

“Signs of the Spirit” Acts 2:1-4, 17-21 June 4 2017

Cheryl and I met and married at Pentecost Lutheran Church in Racine, WI. We taught youth the Bible, I served as an elder, and our daughters received forgiveness of sins and the Holy Spirit there in Baptism. We sometimes wondered if Pentecost would one day have a Pentecostal miracle of the Holy Spirit. It had been all along, but not in the signs we were looking for. Was not the Spirit already working in the Bible studies and in the baptism? We learned to cherish the less noticeable signs of the Spirit.

Yet those noticeable signs at Pentecost were also important. The sound of the wind, tongues of fire, and Galileans speaking the many native languages of the assembled Jews drew attention to the first real sign of the Spirit that day: The bold proclamation of the death and resurrection of Jesus. which called for repentance and faith.

That sign is still evident each time you hear the Bible read and preached. It is the sign that the Spirit is doing what Jesus promised: pointing to His saving work through the words that would be given to the apostles. Paul calls proclaiming the Gospel the greatest gift of the Spirit.

The Spirit had always been present, creating, prophesying, reviving faith and then conceiving in Mary the Son of God. What was different at this harvest festival was that the Spirit was not just given to a few, but to all the Church. On this day, God would reap a harvest of 3000 souls and the Church would grow. The Spirit would not only preach the Word but also work faith in those who heard the Word. Rev. Glenn Nielsen illustrates this new work of the Spirit this way:

*When a dam designed for hydroelectric power is built, some of the river continues to flow downstream. Those who live near the river have water to grow gardens and fields. Towns have water for drinking and bathing. Before Pentecost, the work of the Holy Spirit was less evident, found mainly in Israel, particularly for major events and prophets. It's like the people near the river.*

*But when the switch is thrown and the water running through the dam is used for generating electricity, the extent and degree of the water increases dramatically. After Pentecost, the Holy Spirit's work is unleashed and the Church grows throughout the world and empowers millions of people to believe and produce the fruit of faith for others to see.*

So after the proclamation of the Gospel, what is the next great sign of the Spirit we see in this text? That sinners believe the Gospel, repent of their sins and are baptized. Paul writes that without the Holy Spirit, no one can say that Jesus is Lord. No one can be saved, without the power of the Spirit generating faith through the Word of God.

So the two signs of the Spirit are these: Proclaiming, Prophesying, or Preaching the Word of God. The second is that sinners who hear the Word repent and believe.

These signs of the Spirit move the Church to respond to another sign from the Spirit. Peter refers to it in the first words of the quotation from the prophet Joel, “*In these last days*”.

This outpouring itself is the sign that last days are upon us. We don't look for them in the future, or look in the sky or the headlines for signs of their coming. These are the last days because in Christ, God has done all that is necessary to save us. There is nothing left to wait for before He returns to take us home.

We are not to wait, but to work. As God's people, entrusted to be stewards of the Gospel, we are to take seriously the prophetic promise: “Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved.” First, God's people daily call upon that name in repentance and faith for the forgiveness of sins poured out from the cross of Christ. Secondly, we proclaim that name by the power of the Spirit poured out in baptism for the salvation of the world. And we do this until the very last of the last days.

In the long races at track meets there are too many laps for the runners to count. So as the front runner starts the last lap a bell is rung as a sign that the race is almost over. Hearing this, runners hold nothing back in order to finish the race strong. Pentecost, like that bell, is the sign that the end is near. A sign for the church to hold nothing back in proclaiming with power the saving work of Christ.

We are the sign of the Spirit in our work of witnessing, teaching, baptizing, serving, sacrificing, loving and living the life of Christ in this world. When Christ returns, may we the Church be a sign of the Spirit for the salvation of all. Amen.