

St. James Lutheran Church

**Pentecost**

**May 23, 2010**

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First Reading: Acts 2:1-24

Second Reading: Romans 8:14-17

Gospel: John 15:8-17

**To Speak for God**

The events of Pentecost are a powerful reminder that God will not be silent. A vital aspect of our faith is that we believe in a God who speaks. The bible begins with the story of how God spoke the whole creation into being. "God said, 'Let there be light.', and there was light." God spoke words of judgment and justice, as well as words of compassion and mercy through his prophets: "Thus says the Lord..." Then God spoke most clearly and powerfully through his Son, Jesus Christ – the Word made flesh.

Some presumed that God's Word could be silenced by nailing him to a cross. But God raised Jesus from the dead, and he came to his own, speaking the blessing of "Peace." Even as Jesus was about to return to his Father in heaven, he assured his disciples that the Holy Spirit would come to them, the Spirit that would "teach them everything and remind them of all that he had said to them." Ten days after the Ascension, God sent the promised Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost.

On that day God spoke loudly and clearly, not through a single voice, not even in a single language – but through many voices and many languages. All the disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit, and what did they do? They began to speak! They began to speak, not about themselves, but about God. What they began to tell the crowd, in many languages, so all could understand, was:

"God's deeds of power"

"the great things God has done"

“the mighty acts of God.”

They announced to all who would listen the love of God made known in Jesus Christ, the gospel of repentance and forgiveness, the truth that sets us free. The words God gave them to speak were compelling and persuasive. That very day of Pentecost 3,000 people became baptized believers.

On this anniversary of Pentecost, I remind you that God still calls and empowers us to speak. The speaking that’s called for has nothing to do with our personal views, preferences or opinions. This world is filled to overflowing with things people have to say about themselves. Consider the tidal wave of verbiage that is unleashed on a daily basis through endless blogs, tweets, texts, emails and voice messages. Today people have so many ways to say something – and apparently very little worth saying.

This world doesn’t need to hear more about us (or about Paris Hilton or Donald Trump or Lady Gaga). But the world surely needs to hear more of God:

- more truly good news
- more unvarnished truth
- more reason to hope

What people need to hear from you and me is not:

- “Our God is better than your God.”
- “I have something you don’t have.”
- “Believe like I do – or else.”

Nor do people need to hear anything like:

- “One god is as good as another.”
- “Believe whatever works for you.”

Instead what needs to be said is things like:

- \* There is a God above all the pretenders, above all the false gods (including yours and mine).
- \* There is a God who is the Creator of heaven and earth, the author and giver of life.

- \* This God is awesome and powerful – not to be trifled with – and this God demonstrates his power chiefly in showing mercy, in his infinite patience, his steadfast faithfulness.
- \* Let us speak of a God who knows us intimately, because he has lived on earth as one of us.
- \* A God who cares for each of us personally, who is acquainted with our joys and sorrows.
- \* Let us tell others of a God who has high hopes for us – and who, therefore, also has high expectations of us.
- \* A God who thinks more highly of us than we think of ourselves (as hard as that may be to imagine).
- \* A God whose ways are higher than our ways, who does not embrace our selfish priorities – yet encourages us to share his.
- \* A God who can be trusted – who insists on being trusted above all else (because to trust anything or anyone more than God is a sure path to disappointment and despair).
- \* Let us learn to speak humbly: as God’s ambassadors, not as self-appointed authorities. Yet let us be sure to speak unapologetically on behalf of God’s genuine wisdom and authority. Let us never be ashamed of the Gospel. Let us not be embarrassed to bear the name of Jesus Christ.

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Pentecost is a moving story about power – God’s power. It’s not our power. St. Paul describes it this way: “We have this treasure in earthen vessels to show that the transcendent power belongs to God, and not to us.” It’s God’s power – yet it is shared with us that we might be instruments of God’s grace and peace – and power. The Pentecost story teaches us not to over-estimate our own capabilities, and to never under-estimate the power of God. God intends to speak – to make his will known. And God wants to speak through us, his people.

Because of Pentecost, speaking for God is no longer the vocation of a chosen few. God has now poured out his Spirit on all believers, through

Holy Baptism: on men and women, young and old, rich and poor, the privileged and the oppressed.

Now, it's not that everyone should start preaching sermons. Yet every Christian has something to tell about God. If you believe in God, if you know the story of Jesus, if you have experienced the wonder of forgiveness, if grace has touched your life, if hope is alive in your heart – you certainly have something to say, good news to share. Every committed Christian has a faith story. Pentecost is our commissioning to tell those stories.

Over the past two years, about 20 of our fellow members have shared some of their faith stories. These stories have been very different in both form and content – yet each one has been a powerful and moving testimony. The “Speaking of Faith” series is one of the best things we are doing as a congregation. Each offering is a blessing to those who do the telling – and to us who get to listen in.

Our hope when we began this series was that, bit by bit, members would (A) get comfortable with the notion that they have a faith story of their own and (B) find an opportunity to share it (not necessarily here at church, but perhaps with friends or family – or even with someone who doesn't know the goodness of God.)

God has a lot to say that people need to hear – yet how will God be heard unless you and I open our mouths? This is serious business! The world is flooded with information – yet what people are thirsty for is news of a God who cares, who heals, who forgives, who won't forsake us. We can't duck this responsibility because we're shy or because we're Lutheran, or because we're not good with words. When Old Testament prophets like Moses or Amos or Jonah tried to get out of speaking for God, they soon learned God wouldn't take no for an answer. Jesus assures us that when the time comes to speak, the Holy Spirit will give us the right words to say.

Just as the Spirit of God opens our minds to understand what we read in the pages of the bible, and opens our hearts to believe and trust in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior – so that same Holy Spirit has power to open our

mouths to speak of what God has done and what God is continuing to do in our lives and in this world.

The wonderful promise at Pentecost is that “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.” Isn’t that good news! But how can someone call on a God whom they do not know, with whom they are unacquainted, a God they’ve never heard of or heard from? And how will they know God is for real, how will they hear of God – unless you and I are willing to speak?

Faith comes through hearing, so we better start speaking of God.

Amen