacles you face is discouragement. In fact, some have stated Lutherans seem to suffer from a malady called "Lutheran shame." The symptoms of Lutheran shame are that we are under the impression that our doctrine isn't all it could be. We find ourselves thinking things like, "Yes, we have good doctrine, but we're just not 'alive' like other churches." Or "We Lutherans are too concerned with doctrine, and not enough with missions." Or, "Lutheran doctrine is okay, but we need something else when it comes to evangelism, when it comes to saving the unsaved." Or, "We just don't have 'it' like some other churches do." (Whatever "it" may be! Maybe an overhead screen or a praise band!)

And so we begin to grow ashamed of what we believe and teach as a church. And growing ashamed of what we believe and teach, we don't like that feeling at all; and so we begin to look around, trying to find something that we can add or change in order to bring life to the church; or at least to change things so we're not so apologetic for doing what we do. At times like that, we are quick to stray from the Word of God, and quick to look to at what we do or can do instead. We look at other churches where the grass seems greener and want to do whatever they are doing. We look at other churches that are growing faster and want to adopt their methods for growth, even if it is not scriptural. We may grow weary of being careful with doctrine and practice, and try to ignore our doctrine in the name of success. The measure of any church is not how big it is in terms of facility or

numbers or budget; the measure of any church is whether or not it remains faithful to the Scriptures. I tell pastors, your pastor, you are called to be faithful; not successful. The measure of any missionary effort is not how many converts it achieves in its first year or years; but how purely and rightly it proclaims God's Word and administers His Holy Sacraments.

Could it be that it is not your doctrine holding you back? Could it be that you are hesitant to believe and practice it, because you are not quite "sold yourselves" that it is true and right and good? Could it be that the problem is not with your teachings, but with you? After all, what could be more enlivening, exciting, and joy-giving than the news that by God working in you through His Means of Grace, the Lord, who died for you, grants you faith for eternal life and salvation?

Let us not doubt or be discouraged. Let us faithfully examine God's Word and preserve His precious teachings. Preserve it, not in the sense of putting it in a jar on the shelf and never addressing it again. Preserve it in the sense of this: Let us continue to proclaim exactly what God's Word declares, that people might hear and believe. Let us carefully preserve God's Word in all its truth and purity, so that we might continue to declare that saving Word throughout all generations. For the Lord continues to pour out His Spirit on all flesh. He continues to grant you grace through His precious Means of Grace, and by these means the Holy Spirit is at work to justify and sanctify you.

This is the Good News of life and salvation; indeed, there is no better news to

be heard. By the proclaimed Word and the Sacraments, the Lord continues to grant faith and forgiveness to His people, sanctifying you so that you might depart from this church and go about the vocations that He has given you. You receive His grace, and by that grace you grow in faith. In that faith, you go about your vocations. You work hard for your employers and are in service to your fellow man, showing your faith. This congregation will grow because of you being faithful with God's Word. Parents and grandparents, take on the responsibility of teaching your children about Jesus. Do not neglect this important mission and evangelism! And, as God gives opportunities, may you be able to give an answer to all who ask about the hope that is within you.

This is the mission program of God, the evangelism and mission program that He declares in His Word. If each of you truly rejoices in the means of grace and go about the vocation that God has given you, there is no time or room for shame or discouragement. There is only the joy of the Lord.

Do not be misled to be discouraged or ashamed of what you teach and practice here; if it is in accordance with the Word of God, then you have the blessing of your Lord. Rejoice in what is right. For what happens here is exactly what happened on the first birthday of the Church; that Pentecost Day after the first Easter: The Lord still pours out His Holy Spirit upon you this day, granting you forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. He does so with the same means He used on that first Pentecost Sunday: His holy Word and His sacrament of Baptism. (And

for the Christian who is instructed and prepared, He continues to forgive and strengthen you by His holy Supper.)

Are you missing something? A better question is, "What has the Lord provided?" The Lord has provided life and salvation for the sake of His Son. You are missing nothing that the Lord hasn't promised to give to you. May you rejoice in this precious gift and proclaim it to all who will hear: for in this Gospel is life and salvation for you and the world. Amen

The love of God that surpasses all understanding keeps your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.