

Acts 2:1-21

What have you done with your time during these past months? Not all, but most have been given a lot more of it than ever before. Puzzles have been put together. Games have been played. Books have been read. Household projects have been accomplished. All well and good. Did you spend more time in the Word of God?

This is where we see the disciples of Jesus in our text. They are on lockdown. They were given orders to shelter in place; to stay in Jerusalem and wait. How long? They do not know. They do not use this time of isolation to amuse themselves. They are in prayer. They are in the Word together.

But now on Sunday morning, the Day of Pentecost, the quarantine is over. The Holy Spirit comes. It's a deafening sound, like a mighty rushing wind. Flames of fire appear and come to rest on them. Filled with the Holy Spirit, they begin to speak in other tongues.

If these disciples have a virus, and the symptoms are all there, it is now out of their hands. Masses of people are drawn to the sound of the wind. They are amazed and perplexed by what they see and hear. They gather around the disciples, no social distancing at all. It must be a virus because, by the end of the day, 3,000 of them are infected with it. They repent and are baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their sins.

If we can call this a virus, then it most certainly has become a pandemic. What began in Jerusalem, the epicenter, has spread around the globe. Not by a twist of fate, but by God's grace. He spoke through the prophet Joel, "*I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh.*" He never intended to infect only the chosen people of Israel. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is for all. The Holy Spirit, beginning in Jerusalem on Pentecost, has truly filled the world.

What about you? Are you infected? We know now that not everyone who has the covid-19 virus displays the same symptoms. So it is with the Holy Spirit. On the Day of Pentecost, the disciples were speaking in languages they had not learned. Flames of fire were resting on them. That was then. But those same symptoms are not promised to us today.

How sad for someone to believe that unless he imitates these disciples on the Day of Pentecost, he does not have the Holy Spirit and is no true Christian. And tragically there are those who do believe this. They have been taught that what we read in this Acts 2 Pentecost text is not merely descriptive, but prescriptive.

But then there is the other extreme. With the covid-19 virus, there are some who have it, but you cannot tell. They are asymptomatic. They look and behave like everyone else. Not so with the Holy Spirit. You can tell a Christian from others. Do not look for a flame of fire on his head. Do not listen for a mighty rushing wind. And do not check to see if he suddenly erupts with a flurry of strange words. Yet, do listen to what he says, for "*out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.*" He will confess the Christian truth. He will speak and sing of Jesus. He will call Him Lord and Savior for "*no one can say Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit.*" (1 Cor. 12)

Do not look for a pristine life, a life free of sin. Quite the opposite, a Christian is a sinner like everyone else. We are not more righteous than those out there. It is true that willful, intentional sin can drive the Holy Spirit out of the heart. This is why David cried, after his fall from grace, *“Create in me a clean heart, O God...and take not Thy Holy Spirit from me.”*

A Christian, one in whom the Holy Spirit dwells, is a sinner like all other people, but does something that others do not do. He *“calls upon the name of the Lord (to) be saved.”* He confesses not just the Christian truth, but also his own sinfulness, and he pleads for mercy, *“calling upon the name of the Lord.”*

Not all are infected with the Holy Spirit, for not all call upon the name of the Lord. The Gospel of Jesus Christ has gone out into all the world, and the promise in our text is for every sinner: *“Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.”* Since Jesus died on the cross for every sinner, all are invited to call upon His name. The Holy Spirit desires to work in the hearts of all people.

But you know how it is. With the covid-19 virus, people do not want to become infected. And so they wear a mask; they social distance. What’s sad is that the same thing is done with the Holy Spirit. People keep their distance from the church. They wear a mask, not over their face, but over their ears. But *“how will they call upon Him... (says the apostle) ...of whom they have never heard?”*

By the grace of God, you are hearing today. You are included in the words, *“Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord.”* Your sinfulness does not in any way disqualify you. Nor does your inability to speak in tongues. God’s invitation and promise does not depend upon you at all, but on Him. And He has done it all for you. No matter who you are, you have a Savior in Jesus Christ. No matter what you have done, you have been declared forgiven for Jesus’ sake. He bore your sins on the cross. This is why you, too, are invited to *“call upon His name to be saved.”*

Therefore, look not at what you can or cannot do. Look to your baptism into Christ which stands forever, and names you as one for whom He died. If you judge whether you have the Holy Spirit and are a Christian by your life and conduct, you will either become proud, or doubt and despair. Look instead to Jesus, calling on His name, and you, for God’s promise is certain, *“shall be saved.”* Amen.