**The Giver of Life**

Based on [Acts 2:1-21](http://biblia.com/books/esv/Ac2.1-21) and [John 14:23-31](http://biblia.com/books/esv/Jn14.23-31)

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Pentecost Sunday

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Pentecost is the day that is often recognized as the “Birthday” of the church. It sounds kind of hokey to put it that way, but I think it’s a useful way to describe it. Your birthday is not the day you were given life, but the day that you came into the world. It is the day you were made known to the world.

We confess that the Holy Spirit is “the Lord and giver of Life,” but Pentecost is not the day the church was given life. The church was given life the day that Jesus Christ said from the cross, “It is Finished” and bowed his head and gave up his Spirit. Moments later, a soldier came by with a spear and pierced the side of Jesus’ dead body, and the scriptures testify that blood and water poured out. St. Augustine once wrote, “**From [Jesus’ side] have flowed forth the sacraments of the Church, without which there is no entrance to the life which is the true life**” (NPNF1 7:434). The sacraments, which are the fruits of Jesus’ sacrifice, pollinate the church and give it life because from Jesus side with the sacraments flows the Holy Spirit, the giver of life.

The apostle John writes, “**This is he who came by water and blood—Jesus Christ; not by the water only, but by the water and the blood. And the Spirit is the one who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth. For there are three that testify: the Spirit and the water and the blood; and these three agree**” **(1 John 5:7-8).** Baptism, Holy Communion, the Holy Spirit these three agree, these three testify, these three give life; these three proceed together; these three deliver Jesus himself who is "the life" to the church. And together they testify to the truth because they all come by the Word of God.

The cross and death of Jesus is the conception of the church, they are life of the church; but not its birth. Pentecost is the birth of the church. It is the day wherein, by the Spirit, the church comes out of the womb and into the world. On the day of Pentecost, the disciples were all together in one place. “**And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance**.” And the disciples began to preach the gospel.

These disciples were not lacking the Holy Spirit. The evening of the resurrection, they had received the Holy Spirit to forgive and retain sins. But here's the thing...for fifty days they weren’t doing it. **They weren’t preaching the Gospel; they weren’t forgiving and retaining sins.** They were holed up in a room, afraid of the Jews and decidedly not preaching the gospel. But fifty days after the resurrection--(Pentecost means fifty)—fifty days after the resurrection, the disciples come out of their cloister where the doors were locked for fear of the Jews; they come out of their congregational “womb,” as it were--into the world to preach.

And wouldn’t you know it, they didn't have to go far. It was the feast of Pentecost, and whole world had come to them: **Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians**. And the tongues and languages that were divided thousands of years before at the tower of Babel, were united in the preaching of the apostles to the nations. The disciples preached the mighty works of God, and the nations heard it in their own language.

A few points to make here. One is that the church is conceived in the congregation of the saints, in the Word and Sacrament ministry that delivers the Holy Spirit from faith to faith. The church is conceived in the wounds of Christ, that it may be born into the world. Jesus says to his church, “**You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven**” (Matthew 5:15-16). The good work of the apostles on Pentecost is the preaching of the mighty deeds of God, from Jerusalem and to the ends of the earth.

Another point is this: we live in what is perhaps the most arrogant period of human history since man tried to build a tower to the heavens. We treat other people as though they are victims of their beliefs and we call it “culture.” There was a professor at the seminary when I was there who tried to pull this stuff. **He told the class to imagine a culture that had never heard of lambs, and how teaching that Jesus is the “lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” just wouldn’t resonate with them. So what do you do?**  He suggested, that the best thing to do would be to find out how to communicate the gospel in a way they could understand. He said that it was the task of the missionary to meet them where they are at and find out what animal in their culture might communicate what “lamb” communicated to the Israelites a shepherding culture. So I don’t know, Jesus is the *yak* who takes away the sin of the world? Here’s a thought, why not just teach them what a lamb is? Thankfully, the seminary didn't renew his contract.

The message of Pentecost, and the birth of the church into the world is that it is the holy spirit who creates faith in the hearing of the word. **Yes there are different languages and different cultures in the world, but we are never to forget that the telling of mighty works of God are not to be accommodated to suit what we believe are the “cultural sensibilities of others.** The word is simply to be preached to the world and it is not our cleverly devised “approaches to ministry” that facilitate belief in the unbelievable grace of God poured out upon an undeserving mankind through the sending of his son.

Pentecost is the day that the Holy Spirit brings the church out into the open into the world. And in the promise of the Holy Spirit, Jesus promises to give his church peace. "**Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid**."

Jesus knew his disciples would be afraid, he knew that they would be inclined to hide their faith under a bushel. **Because the Gospel has enemies, we are inclined to bury it in the sand, or else preach it in a way that even its enemies will accept it and us.** But that, dear friends in Christ, is how the world gives peace, by avoiding conflict and giving consumers what they want. Like a therapist, the world tries to repackage the gospel to make the patient feel better. But St. Paul calls that "man's gospel" and the Holy Spirit does not preach it, and those born of the spirit find no comfort in it.

But the one true gospel of Jesus Christ addresses three problems that are common to man in every culture in every corner of the world, and in the lives of every one of you here. The problem of sin, the problem of death, and the problem of the devil...these are the problems of everyone who is descended from Adam. And these are the problems that Christ sends the Holy Spirit to address, through the church, to the ends of the earth.

Jesus gives the Holy Spirit to the church, and the Spirit is our helper, our comforter, our counselor. **We who have been washed in the blood of the lamb and who have been taught and believe all that Christ has commanded have an imperishable treasure in heaven, and have been given the Spirit as a guarantee.**

The Holy Spirit is our helper because he a person. He is a he, not an it. The Holy Spirit is not some power or energy that we are to use; it is He who uses us. First he sanctifies us, and makes us a people holy unto the Lord. And then He calls, gathers enlightens and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth.

The Holy Spirit is our comforter because He is God; and God is never wrong. A church that believes it is up to them to repackage and reforge the gospel to meet the needs of the culture is a church that is subject to the failures of men. But the Holy Spirit never makes mistakes. **When the church baptizes, the Holy Spirit works; When the church teaches Christ's commands, it is the Holy Spirit who teaches; When the church shares the life giving body and blood of Christ, it shares a Spiritual food--**and when the Spirit is at work, he never fails to accomplish his purposes. If the church has to use the Spirit, the church can fail, but it is the Spirit who uses the church and he cannot fail.

The Holy Spirit is our helper because He intercedes for us. St. Paul writes, "**The Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not always know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God**."

The Holy Spirit is our helper because he is always at work in God's Word. And apart from God's Word, the Holy Spirit offers no help. Often I hear parents whose children move away and attend other denominational churches, baptist, evangelical, pentecostal churches say things like, "**well they aren't attending Lutheran Church, but at least they are going to a church**." This is not something to take comfort in. Scripture does not teach that all you need to do is give the Holy Spirit a foothold and he'll do the rest. The devil is the opportunist. He is the one always looking for a foothold, for a chink in the church's armour so he can exploit it and wedge a division to grieve the Holy Spirit and rob us of our comforter. And a church that preaches only some of God's word mingled with man's gospel lets the devil in through the back door.

But Scripture counsels us to put on the whole armour of God. **Why?...because it is not the Holy Spirit that prowls around like a roaring lion, it is the devil who operates that way**; and we need the defense of the Spirit. This means that the Holy Spirit, though he is never wrong, though he is all-powerful, he will not remain where false doctrine is taught and believed. But a church that preaches the whole counsel of God and does not tolerate even the slightest twisting of God's word, has the Holy Spirit and need not be afraid of losing the salvation that is yours in Christ Jesus.

The church is conceived in the wounds of Christ, and She is "**born"** into the world by water and the spirit. This Pentecost and always, let us rejoice in the water, the blood and the spirit, these three that testify to the work of God in the world to gather the dead bones of Adam to give them life in the Spirit.