

Acts 2:1-21

In a few weeks many of us will be drawn to the fireworks displays on or around the Fourth of July. The fireworks are not done for their own sake. They are done in celebration of our American independence. Many soldiers sacrificed their lives so that you and I can live in a free country. Tomorrow we are especially mindful of this fact as we honor all who fought and died for our nation. We do not have our freedoms because of the fireworks which will light up the sky. They simply draw our attention to the bigger picture. They remind us that our independence is not free, but was paid for at a high cost. Sadly, however, many Americans give little or no thought to all of this. They see July Fourth not as Independence Day, but as “Fireworks Day.”

There is a parallel to this within the church. You heard the reading from the Book of Acts. The Holy Spirit came in full measure to the little group of disciples gathered in Jerusalem. There were some pretty big fireworks that day...the sound of a mighty rushing wind filling the entire house, tongues of fire resting on the heads of the disciples, and the disciples using their own tongues to speak in strange languages--languages which they had never learned. The Day of Pentecost was “Fireworks Day” for the disciples and for everyone who gathered for the event.

Those fireworks were only shot off on that day. Every time that you and I celebrate the Day of Pentecost in the church, we do not celebrate it with fireworks. If the sound of a mighty rushing wind were to suddenly fill this House, we would not stand up and cheer for the Holy Spirit. We would all run to the basement. If a flame of fire appeared on my head, you would not praise God that His Holy Spirit had come to me. I would hope you would grab the fire extinguisher. And if I began speaking gibberish in a strange tongue, you would not pray for someone to interpret. I would hope you would call an ambulance and tell them that your pastor was having a stroke.

Today in the church we celebrate Pentecost, but without all the fireworks. And there are some, perhaps many, who are disappointed. A lady spoke with me in my office several years ago looking to join the church. But she left and never returned when learning that we do not speak in tongues here. People love fireworks. And some have it stuck in their head that unless there are fireworks, there is no Holy Spirit. Unless the same things that took place with those early Christians on the Day of Pentecost take place among us today, God’s Holy Spirit is not coming to us as He came to them. And they don’t stop with that. If those Pentecost fireworks are not happening here in Christ Lutheran Congregation, they claim, then we are not Jesus’ true church, but a false church. And if those fireworks are not going off in your spiritual life; if you have never spoken in tongues--or what have you--then you are a false Christian; you are not a true believer yet, not until, they claim, you have those fireworks.

Friends, not everything in the Bible is prescriptive. Much of it is descriptive--describing for us what took place, but not prescribing what we should be doing, and looking for, today. The fireworks of Acts 2 is one such place where God describes what happened on the Day of Pentecost, but He does not promise us that today He will work in the exact same way.

When Moses was on Mt. Horeb in Exodus 3, God spoke to him from a burning bush. That story is descriptive. It tells us how God acted then. But if we use that story to prescribe for us the exact same way God will act today...so that we go around with matches lighting bushes on fire believing that God will speak to us today through a burning bush...we miss the point of the Bible story. God works through means, but He, not us, chooses the means. He chose to speak through a burning bush. He chose to speak through Balaam’s donkey. He chose to speak through Samuel, Isaiah, and the other

prophets He called. Today He speaks to us through His Son, Jesus Christ...not wherever we happen to place Jesus, but where Christ promises to be--in His external Word and in His Holy Sacraments. And where Jesus is, there is His Spirit at work.

Anyone who looks for the Holy Spirit in fireworks will get burned. Those who seek God's Spirit in tongue-speaking, in divine healing, in the picking up of serpents will find, not the Spirit of Christ, but the spirit of Satan. When the sainted Professor Marquart was a pastor in Australia, he took his Elders to an assembly where a famous faith healer was coming to lay his hands on the sick. Pastor Marquart and his Elders sat quietly in the back row just to observe. But when the faith healer came out and was about to begin, he looked at Pastor Marquart and his Elders and scowled, "I can do no healing today because there are some here who do not believe!" Yes, the spirit of Satan is behind the fireworks displays going on today.

If Jesus had told us--if He had prescribed that we should look for His Spirit in the midst of a burning bush, then why are we in here? We should take our candlelighters out to the shrubs. If He had promised to give us His Spirit through a mighty rushing wind, then let's open the windows. But He hasn't. He does, however, promise again and again that where His pure Word is heard, and where His true Sacraments are given, there He is giving His Holy Spirit--and with the Spirit He is giving the gifts of repentance, and faith, and forgiveness, and eternal life.

We could call the Holy Spirit the humble Spirit because He comes to us today through humble means. He does not loudly announce His entrance with fireworks. He comes quietly working through humble water, humble words, humble food. He is not out to make a name for Himself. He never points to Himself but only to Christ. The Holy Spirit is here today in this House of God because Jesus' true Word is here proclaimed, but He is not saying, "Look at Me! Look at how important I am!" He is quietly, but powerfully working, through the very words placed in your ears, to lead you to repentance and to faith in Jesus Christ.

How unlike us the Holy Spirit is! We want a name for ourself. We want to be important, and to be seen in that way. We want everyone to know how hard we work for the Lord, how much we sacrifice. Without the Holy Spirit, not one of us would be a Christian. Without Him we would only reject salvation and eternal life in Jesus Christ. Yet, the Holy Spirit wants Christ and Him Crucified to be preached here, not how great and important He is...because through the preaching of Christ--through water and through word--the Holy Spirit does what He loves to do--makes you into Christians, and keeps you as God's Christians.

There is no burning bush here. There is no Balaam's donkey. There is no rushing wind. The flames of fire are on the candles only. No one here is speaking in a strange tongue. But you do not need those fireworks because the Word of Truth is here, and so Christ is here, here for you. He who died for you and rose again is here as He promises, to forgive your sins--and He does--all of you He forgives. And He is here giving you His Spirit...so that whether you are here in church, or shopping at Wal-Mart; whether you are studying, working, relaxing, or sleeping, you belong to Christ. You know Him as your Savior. You trust in His blood shed for you. You wait for His appearing in the clouds of glory. You love Him and live your life in Him. And all this because of the Holy Spirit who is here, without any fireworks, but here for you because this is God's promise to you. Amen.