

Sermon Draft for June 8, 2025, Pentecost

Text: Acts 2:1–21

Sermon: “The Refiner’s Fire”

For the early Christians, Pentecost as a church festival was second in importance only to Easter. It was the occasion of the first great “harvest” of the church and thus was also a great baptismal Sunday; in the early church, those not baptized during the Easter Vigil were baptized on Pentecost. The propers of the day focus on this event, placing special emphasis on the edifying work of the Spirit. The propers do want to avoid a “charismatic” interpretation, maintaining a proper balance in the Holy Spirit’s work between the spiritual gifts given on the first Pentecost and the teaching and preaching that occurs throughout the church of all ages.

It was indeed finished! Jesus’ death on the cross had paid for every sin of every man, woman, and child, of every age and of every language and nation.

Jesus' resurrection had proved it; God the Father was satisfied that Jesus' death had atoned for every sin of every man, woman, and child, of every age and of every language and nation. And Jesus' ascension back to heaven had shown that Jesus' cross had opened heaven to every man, woman, and child, of every age and of every language and nation. It was finished!

And yet there was and is more to be done. Because unless men, women, and children whenever and wherever they were living heard about Jesus' death and resurrection and were brought to believe it, no one would be saved. And that's where today, Pentecost, comes in. Beginning on the day of Pentecost, but now every day since, the Spirit comes down upon the Church to do and to move us, the church, to do what is still to be done for every man, woman, and child, of every age and of every language and nation.

The Spirit comes down to fulfill the exodus of the church (vs 1–3). Fifteen centuries before, a mighty wind had blown for God's people. That mighty wind had parted the Red Sea.

Miraculously, God had completed Israel's exodus from Egypt, giving them new life in freedom. The wind that blew the waters back now fills the Upper Room. There's a potentially interesting word play here: this word for "wind" can also mean "breath," as in "the breath of life." It's not surprising that the Holy Spirit, ***"the Lord and giver of life,"*** might wish to come with wind. After all, the Spirit has come to give life.

The exodus that gave Israel new life in freedom the Spirit comes down to work again for the church. What Christ has won (finished!) on the cross the Spirit now delivers. The Spirit brings us through waters of our own, Baptism, from slavery to a new life of freedom. Baptism creates faith in Jesus' saving work in our hearts so that we receive his forgiveness of every sin and life eternal.

The Spirit comes to inaugurate the last days for the church (vs 14–21). Amid all the excitement of wind, fire, and the apostles' many languages, Peter declares to the gathering crowd that this is a sign of the last days.

Joel had promised that the Spirit would come in the last days. With Jesus' work finished and the Spirit poured out, the church is living the last days between Jesus' ascension and return.

The last days are the time to repent! We cannot face Christ's return in our sin! Peter is calling us to take a sober look at ourselves. Whom have I wronged? What am I to do? Today, Pentecost, is the day to repent!

But the Spirit has come down to sanctify us, God's church. In Christ we are justified, His death and resurrection accomplished that. Now the Holy Spirit works in us and through us. Our sanctification is a lifelong journey.

We are quite familiar with the primary uses of fire. The first is destructive occasionally intentional, more often accidental. It threatens everything we own, and even our lives, but, as in the case of a forest or prairie fire, what comes after is renewal. Another use of fire is life-giving, as the warmth of a fire can literally save our lives on a cold winter's night.

There is, however, another use that may be less familiar: the use of fire for purification. ***“He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, and they will bring offerings in righteousness to the Lord”***

(Malachi 3:3). One who seeks to purify any metal by removing impurities must melt it with intense heat, which separates the metal that you want from that which is to be discarded. The result is “pure” gold or silver. We can see this process at work throughout our lives as the Lord uses the sorrows and struggles of this life to drive away sin and break every idol. The day of Pentecost points us to the Last Day (Acts 2:17), when this work will be brought to its fulfillment. We will emerge on the other side clean and pure to live before him forever!

Fire often symbolizes purification, and the fire that will purify God’s people now rests upon the assembled church. When we repent, our impurities are burned away. We will dwell with Christ in holiness and righteousness forever.

The Spirit comes down to reverse Babel through the church (vs 4–11). Remember the mess we made (make!) in pride and how God had to deal with us (Genesis 11:1–9)? God had to confuse the languages to humble the proud likes of us. But think of the confusion, alienation, rivalries, distrust that our sinful separation has wreaked on the world ever since.

At Pentecost, the tongues that were confused have now been set aright. The Spirit has come to send the church, you and me into the world. As the apostles spoke, the church now speaks the one language of Jesus' cross in every language. The scattered nations are gathered into the one church.

The theme of Pentecost speaks of the Holy Spirit calling men of all nations through the mouths of the apostles and uniting all believers by the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Men from every nation heard the mighty works of God in their own languages.

As God declared through the prophet Joel, ***“I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy . . . that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved”*** (Acts 2:18, 21). This gift of languages is the undoing of the damage wrought by man’s pride at Babel, when the Lord confused human languages and thus divided humanity into the many nations. And the coming of the Spirit is the fulfillment of Jesus’ prophecy of the Paraclete, ***“the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name”*** (John 14:26).

Every man, woman, and child, of every age and of every language and nation. Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.

In Jesus’ precious name! Amen