

PENTECOST—A CHANGE FOR THE BETTER!

Acts 2:1-11

Text only---No in-person worship due to COVID-19

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Next to Easter & Christmas, this is normally my favorite time to Worship, Pentecost Sunday. We are usually all here with our red clothes to remember Pentecost. But, today is different.

I think it's generally true that people are always looking to improve, to change their lives for the better. That's why there are so many commercials for diet and exercise products – lots of people out there trying to change their appearance for the better. When I was in school, we studied all the dangers of botulinum toxin. Now days, people are injecting it into their faces, because it will take away your wrinkles for awhile. People are always looking to improve, to change for the better. Isn't that why people go to school? Isn't that why people go to conferences and seminars? Isn't that why people go to counselors and psychologists? People want to be changed for the better.

What is it about yourself that you would like to change? If you could change one thing about yourself, what would it be? Is it the way you look? Is it something to do with your health? Is it something to do with your level of expertise on a certain subject? If you could change one thing about yourself, what would it be?

God is interested in change. He's interested in changing you. Today is Pentecost Sunday, and as we take a look at what happened on Pentecost many years ago, we see that God changed many people's lives. And as we learn about these things, we will see that God is also interested in changing you - there are certain things about

you that God wants to change. What are those things? And how does God plan to do that? We will find the answers as we study God’s Word. I doubt that we will ever go back to the “Old Normal” when the Pandemic subsides. All are predicting a “New Normal”, whatever that will be?

Two major changes took place on Pentecost. Change number one was what happened to the disciples. If you are familiar with the Scriptures, you know that the disciples believed in Jesus as their Savior but they were still very confused about all kinds of different things. They still didn’t fully understand Jesus’ mission, why he had come to earth. They were still wondering if Jesus would be an earthly king. They were confused, and as a result, they were timid. They weren’t confident about sharing the Gospel with others. How could they, if they didn’t fully understand it?

But then Pentecost came. The disciples were together when the sound of a blowing wind came down from heaven. What seemed to be tongues of fire settled on their heads. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in foreign languages they had never learned before. A crowd gathered, people from all over the world, and that crowd listened as the disciples preached the Gospel. The Apostle Peter stood up and addressed the crowd – he gave a beautiful sermon that God the Holy Spirit inspired him to preach, a sermon that converted 3000 people in one day.

Do you see the changes that took place on Pentecost? No longer were the disciples confused. Now they understood the plan of salvation completely. No longer were they timid. Now, they were confident, speaking publicly. Look at Peter – two months earlier he was so afraid that he denied Jesus three times. Now he was speaking to the crowd with confidence and understanding that he had never had before.

There was another change that took place on Pentecost, and you could argue that this change was more spectacular than what happened to the disciples. After Peter preached his sermon on Pentecost, 3000 people came to faith and were baptized. We

don't know much about these people. We do know that Jerusalem was packed with people because of the Festival of Pentecost.

Back then, Pentecost was an agricultural festival – God had told the Jews to gather in Jerusalem 50 days after Passover to celebrate the harvest. Jews from all over the Roman empire came. Three thousand of them; who were not Christians, who did not believe in Jesus Christ, were changed that day. Their whole way of looking at God, at themselves, at the world, at eternal life – everything had changed. The Holy Spirit was the one who converted those 3000 people that day. Now these people knew how to get to heaven. Now they knew that they were at peace with God. Now they knew that Jesus was their Savior.

Pentecost can be summed up in one word and I believe that word is CHANGE. We see the change that took place in the disciples and the change that took place in those 3000 people. Our world today needs change. There are so many people who do not believe in Jesus Christ, who do not know how to get to heaven. And there are so many Christians who are like those disciples were before Pentecost – confused, weak, timid. We need the Holy Spirit to come to us and change us.

Our problem is, we don't think we need to be changed. "I'm alright the way I am," we say to ourselves. "What do I need to change about myself?" The answer is, a lot. Yes, it's true, we are Christians but we still have sinful habits that we don't want to get rid of. We still have moments when we are selfish. We still have moments when we completely misunderstand what God is telling us in the Bible. We still have moments when we fail to share our faith because we're too timid. It is true that we are Christians, that we are going to heaven, but we still need to change. We still need to become more and more the people that God wants us to be.

How does a person change his soul? You can't do it by trying to be a better person. That's like saying that there is something wrong with my car, but I'll try to change that by being a better driver. You need someone to work on your engine, your soul.

But the thing is, your soul is too complicated for you to fix yourself. You need someone to fix it for you. And that someone is the Holy Spirit.

But how? On Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came directly to those disciples. Today, he could do that if he wanted to, but in the Bible, he tells us that he works in a different way. He no longer comes with the loud sound of a wind, or with what looks like tongues of fire, or with the ability to speak in foreign languages. That was a one-time event.

Today, the Holy Spirit comes to you through the quiet, humble preaching of the Word. On the surface, it doesn't look like anything spectacular. But on the inside of you, all kinds of changes are taking place. And when we combine the Word with water, we get baptism. What happens at a baptism? Once again, on the surface, it doesn't look like anything spectacular. But we know from what God tells us in his Word that in baptism, the Holy Spirit changes a person, causes a person, even a little person, to believe in Christ.

And what happens when we combine God's Word with bread and wine, as Jesus did on the night he was betrayed? Once again, it doesn't look like anything spectacular, but it is. As we partake of Christ's actual body and blood in this Sacrament, the Holy Spirit changes you.

HE strengthens your faith, HE increases your love for Christ and your love for one another.

Do you want to be more confident? Do you want to be more at peace with God and yourself? Do you want to be less confused about the Bible? Do you want to understand it better? Do you want to be able to share your faith more naturally, more confidently? Do you want to be able to live the way God tells you to live in the Bible? Do you want to change your soul for the better?

This is what the Holy Spirit does. HE did that in a miraculous, unusual way on that first Pentecost. Today, HE does it as you spend time hearing the Word, as you see a baptism, as you take the Lord's Supper – that's how the Holy Spirit changes people, changes you, turning you more and more into the Christian that God has made you to be.

Why is red the color of the festival of Pentecost? There are all kinds of reasons. Red reminds us, of course, of Jesus' blood, which he shed as a payment for our sins. Red also reminds us of what looked like tongues of fire on the disciples' heads. Red reminds us of the invisible fire of faith that's burning inside of us, the gift that the Holy Spirit has given to us. If you were to give the Holy Spirit a color, maybe the best color to describe HIM would be red, the color of fire. Every time you come into contact with the Word and Sacrament, fire enters your heart, and burns away that selfishness and confusion. That fire becomes the fire of faith, a fire which trusts and loves Jesus Christ as Savior. If you could sum up Pentecost in one word, that one word would be change. May the Holy Spirit continue to work in you, to change you, to fan into flame, the fire that is in each one of you. Amen.

Let us pray: God of grace, you sent the promised gift of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles and the women, upon Mary, the mother of Jesus, and upon his brothers. Fill your church with power, kindle flaming hearts within us, and cause us to proclaim your mighty works in every tongue, that all may call on you and be saved, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen!