

The Day of Pentecost - Baptism Sunday

May 23, 2010

Amazing Grace Lutheran Church - Pastor Chip Wilke

Acts 2:36-41

"Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ." When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off--for all whom the Lord our God will call." With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation." Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day. (NIV)

Happy Birthday! I am not just saying this to Josh and Joel who just minutes ago were born again by water and the Spirit. I am talking to all of you. Today is Pentecost, which we often refer to as the birthday of the Christian Church on earth. It was a day that marked the beginning of the good news about Jesus being spread to the ends of the earth. On this day, the small group of believers grew by about 3000 people, and Christ's Church has continued to grow ever since.

So today we say happy birthday and we celebrate. And if I ask the kids what the best part about birthdays is what do you think they would say? After the friends and the cake, no doubt the best part about a birthday is the gifts. My little Rachel points out gifts she wants for her birthday even when it is still ten months away. Good gifts can especially make for a *happy* birthday.

And there are no better gifts given than what we find on Pentecost! God graciously is the Giver once again on this birthday. The gifts our Lord gives are more valuable and superior than anything money could buy. On this Pentecost celebration let us **thank God for his great gift of baptism.**

Certainly, there are other special gifts given on this fiftieth day after Jesus' resurrection. After all, Jesus told his disciples to wait in Jerusalem for the gift He had promised them. Then they found out just what Jesus had been talking about - the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out on them in a miraculous way. The violent wind and flames of fire on their heads were visible testimonies of this. Then the Holy Spirit gave the apostles the gift of being able to speak in different languages. Without opening up books and studying for years, like I had to do, instantly these disciples were able to proclaim the wonders of God to people of all different cultures in their own native tongues.

What gifts from God! While I by no means want to dismiss these special gifts, I want to focus on another gift this day - one that you and I know well because it is a gift that has been given to us. You see, I have never witnessed the Holy Spirit come with a violent wind, or had a fiery flame on my head. Nor have I ever been suddenly able to speak in a language I never learned. I doubt any of you have, and if you have I'd like to hear more about it. These things have never been specifically promised to us either. But there is a gift that has been promised to us and all people on this day - the gift of baptism.

What makes something a good gift? I think as we get older the gifts we really appreciate are the gifts we need, aren't they? You get something and immediately the words come out "*thanks, I really needed this or I can definitely use one of these.*" So who needs this gift we call baptism? Did you notice how the people on Pentecost came to see how much they needed this gift from God? Peter spoke God's Word to them and told them all about how God had sent them His Son. God demonstrated clearly that Jesus was His Son by raising Him from the dead. But as Peter points out, they with the help of wicked men, put Jesus to death by nailing Him to the cross. It was their sins that did this to Jesus. They are the reason Jesus suffered. They are the reason Jesus died. Now as Peter said, "***let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.***"

After hearing this we are told the people were cut to the heart. This message served like a sword that pierced their hearts and now they turned to Peter and the other apostles and said: "***Brothers, what shall we do?***" They wanted to know how their relationship with God could possibly change after all this. They wanted to know what could be done to make up for their wickedness. What could they do to atone for such sins?

Now we have God's gracious answer and it does not rely one bit on what they must do but on what has been done. Peter replied, "***Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.***" All that was needed was a gift from God. Forgiveness is theirs through simple water and the Word. What they needed was a change of heart and mind about sin and about Jesus - the only Savior from sin. Baptized into this name they will have the gift of forgiveness and be given the gift of the Holy Spirit. Baptized into Jesus' name they will be free from the devil, and delivered from death and hell. They will be God's children. They will find peace and rest from all their sins. Baptism was a gift they really needed.

What about us? We were not actually there to help condemn Jesus to death. What would Peter tell you and me? A convert to Christianity from a foreign country once put it this way: "*When the story of Christ's death was first read to me, I cursed Judas and Pilate, the Jews and the soldiers. But when I understood it, I cursed myself.*" We too are the reason Jesus suffered. We too are the reason God's Son died. Our sins nailed Jesus to the cross. We fail to live up to God's righteous standards. We are sinners who must cry out with the crowds on Pentecost: "***what shall we do?***" God's loving answer remains the same. It has already all been done by Jesus. That's why Jesus came - to live perfectly for us, and willingly suffer and die on the cross for us - to pay the price for our sins. God raised Jesus from the dead as our guarantee that sin has been taken care of for good.

So now the question still is: who else needs this gift of baptism? Who else needs forgiveness for their sins? Who else needs to become a child of God? Who else needs to be delivered from sin, death, and the devil? Who else needs this free gift of forgiveness, life and salvation given in baptism? Who doesn't? Just a little examination of our lives reminds us our great need for baptism. Look at our lust, our greed, our selfishness, envy, laziness, apathy, and many other sins and we are reminded baptism is a gift we really, really need. Even our little infants who are sinful from the time they are born need this precious gift of baptism. Thankfully, God gives us this great gift for "***the promise is for***

you and your children and for all who are far off--for all whom the Lord our God will call."

Isn't this the wonderful thing about baptism? It is God's gift for all people. From the newborn to the elderly man dying in His bed. God excludes no one from the benefits of baptism, because God wants to exclude no one from heaven. God wants all people to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. He wants to give the Holy Spirit to all people so they have faith in Jesus as their Savior. He wants all to become His children and wants no one to perish in the eternal flames of hell. Don't you hear that in Peter's plea? "***With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation."*** Literally, Peter says: "***Be saved.***" "***Be saved from this wicked and evil world, be saved from your sins and rescued from death and the devil. Do not reject what God has done for you in Christ Jesus!***" Peter's words almost give the picture of a man grabbing someone around the ankles, not letting go, and begging them - "***Be saved.***"

Dear friends, as baptized children of God I pray that we now become the Peter's in this world. While we are calling today baptism Sunday and focusing on blessings of baptism this morning, wouldn't it be nice if every Sunday was baptism Sunday? If you know others or others with children who have not received this great gift of baptism from God don't stop telling them, don't stop encouraging them, don't stop inviting them or pleading with them. If you are uncomfortable talking to them tell them your pastor would love to speak to them about the blessings of baptism. For "***the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off--for all whom the Lord our God will call.***" I have never witnessed 3000 baptisms in one day, but the two baptisms this morning mean that 74 souls have been baptized into the name of our Triune God here at Amazing Grace and I pray that we have the opportunity to witness many more. Thank God for His great gift of baptism - where God has washed our sins away, given us His Holy Spirit and a new birth, and made us heirs of eternal life. What a gift! Happy Birthday! Amen.