

**SERMON**  
**The Day of Pentecost**  
**May 11, 2008**

Acts 2:1-21  
Psalm 104:24-34, 35b  
1 Corinthians 12:3b-13  
John 20:19-23

Brothers and sisters in Christ, grace to you and peace from God the Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus, who is the Christ. Amen.

Birthdays are days when we celebrate the anniversary of the day we were born. When we are children, we look forward to birthdays. We can't wait until our next birthday. Usually we get some really cool presents. We get to have all of our friends over for a party, and we get to eat cake until we're sick to our stomach.

When we're young, it seems like an eternity between birthdays. Think of it; during the time between our first and second birthdays, we've doubled our age. Then there are those special birthdays that we really look forward to. They're milestones in our lives.

When we're 5, we begin school. When we're 13, we become a teenager. When we're 16, we start to drive. Parents love that age. When we're 18, we graduate from High School and either go on to college or enter the working field. When we're 21, we officially become an adult.

But then after that, things seem to change. We seem to lose that sense of excitement for birthdays. The birthdays that end in zero become somewhat important. We turn 30 and notice that either we're starting to lose our hair, or we begin to find a few gray ones.

Many people are married by then and have children. We start to realize that life is not so fun anymore. We have responsibilities. Life takes a more serious tone. We're no longer foot loose and fancy free.

Then comes the dreaded 40. We think, "Oh my gosh, I'm half way to 80! Our joints start to ache. We can't fit into our old summer clothes anymore. We panic, and start to do anything to try and recapture our youth.

We dye our hair. We begin reading articles about the pros and cons of Viagra. We start doing research about liposuction, tummy tucks, and botox. We trade in the family mini-van for a sports car.

Then we hit 50, and we realize that our life is on the down swing. We realize that we are probably closer to our death than we are to our birth. We begin to get advertisements for AARP. That has recently happened in our family. We forget about trying to look like we are in our 20's anymore, since we know that that's not going to happen. Instead we begin to look forward to retirement.

Then come the 60's. We enter the golden years. We are now an official senior citizen. Birthdays come and go. They come around much quicker than we would like. Sometimes we have to think back to what year we were born to calculate how old we are.

We then gracefully move into our 70's and 80's. The pace of life slows down. We again enjoy the simple things in life. We worry about who will take care of us when we can no longer care for ourselves. We begin to think about the next life – a life where there will be no more aches and pains; no more hardships and suffering.

For those of us who are people of faith, a sense of peace quiets our hearts. And then comes that glorious day when we will meet Jesus. We will be born anew in God's Kingdom.

I talk about birthdays because they are so much a part of our lives. Today we celebrate the biggest birthday of all. Today is The Day of Pentecost. It is the birthday of the Christian Church. It is the day we celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit. You see, there was no church before Pentecost. There were just a small group of frightened followers of Jesus.

According to The Book of Acts, the apostles remained in Jerusalem after the Resurrection appearances. They were a small group of devoted believers, but they had no direction, no power in their message. But that was soon to change.

For on the day of Pentecost they were gathered in one house when the Holy Spirit came upon them, sounding like a mighty wind and appearing like tongues of fire upon each of them.

All of a sudden, they miraculously began to speak in foreign languages, attracting the attention of foreign Jews who were amazed to hear their native languages spoken by Galileans. This set the stage for Peter's sermon that resulted in the conversion and baptism of about 3000 people.

Now that must have been one powerful sermon. Wasn't this the same Peter who heard Jesus say to him; "Get behind me Satan"? Wasn't this the same Peter who had recently denied even knowing Jesus 3 times? Wasn't this the same Peter who had been on the run for the last 50 days afraid of being arrested for being a follower of Jesus?

Now here he is, boldly proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ right in the face of those who would persecute him. The difference was, is that he had received the Holy Spirit.

It was not that Peter all of a sudden became very charismatic, some great public speaker. Rather, it was God in the Person of the Holy Spirit speaking through Peter. It was the birth of the Church, for Jesus said to Peter; "Upon you Peter, I shall build my Church."

You see, Peter has no authority apart from the Church – the Church that was established by Jesus himself. Indeed, none of us have any authority apart from the Church.

So today we celebrate the birthday of the Church. The Church is almost 2000 years old. Like a young child; in it's younger days there was a sense of excitement. For the first two or three hundred years, there was a lot of growth.

Then the Church had a mid-life crisis. During the middle ages, the Church began to lose its sense of mission. There were separations.

First it was the split between Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy. Then it was the Protestant Reformation.

Even so, during these past 500 years, Christianity has been the dominant Religion in the world. But perhaps in a way, we have become over confident. After all, who needs the authority of the Holy Spirit any more, we dominate the area of religion? Therefore, in some ways the Church has lost its sense of mission and purpose.

Recently, however, scholars are saying that we are entering a post-Christian era. We are not the giant that we once were. Christianity is now being seen as irrelevant by more and more people. The Christian Church has become a dinosaur nearing extinction in some countries. In Europe, statistics show that only about 10 percent of the population attends worship on a regular basis.

And the United States is not far behind. More and more people are retreating into their own spirituality away from the Church that Jesus established. We hear statements like; "I don't need the Church to believe in God." I have heard on numerous occasions people say; "I don't believe in organized religion." My response to that is usually; "Oh, I see, so do you then believe in disorganized religion?"

We see people waiting in line months in advance to get tickets to the latest rock concert when most churches have trouble filling half of their pews for one hour on a Sunday Morning to worship our Lord. So what's the problem?

I believe that the problem is that we have become like the timid apostles who were hiding out in homes afraid of the Jews before the Pentecost event. We have retreated behind the walls of our church buildings hoping that no one will bother us or disrupt the way we do things.

We are afraid to tell anyone about Jesus for fear that we might offend them. We feel the pressure from the outside, so we circle the wagons, gird up our loins and tighten our belts. We live in our own secure little cocoons not wanting anything or anyone to disturb us. But this only makes us more irrelevant.

I believe that the solution is, that we need a big dose of the Holy Spirit. After all, each Sunday we pray, "Amen. Come, Holy Spirit." But do we really mean it? Do we really want the Spirit and power of God to come crashing into our lives. It would mean that life would not go on as usual.

It would mean that we could no longer hide behind closed doors. Instead, it would tear down the physical, emotional and spiritual walls that we build around ourselves for protection.

I think that sometimes we, as Lutherans, are afraid of the Holy Spirit. We like the image of God as loving Father. We like the idea of God as Jesus, the caring shepherd. But what about God as Spirit who invades our lives with a sound like the rush of a violent wind and tongues of fire. This is scary.

We say; "Look what that Spirit does to those Pentecostals. They dance in the isles and speak jiberish."

However, the God we worship is indeed a Trinitarian God; God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. They cannot be separated. We cannot choose the one or two we like best. For God is one.

We must not fear the Spirit of God. Instead, we must allow God's Spirit to permeate our lives. This means doing things that might be uncomfortable. Doing things that force us to put our trust in God rather than ourselves.

It means welcoming the stranger, comforting those who grieve, caring for those who are sick or lonely, feeding those who are hungry, speaking out against the forces that oppress people and are unjust, and telling those who have not heard, the good news of the Gospel. And it is only God's Spirit that gives us the power to do such things in the name of Jesus.

So as we celebrate the birthday of the Church of Jesus Christ, let us imagine that it is the first birthday. We are so young. There is so much to plan for, so much to get excited about, so many people to share the good news with, so much growing to do.

We at Atascocita Lutheran have a lot to be excited about. We have many talented, dedicated people who are filled with God's Spirit. The Holy Spirit has blessed us with many gifts. Our task now is to allow God's Spirit to use these gifts to the glory of God.

I pray that we will allow God's Spirit to build each other up and not tear each other down. To allow God's Spirit to unite us together as one body with the Body of Christ. To allow God's Spirit to send us out into the world in love and service. Amen, Come Holy Spirit.

May the Spirit of God abide in you always so that the love of Christ may be witnessed to all. Amen.

How many of you have ever had a birthday party? Do you look forward to your birthday?

What is it that you celebrate at a birthday party?

What kinds of things do you do at a birthday party?

Eat cake, Invite Friends, Sing songs, Play games, Tell stories

Did you know that today we are celebrating a birthday? Guess who's birthday we are celebrating today?  
THE CHURCH

After Jesus rose from the dead he spent a few weeks with his friends and his followers. But then he went up into the clouds to be in heaven. We call that Ascension Day. But Jesus did not leave them alone. He promised to send them the Holy Spirit.

Can any of you tell me who the Holy Spirit is?

The Holy Spirit is God who lives inside us. The Holy Spirit gives us power and courage to tell others about the Good news of Jesus. We receive this Holy Spirit when we are baptized.

Today we celebrate the day that Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to his believers. Do any of you know what we call this special day? PENTECOST

Pentecost is the day the church was born. So today we celebrate the birthday of the church. Do any of you want to guess how old the church is? ABOUT 1,975 YEARS OLD. That's pretty old. Do you think we can fit that many candles on the cake?

But the good news is that the Holy Spirit is alive in you and in me. Just as much as the day the church was born. Because all of us here today are the church. We are the ones that God chose to help people in the world and tell people about Jesus.

Let us pray.....