

Sermon Pentecost 2017 June 4, 2017

John 7: 37-39; Acts 2:1-21; Luke 24: 49

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. This morning we meditate upon all of the readings for this the Feast of Pentecost, and the words from last week's Gospel Lesson from Luke 24:49: **"behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you."**

There was a children's book written in the 80's called "A Promise is a Promise." And the point of the story was to teach children the importance of keeping a promise once one has made it. As we think about our God, we see that He understands better than any one of us does how important it is for Him to keep His promises. And as we hear those words from the reading last week and celebrate the Feast of Pentecost this week, that is exactly what we are celebrating: the keeping of a promise. Jesus called the Holy Spirit in last week's Gospel lesson, **"the promise of my Father."** And this week we see that promise fulfilled in the Holy Spirit's coming at the first Pentecost, that day when He visibly manifest Himself in tongues as of fire over the disciples as they began to confess the mighty works of our God which He has worked in our redemption and salvation promised and fulfilled in our Lord Jesus Christ's, life, death and resurrection. Today, I would like to reflect on this idea of the promise of God and the Holy Spirit as His promise.

To start though, I'd like to take us to where our Lord Jesus spoke the words of the Gospel Lesson. If you noticed the reading started off with John saying, **"On the last day of the feast, the great day."** As you heard that you maybe wondered what it was talking about, which feast? Well, if you know your Old Testament you know that there were a number of feasts that were specifically mentioned in the Law. This one, however, is the one often called the Feast of Booths, or of Tabernacles. You see, in this feast the Jews were required to build a small hut, or a kind of tent or tabernacle. They were then to live in that tabernacle for seven days reminding them of their transience during the forty years in the wilderness. However, what makes this feast so significant for the words Jesus spoke in the reading was that on the last day of that feast, the priests would pour water out of the ground. The historical significance was assumed to relate to the hope that God would give them abundant water for the following year's crops. They hoped that this meant that God would bless them in their harvest eventually.

But what does Jesus say at this feast in this morning's Gospel Lesson? **"If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'"** Do you see the connection?

They're pouring out the water at this feast, and Jesus tells them what real water is. He tells them where God promises to give them that true water. Where is that? What does John go on to say? **"Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified."** Now to clarify that a bit, when John is talking about Jesus being glorified, he means when Jesus was crucified, and if you remember when Jesus is on the cross in John, the last thing He did was **"He bowed His head and gave up His spirit."** But as I say this, why is this so important?

Well, let me ask this another way. What does this show us about God? Here God is showing something in the Old Testament feast, here Jesus Himself is speaking about God doing something, you could even say promising to do something, and what ultimately happens? God does it, right? God promised to send the Spirit, and what happened? The Spirit was sent.

In fact, this is what Scripture tells us about our God. He is the God who is faithful, as Hebrews 10:23 says, **"Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful."** Or look at Isaiah 55, **"For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it."** When God speaks, His Word does exactly what it says. If He says for something to happen, it does. So, when He promises something, is it going to happen? Of course!

Now many of you know that I often speak about this in Bible Class like a check. If I were to give you a check, would you go cash it? You know, if I got up here one Sunday and said, "here, I am handing out checks for one thousand dollars to you all," I am guessing you would most likely assume I would only do that in good faith. I am guessing most of you would say, "Pastor wouldn't just hand out bad checks like that, so I'm going to go cash it." You see, the check is a promise, and a promise is only as good as the person who speaks it, right? So, when God promises something we see it's trustworthiness, or His trustworthiness and know that what He promises will happen. That's first thing we need to understand as we look at the Holy Spirit as this promise of the Father: God said it and it will be.

So, looking at the promise of the Spirit, I think we should clarify something else. So often we hear people talking of finding the Spirit speaking in all kinds of places. Or more often the "feel" the Spirit working in all kinds of places. Last year I mentioned

specifically how even church bodies look for the Spirit's "guidance" and see themselves as following that guidance as they change their teachings on all sorts of things which are contrary to the Scriptures. And as we see this, we should ask ourselves then, how do we know when this is actually the Holy Spirit's work? How do we know that what someone "feels" is the Holy Spirit, and not just a "the bad can of chili they ate last night," as my vicarage supervisor would always say? Well, think about the nature of a promise. If I promise to be here at Grace on a Sunday Morning, what have I not promised? I have not promised to be at home, right? I have not promised to be at my house, I have not promised to be at the grocery store, I have not promised to be on vacation.

Now apply this promise to God and the Spirit. What has God promised about the Spirit? Or perhaps we should ask, where has God promised the Spirit to be? Well, we see Him working at Pentecost, given to the Church there, so we know He was there, we know He's connected to the Church. So, we know there's something to that. But has the Church ever erred? Of course, so where do we go from there? Well, where else does He promise the Spirit? He does say the Spirit is in our hearts, He cries out in us "Abba, Father." So, He is promised there. But does my heart ever tell me things that are wrong? Does my heart ever try to convince me that it would be better for me to be selfish than giving? Does it tell me it would be better to be indulgent than self-controlled? Or that I should desire something and covet rather than do what's right? As much as we try to deny it, yes our hearts tell us things that are wrong. So, where do we know for sure the Spirit is? Well, we see that Peter promises Him in baptism at the end of His Pentecost sermon, He says, **"Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself."** So, we can know we have the Spirit even when we don't feel Him, because we know He was given to us in Baptism. But where can we know where to find Him to speak? Look at what Jesus says, **"But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you."** So where can we find the Holy Spirit to speak, where does God promise He speaks? In the words of Jesus. And where do we have those words? In the Bible. In fact Paul calls the Bible, the Scriptures, "God-breathed," or as we often say, "Inspired." Do you hear it? "InSPIRED." "InSpirited." Where Jesus' word is, where the Word is there the Spirit is. And where do we have the Word? Where do we have baptism? Here. In the Divine Service. So where do you look for God? Where does the Holy Spirit promise to be? Here. Can He be other places? Sure. God is God, He can be anywhere. In fact, we know that "In Him we live

and move and have our being,” as we heard from the book of Acts a couple of weeks ago. We live in Him somehow, but when it comes to finding Him, where do we look? Where He promises to be. Why would we look somewhere where we don't know for sure He's there? Why would we look at the world? Or why would we look for signs? Or why would we look for miracles, or even our own thoughts? Why would we not look for Him where He promises? And that's the second thing we should learn. We shouldn't expect God to work in ways He hasn't promised to work. And we should not only expect, but know that He will work where He has promised to work: in His Word.

And finally, we should ask what this promise of the Spirit is. Again, look at the words of Jesus: **“If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’”** So, what's the promise of this Spirit? Living Water. Or as Paul says in I Corinthians about the Israelites, **“they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ.”** Do you remember that in the desert? They wandered around, and they ached for water. And Moses struck the Rock, and what came out? Water. And they drank that water. The Rock was Christ, the water was life. That is the promise of this Spirit: Life. Life in the Christ who bore your sins. Life in the Christ who bled for them on the cross. Life in His resurrection. Life in this Spirit given to you in baptism, the Spirit promised in the Word. Life in the God who created all life and all things.

In other words, what is the promise of the Spirit? Faith. **“Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.”** Faith. You see, as we celebrate the Holy Spirit today, we see that's what the Spirit does. He gives this water. He gives the trust that hears the promises of God and believes Him. Looking at the first Pentecost He gives the faith that confesses in declaring the **“mighty works of God,”** as Luke tells us the people said, **“we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God.”** That faith confesses. Likewise, the Spirit gives the faith that calls on the name of the Lord. Faith calls on the Lord who fulfills His promises, faith trusts in the Word which is Jesus' Word, the Word through which He Himself is present, the Word that gives life, faith and salvation from sins. And these are all connected. After all, as we heard, **“And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.”** The Lord says it, the Spirit in that word gives us trust in it. It's a promise. It's the promise of the Spirit. And a promise is a promise. Amen.