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St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749
Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
May 15, 2016
Pentecost Sunday

Scripture Lessons: Acts 2:1-21; John 7:37-39

Hymns: 232; 224; 226; 313:3

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord
and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Isaiah 44:1-6

“Yet hear now, O Jacob My servant,
And Israel whom I have chosen.

² Thus says the LORD who made you
And formed you from the womb, *who* will help you:

‘Fear not, O Jacob My servant;
And you, Jeshurun, whom I have chosen.

³ For I will pour water on him who is thirsty,
And floods on the dry ground;

I will pour My Spirit on your descendants,
And My blessing on your offspring;

⁴ They will spring up among the grass
Like willows by the watercourses.’

⁵ One will say, ‘I *am* the LORD’s’;
Another will call *himself* by the name of Jacob;
Another will write *with* his hand, ‘The LORD’s,’
And name *himself* by the name of Israel.

⁶ “Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel,
And his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts:

‘I *am* the First and I *am* the Last;
Besides Me *there is* no God. (NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth.
Amen.

In Christ Jesus, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: Pentecost Festival

We know the Bible History lesson very well, almost as well as the account of Jesus' birth or the account of Jesus' sufferings and death and His resurrection. While we may be able to recite much of what happened on that day, and we may properly think of this day as the birth of the New Testament Church, we may not fully comprehend its meaning for us in our hearts and lives.

We know that we **“cannot by *our own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ our Lord or come to Him.*”** We know that **“the Holy Ghost has called *us by the gospel*”**(Luther's explanation to the Third Article of the Apostles Creed). However, that is where we start and all too often stop in our understanding of the working and power of the Holy Spirit and how things changed with the coming of the Holy Spirit on the Jewish festival of Pentecost. After all, even in the Old Testament era no one came to faith without the Holy Spirit working through the gospel, and the Holy Spirit was already then the power that led the prophets to write exactly what the Spirit led them to write for our learning. So what changed? What was suddenly different then on Pentecost, and is it still that way among us today?

Pentecost was a spring harvest festival. The early grains were brought in. First fruits were harvested and offered to the Lord. Indeed, the Holy Spirit harvested spiritual first fruits on the Pentecost we commemorate today. So let us turn to the Old Testament prophet Isaiah to be instructed by the Spirit concerning a New Testament event: --

THEME: The Pouring Out of the Spirit of our God.

The first lesson that the Spirit presents to us concerns –

I. God's Grace on His Chosen People.

In the chapter preceding our text Isaiah had declared the judgment of God upon the people of Judah because of their sin and impenitence. This judgment was to come upon the people when Nebuchadnezzar would take Judah captive and ultimately destroy all of Jerusalem, including the temple. This was what the people of Judah deserved to receive from the hand of the LORD, for they had forsaken His covenant and served the false gods of their neighbors, engaging in horrors and evil beyond that of the peoples that had lived in the land of Canaan before them. It was what they deserved and it was what would come upon them. However the Lord would not forsake them forever, and He would not forsake the promises He had made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. In spite of their sin He turned to them in grace and love, declaring a time of deliverance.

Isaiah 44:1-2 “Yet hear now, O Jacob My servant, And Israel whom I have chosen. 2 Thus says the LORD who made you And formed you from the womb, who will help you: ‘Fear not, O Jacob My servant; And you, Jeshurun, whom I have chosen.’”

The Lord loved these descendants of Jacob who had forsaken Him and His covenant of grace. These were the chosen people of God, chosen according to His grace to be the people from whom the Savior of the world would come. The Lord made them His people, He made them what they were to be, the people whom He loved. He would help them. He would deliver them. They need not fear, and of course the ones who feared were only those few who still knew that the Lord was God, and that He would do all that He had foretold through the prophets. God’s faithfulness to His Word included the promise of a Savior.

In His grace God looked down upon this people and called them “Jeshurun” a name the Lord used for the people of Israel in the days of Moses immediately before they crossed into the Promised Land. He looked upon that new generation that had arisen during the forty years of wandering in the wilderness and called them “Jeshurun,” “His righteous one.” This was not because they were suddenly without sin and righteous in themselves. It was because God in His grace led them to believe and trust in Him, and He declared them to be His righteous people. God held out that same promise of grace to the remnant that would return from captivity.

This is an important lesson for us in how the Lord deals with the sinner. He seeks the sinner's salvation. He is **“not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance”** (2 Peter 3:9). He does not deal with us according to our sin, and cast us off forever. He deals with us according to His grace. He would have us be His **“Jeshurun”** yet today. And that is what Pentecost is about for us; the revelation of God's grace in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. What we see both in the promises of our text and in us is --

II. The Spirit's Life Giving Power.

Isaiah 44:3-4 “For I will pour water on him who is thirsty, And floods on the dry ground; I will pour My Spirit on your descendants, And My blessing on your offspring; 4 They will spring up among the grass Like willows by the watercourses.”

What would be left of Judah at the end of seventy years of captivity would be but a small remnant of what they were before, and they would be scattered among the nations of the empire. There wouldn't be much to inspire hope of a restored nation of Judah. It wouldn't be much basis for a hope of glory to come to them. They would be like a parched land, a desert. But it was upon this people that God would pour out His Spirit as floods upon a dry ground. And yes, the result would be magnificent! It would be as some have witnessed, as I have only seen on television, in the deserts of the American southwest. The rains fall and the deserts comes to life and blooms as if miraculously. So is the picture that the Lord presents of the results of the pouring out of His Spirit upon the descendants of Judah who would survive the judgment that would befall that nation.

The blessing of the Spirit coming upon the people of Judah in captivity was only the beginning. The greater grace was set to come with the coming of the Christ centuries later. The fullest fulfillment of these words would ultimately come on that Pentecost Day when the disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit, and then life blossomed before them, spiritual life bloomed in Jerusalem as the people heard them declare the wonderful works of God, and 3000 men were baptized on that one day!

This promise of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit did not end with the Jews in captivity being brought back to the Lord as His people. Or even with the fulfillment of Jesus' promise of the coming of the Holy Spirit on the apostles on Pentecost. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit comes upon people yet today, people who like the people of Judah in days of old have no more life in them than a dry and parched land. Let us recall the words of our Lord Jesus in the beatitudes of the Sermon of the Mount.

Matthew 5:6 "Blessed *are* those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, For they shall be filled."

These words of Jesus remind us of exactly how blessed, how privileged and happy we are who have thirsted for that righteousness which does not come from the works of the law, but from the righteousness of faith. The law shows us our sin. The law leads us to despair of any righteousness of our own. We thirst for the life giving waters of Christ. And so the Spirit of our God is poured out upon us as we hear the gospel of God's love and forgiveness in Christ our Savior. Then spiritual life springs forth within us as when the grass greens after a spring rain, or we see trees growing along the banks of the rivers in plains and prairies of western Minnesota. Life is there, and it is abundant life even as Jesus' promised to bring to all who believe.

From that life flows --

III. Spirit Led Professions of Faith.

Our text describes a wonder that we may not fully appreciate. It is a wonder that requires a faith filled heart. It is a wonder of grace that stands out in an evil world. It is a great fruit of faith. Among the people of Judah it would be heard:

Isaiah 44:5-6 One will say, 'I am the LORD's'; Another will call himself by the name of Jacob; Another will write with his hand, 'The LORD's,' And name himself by the name of Israel. 6 "Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel, And his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts:

'I am the First and I am the Last; Besides Me there is no God.

The rescued people of Judah would boldly declare themselves to be the Lord's people. They would call themselves by His name. They would recall how God had chosen them and called them to be His own, and they would declare it to all without reservation. It would not be as it had been in the days of Isaiah and the earlier prophets when they people served many gods, worshiping the Lord on one day, and sacrificing to idols on the next, or even hiding from others the fact that they believed in the Lord for fear of reprisal. Rather they would openly call themselves by the name of the God of Jacob, they would once again make it known to all in every way every day that they were the people of the one true God, the almighty God. He alone delivered them from their enemies. He alone was able to redeem Israel from all their sins.

This is evidence of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. It is not natural, it is not easy to be bold professors of the faith. It can be dangerous. On Pentecost the disciples were all gathered together in one room. They were waiting for the Spirit's coming that would bless them with power. They didn't understand what that would be. Up to that point they had been timid about their faith in Jesus, their crucified and risen and ascended Lord. But then the Spirit came. The Spirit came with the sound of the mighty rushing wind, a noise great enough to draw a crowd. The disciples also saw a visible sign of the Spirit's arrival with the tongues as of fire coming and resting above their heads.

Immediately everything was changed. They were empowered by the Spirit to declare their allegiance to Jesus as their Lord and Savior. They immediately began to proclaim the wonderful works of God, and in languages they had never studied, the languages of the various nations represented by the religious pilgrims in Jerusalem for Pentecost. Almost immediately they were mocked and ridiculed, and accused of being a bunch of crazy drunks who should be ignored. However, with the Spirit's power they were not silenced. Peter spoke out boldly declaring that the prophecy of Joel was being fulfilled in their sight, and continuing to both accuse and call for repentance. The Spirit protected the apostles. The Spirit blessed the message of the gospel which the apostles declared that day for the salvation of souls. People once again knew the Lord, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ as God Almighty! He is Lord of all!

This is where the Spirit's outpouring touches us yet today. And indeed the Lord has poured out His Spirit on all flesh! He has poured out His Spirit upon us so that we gladly and boldly declare that we are the Lord's! The world may mock. The world may challenge us. They may seek to undermine our faith in the Lord, or in trusting His Word. They may and indeed will accuse us of being narrow minded and ignorant and superstitious, and bigoted and intolerant of others, as we adhere to the worship of the one true God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ as the only true God, and the only way to life. He is our Redeemer.

In America it seems that hearts have been hardened. Increasing numbers of people have little interest in hearing the gospel. But we still write it with our hands, **“We are the Lord's! I am a Christian! I gladly and boldly hold to that label and all that it means in truth!”**

The Spirit of the Lord has been and is being poured out on all flesh! It is one thing for us to put up with ridicule. But what of those many hundreds and even thousands who have lost their lives because they declared themselves to be the Lord's, to carry His name? What of those who continue to proclaim Christ in India or Nepal or Myanmar or northern Iraq or Muslim portions of North Africa? The Spirit has empowered them to own the Lord as their God, to wear that faith openly, and be willing to sacrifice all, even their very lives to the praise and honor of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Such is the power of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on sin parched souls. He leads us and empowers us also. Let us become ever more bold confessors of Jesus Christ with the confidence that by our simple gospel testimony the Spirit's outpouring of springs of living waters continues, for the salvation of souls. **“All hail the day of Pentecost, the coming of the Holy Ghost!”**

AMEN.

“Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” Amen. (Romans 15:13)