

**MINISTRY BY MAIL**  
**Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship**  
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**Pentecost Sunday, June 12, 2011**

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)  
Hymns: 31, 230, 224, 234, 231.  
Lessons: Genesis 11:1-9, Acts 2:1-21, John 15:26-27.  
Sermon Text: Acts 2:1-4, 17, 21  
Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Up until the time of our Old Testament lesson – the history of the tower of Babel – everyone on the earth spoke the same language. At that time God confused the language of mankind and gave mankind many different languages. That was several thousand years before the events of our sermon.

Today, of course, several thousand years after the events of our sermon, mankind is seeking a unity among all mankind. This takes different forms, such as seeking a common language in which all men can communicate. For example, English is the official world-wide language of air traffic controllers, so all commercial airplanes can communicate anywhere in the world. Men are trying to break down all sorts of barriers, such as the European Union seeks to do – a common currency for all of Europe is their goal, with many no doubt seeking more commonality. Many think of the world as just one global village, that is, the world viewed as a community in which distance and isolation have been dramatically reduced by electronic media and many tell us that everything we do affects all mankind. Surely we should be aware that as we pollute our air or water, it really affects all mankind. The idea of a global village even takes the form of seeking some kind of universal religion, or watering down religions so that they are acceptable to all mankind and no one is upset by anything any religion says and teaches. Even true Christians are encouraged to dilute their message and change it so it is acceptable to all mankind. This includes not speaking of the innate sinfulness of mankind. This includes not speaking of Jesus Christ as the only way to eternal salvation. So men are trying to do the same kinds of things today that they did at Babel.

Universalism is a very popular religion. Universalism most commonly teaches that all humans will receive an eternal salvation. It used to be just the teaching of the Unitarian-Universalist religion but has become very common for many religious bodies. At a funeral my wife and I attended – as a courtesy to friends – in an ELCA church, the name of Jesus Christ did come up a number of times, but there was no preaching that faith in Jesus Christ as your savior from all your sins is the only way to heaven. In fact, we heard the implication that everyone will end up in heaven. This kind of global message is what is expected by many in churches and other places of worship.

But mankind will not attain unity through a common religion. Just as there were mockers on Pentecost, so today there are those who mock the Bible and its teachings. We, however, strive to teach and live the Bible in its truth and purity. And we do not want to, we dare not water down what God says in the Bible! There is no other name than Jesus Christ which gives mankind eternal salvation.

But in our sermon text, after Jesus Christ had completed his work on earth and ascended into heaven, God provided a way for the gospel – the news about Jesus Christ, the only way to eternal salvation – to be preached to men of different languages. Today

**IN THE MESSAGE OF PENTECOST, WE HEAR THAT**

1. *In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people.*
2. *And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.*

That Sunday of Pentecost came as it came every year, but God had special events in mind for this Pentecost. What Jesus had promised, as in our Gospel lesson, concerning the Holy Spirit would now take place.

John had proclaimed this promise in Luke 3:16 that ***“I baptize you with water. But one more powerful than I will come, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.”***

Jesus himself had promised in Acts 1:5 ***“For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.”*** Now that promise is fulfilled, 10 days after Jesus ascended into heaven, 50 days after he rose from the dead. He had told them, as you heard in our Gospel lesson, that they were to stay in Jerusalem until God gave them power. In our Gospel lesson you heard Jesus say ***“When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me. And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning.”*** Now it has happened. The Counselor, the Spirit of truth from the Father, are different names for the Holy Spirit, the Holy Ghost. Jesus’ followers didn’t know when it was to happen, just like we do not know when Christ is going to come a second time to judge the living and the dead.

Pentecost is the Greek name for the important Jewish observance of the Feast of Harvest (Exodus 23:16) or, as it was also called, the Feast of Weeks (Exodus 34:22). Pentecost means “fiftieth.” The feast took place fifty days after the Passover Sabbath (Leviticus 23:11,15,16). Every pious Jew tried to be in Jerusalem for this Feast. Those who could not come to Jerusalem observed it in the synagogues wherever in the world they lived. This festival was second in importance to the Passover.

Shortly after Jesus’ ascension we are told that the believers were a group numbering about 120. Acts 1:15

Peter explained that ***‘In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people.’*** Peter makes reference to the words of the prophet Joel, no doubt very familiar to those Jews gathered in Jerusalem from all nations. The Christians among those Jews believed they were living in the last days, and you can be sure that we are living in the last days. No one except God knows when the world will end and Jesus will come in judgment.

After Peter preached his powerful sermon on this day, and others preached in other languages on the same day, we are told that about 3000 were added to the number of believers on the day of Pentecost! There you see the power of the Word of God – converting about 3000 people in one day by the preaching of the truth of God’s Word.

Listen to the description of this day again ***“And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.”***

There was a sound like a violent wind – but no wind. And they saw what appeared to be tongues of fire resting upon each of them but no one was burned. With these signs, we see that they were filled with the Holy Spirit and they were enabled by the Holy Spirit to speak in other languages. These were plainly signs from God. In this way, all received what Jesus had called ‘the baptism of the Spirit’, and each would have work to do in carrying out the great commission to preach the gospel to every creature, to teach all nations about Jesus Christ. This is how God, on this day, poured out the Holy Spirit. But the Holy Spirit is also poured out on all who come to faith. In our baptism we received the Holy Ghost. When you hear the Word of God, the Holy Spirit is at work in you.

Clearly all of them spoke in languages other than the language they normally spoke. They did not all speak at once, but each spoke as the ability was given. It is entirely possible that the people were gathered in smaller groups around each of the ‘preachers’. This was not babbling or incoherent speech; it was perfectly understandable to those who knew the languages.

In this way, the gift of speaking in foreign languages, the believers were now equipped and prepared to begin carrying out the assignment which the Lord had given to his church. The dramatic signs – the sound, the appearance of fire, the ability to speak in other tongues – were signs of that. Such signs did not always accompany the preaching of the apostles or the testimony of other believers. However, the Spirit sent by Jesus is

always present and active when the gospel is spoken. He gives the Word its power, and he gives believers the power to speak the Word of God.

The people – Jews from **“Every nation under heaven”** – had come to Jerusalem for the feast of Pentecost. Scripture says they were **“God-fearing,”** that is, they tried to live in faithfulness to the God of Israel and in agreement with the law given by God through Moses. But the Law only shows our sin; it does not show the way we are saved. The Gospel shows our salvation. John tells us **“For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.”** John 1:17. **“Every nation under heaven”** is explained in the 15 nations or regions listed in our Epistle lesson, although it need not be limited to the nations mentioned there. Because of wars and persecutions, as well as because of their business activities, Jews had been scattered throughout the Roman Empire and beyond it, and many Jews as well as Gentiles who had been converted to the Jewish religion heard God’s Words on this day and especially they heard the truth about Jesus. That is a message which we have learned and are to share, too, the truth about Jesus.

Each person in the crowd heard and understood one of the believers speaking the language of his homeland. It was not the Aramaic language of Judea, very similar to the Hebrew of the Old Testament, which most of them understood, or the Greek language of the Roman Empire, which virtually all of them would have understood. Nor did they hear the dialect of Galilee, which we might have expected the apostles to speak. This speaking was a miracle, not babbling. There are people, and even church bodies who claim that in order to be a Christian you must have a gift of speaking in tongues, that is, speaking in a language that others may not understand. Some say that this is languages that do exist or have existed at some time in the world’s history; some say that it is just unintelligible sounds. Although this gift was given to believers on Pentecost and at other times and places recorded in the New Testament, nowhere does scripture say that this is an essential mark of a Christian. We need to stress again: This speaking was not babbling or gibberish which the hearers then interpreted. It was coherent, intelligible language.

In this way the Holy Spirit had equipped believers to proclaim God’s great saving work in many languages. The confusion of tongues which resulted at Babel when men tried to glorify themselves by building a great tower was in a sense reversed on Pentecost. On that day the Spirit moved men to glorify God in languages that were understood by all who heard. This “reversal of Babel” still occurs when Christians learn new languages in order to declare the wonders of God to people in the world today. And there is great need for this. Even people in some of our communities speak a different language as their native language!

Here is the joyful outcome of this preaching: **“And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”** Peter later emphasized this in speaking about the man whom he had healed: **“If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a cripple and are asked how he was healed, then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. He is ‘the stone you builders rejected, which has become the capstone.’ Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.”** Acts 4:9-12

You have learned and believe that your only salvation is found in Jesus Christ, and that he is the only way to salvation for all mankind. Just as on Pentecost the gospel was preached to others, so today we seek to proclaim that same gospel. We want others to call upon the name of the Lord Jesus whom we confess. Believers have work to do for God in this world, as we read in Matthew 9:37-38: **“Then [Jesus] said to his disciples, ‘The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.’”** We also read in Luke 10:2: **“Therefore said he unto them, The harvest truly is great, but the labourers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth labourers into his harvest.”** May others call upon the Lord Jesus as the Lord works through us! Amen.