

John 7:37-39, 2014

This week you have heard lessons that are so familiar. Especially the Acts lesson you hear every year on this weekend.

Many think of this weekend as the birthday celebration for the church and I suppose; they are correct,
 But there is so much more to this event of Pentecost than just a birthday celebration.

If we look carefully at the text of this passage from Acts along with the other passages, we can flush some more of what this day means for us. Looking ahead from this event described in Acts we can see how the presence and power of God's Spirit changes the world, the lives of people over the next 2,000 years.

The apostles are likely at the temple when the Spirit of God is poured out on them.

There are Jews from all over the known world gathered in Jerusalem for the festival.

They are amazed and confused at what was going on when they witness the outpouring of God's Spirit on these men, and what they are then able to do,
 and they were asking,
 "What does this mean?"

This brings us to the point in the story where the meaning of all this begins to find clarity.

Peter begins his sermon.

He begins with the words of the Prophet Joel,

"In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh..."

"In the last days..."

this is an important expression because Peter, through the prophecy of Joel is declaring that on the day of Pentecost 2000 years ago a new era has begun,

a new age has broken into the world.
 From this day forward nothing will be the same.

We need to understand the meaning of the “last days” Joel speaks of in his own tradition, in ancient Jewish tradition,
 because it is different from our own Christian understanding.
 This is apocalyptic talk, this is talk about the end times.

When Joel speaks of the last days, or the end times, he is talking about the day that God overcomes evil once and for all, forever. God reigns over all creation, and everything is made right with God.

Our Christian understanding is very different from that. There are still last days , but while those days signify the end of evil, and the defeat of sin and death,
 it all finally depends on the return of Jesus to reconcile the world and put all things in God’s good order,
 the way God intended from the time of creation.

Peter says that in this event, in the pouring out of God’s Spirit on these apostles it has begun.

This is important because it shapes how we understand the world around us and where God is present in the world, how we understand the scriptures today,
 And the promise Joel offers and that Peter sets in this new context of the resurrected Jesus and outpouring of God’s Spirit.

This new age begins on Pentecost with the outpouring of the Spirit on Jesus’ disciples and extends throughout all the las days to today and beyond until Jesus returns.
 We live in the last days.

“Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”
 But we aren’t there yet.

Joel describes, and Peter affirms that there are many other things that will have to happen before the day of Jesus’ return.

Sons and daughters prophecy, old men have dreams the Spirit is poured out on all God's slaves, men and women and they will prophecy.

There will be signs in the sky and on the earth; the sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood...

I would like to turn to this claim that sons and daughters and men and women slaves will prophecy for just a minute.

What does that mean?

All too often in these days when people think of prophecying they associate it with some form of fortune telling or predicting the future.

When Joel talks about prophecying he is talking about doing what all the Old Testament prophets did;

They received God's word and proclaimed it to the people.

This typically meant pointing out the people's failure to follow God, to be obedient to God, in keeping the law and calling them to repentance and recommitting themselves to God.

The prophets called the people back to God.

This was a very law oriented understanding of life and relationship with God.

It centered around the Torah, the law of Israel.

In some ways I don't believe the role of prophecy has changed much in this new age since God first poured out His Spirit at Pentecost.

God continues to pour out His Spirit on all flesh and calls His children to prophecy

but that prophecy looks a bit different, sounds a bit different because of the death and resurrection of Jesus.

The prophecy of this new age, our prophecy still calls the people back to God. That prophecy still speaks,

cries out to a people who have turned from God, broken their relationship with Jesus.

We still receive the Word of God and proclaim it to the people.

And part of the prophecy is to call that to their attention, to hold up the mirror of the law so they can see what they have done, who they have become, how lost they are, and calls them to repentance.

They are called to return to God.

BUT, then our prophecy today does something else.

It also proclaims the Gospel through which all are saved.

That Gospel declares those people are forgiven their sins, they are restored to Christ, they are saved from death and the grave.

The Good News is shared

They can then return to God without guilt or shame. But that is not all.

In these last days there are terrible things going on, and in the midst of all that God's people are to Call on the name of the Lord.

“And the Spirit of God is poured out on all flesh.”

The common belief today is that each of us has our own spirit that drives us, that empowers, motivates, guides and sustains us.

That is part of our culture and today's individualistic ideal. “I have my own spirit and that is enough for me.”

But one of the other things we should learn from these passages today is that there is no Spirit alive in you that is not a part of the Spirit God has poured into you.

You don't truly have a spirit of your own separate from the Spirit of God.

If you turn to our passage from 1 Corinthians you get some idea about how God sees all this, and it is in a very different way.

Paul talks about the gifts and abilities that are given to all God's people, and declares that they are all being activated by the same Spirit in each one

the spirit who allots to each one as the Spirit chooses;
and all this “for the common good.”

There is a response expected. All this has been done for you, for your life, for your salvation, for your peace, and so what.

In Lutheran parlance there is this understanding that we respond to what God has done for us in and through His Son Jesus Christ.

We say, "because Jesus...therefore I..."

Because Jesus died for me, I love and adore Him.

Because God sacrificed His son for me I worship Him

Because God poured out His Spirit on me I answer His calling for my life.

Because God, I love my neighbor, feed the hungry, clothe the naked, give shelter to the homeless.

Because Jesus I commit my life to Him, I give generously, I serve my community, I share my faith story with others who don't know Jesus.

Because God, I live my life as if someone actually loved me enough to endure the beatings, the nails, the separation from God as He hung there on that cross dying for me.

"And the Spirit of God is poured out on all flesh."

Poured out on you.

Poured out on you when you were baptized, and every day since then. You don't get just one dose of the Spirit, that isn't enough for us.

And it was then and there that you were called to love and adore, worship, serve, give, share your story and God's story, to prophecy, to call your neighbor, your community, to call the world back to God.

So yes, Happy Birthday Church, but also,
Come Holy Spirit in these last days. Amen