

**“He Will Testify About Me”
(John 15:26)
Pastor Espinosa**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. So what exactly is “Pentecost”? This is not an incidental thing. For our lives of faith and for truly knowing God, it is a big, big deal! We need to know about Pentecost and the great gift that was given!

“Pentecost means ‘fiftieth day’ and refers to the Hebrew...Feast of Harvest (Exodus 23:16), [and the] day of First Fruits (Numbers 28:26)....” [Lueker, ed., Concordia Bible Dictionary, 108] “It was named Pentecost because it fell on the fiftieth day after the offering of the barley sheaf [a bundle of cut stalks of grain presented] during the Passover celebration. [That first offering of Passover led to the Pentecost] offering of firstfruits [50 days later].” [Tenney, ed., The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, vol 4, 692]. First fruits are signs that what was originally presented has led to great blessing! If you have a good planting, then you will have a good harvest!

In very simple terms: Passover brought forth God’s richest blessings (the necessary grain) and 50 days later, Pentecost was the proof that these richest blessings led to an ongoing blessing or harvest (symbolized for example by loaves of bread brought forward during Pentecost). First the grain, then the bread...there was a pouring out of more blessings from the first blessing.

This is beautiful imagery: just as you must first have grain to make bread, you must first have a Savior to know salvation. Jesus is the Passover Lamb of God. He was the great offering – giving His very body and blood – to save us from sin and death. And 50 days later there is a great harvest! Just as grain leads to bread to eat; Jesus’ death and resurrection lead to a real life to live. But for that life to happen, a harvest must occur; a pouring out of the blessings that follow the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And sure enough! 50 days after His death and resurrection, Jesus poured out His first-fruits gift; His resultant real-life blessing for you and for me: Pentecost shows the result of what Jesus “planted” when He won for us the forgiveness of sins through the great harvest of the Holy Spirit. What has come from Jesus’ great saving work? The blessing of the Holy Spirit. He is the grain turned to bread. He is the One who fills us so that we may know Jesus, the Bread of Life.

There is no Christian life, no faith, no peace, no salvation, and nothing good apart from the Holy Spirit. We need the Holy Spirit to be alive in our spirit like our bodies need air to breath. Without the Holy Spirit, we are spiritually dead, but with the Holy Spirit, we live...Christ’s harvest of eternal life is within us. That’s how important the Holy Spirit is.

With the concept of harvest comes a very basic and vital realization: we get to live. Harvest means life is given. Without a harvest, we starve. Without a harvest, we die. With a harvest, we live. The Holy Spirit is our Christian harvest. With Him, we live. With Him, we do not die.

But we continue to learn about our Christian lives and the Holy Spirit through the Old Testament. Never let anyone ever tell you that the Old Testament isn’t important. In so many ways, we just can’t understand the New Testament without it. The Old Testament is the foundation of the Gospel itself.

In all of these blessings from God at Passover and Pentecost, the Lord led His people to be in worship. They were active in the worship; they were active in the receiving (if nothing else). They

were offering themselves to God, even as God was coming to them to bless them. They were gathered to receive the blessing; they were gathered to receive the harvest. Nothing has changed.

This is why we worship. This is why we come to Church: to receive the blessing of Jesus...and to know the harvest of the Holy Spirit. Jesus who has won your salvation gives you His first-fruit gifts: in Holy Baptism you receive the Holy Spirit; the Holy Spirit feeds and nourishes your faith as you hear the sermon; and the Holy Spirit leads you to receive the body and blood of Christ in a good and proper way as you come forward for Holy Communion. The Holy Spirit is the harvest of God who "calls, gathers, and enlightens" the Christian Church on earth. Again, we can't have faith without Him!

But our offerings of worship don't just take place here. They continue as we go out into the world and live in it 24/7...and guess who is guiding and sustaining you Christian? The Holy Spirit! And as He does, you are experiencing what it means to have a new life, but this is where as your pastor I am especially eager to describe the new life harvest the Holy Spirit is giving to you.

What is this new life like? Some would have you believe that if you have this new life, this harvest life of the Holy Spirit that you become some sort of super Christian; full of astounding and spectacular spiritual gifts; and living in such a way as to avoid the common struggles of the rest of humanity...perhaps having better health, a better attitude, and knowing all kinds of extraordinary benefits. This is how the world sees the harvest of true spirituality. And our flesh sees it this way as well. If you were really filled with the first-fruit harvest of the Holy Spirit, then you would be a much better Christian. You wouldn't struggle so much with doubts, fears and temptations. Life would be easier. This is, however, not the true faith, but a form of triumphalism, utopian imagination, our "theology of glory" image of the Christian faith. When we convince ourselves of these images, then we don't attain this life, we are tempted not to believe at all. These are gross misunderstandings of what it is like to know the harvest ministry of the Holy Spirit.

So what is this harvest ministry? It is put forth very simply in the first verse of our Gospel in John 15:26: ***"[Jesus said:] When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me."***

There is nothing more important to know than this: the harvest gift of the Holy Spirit shows His harvest work and ministry by filling you with the Word of Jesus. He puts Jesus before you. He testifies to and witnesses about Jesus. Of the three persons of the Holy Trinity, He is glad to have the least attention, because He lives to have the Gospel set before you. This is the power of the Holy Spirit: making us poor Christians confronted with doubt, fear and temptation to be comforted not by power, not by might, but through having Jesus put before us; leading us to hear and to know and to be comforted by the Word of Christ: "Come to me all of you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest." (Matthew 11:28) The Holy Spirit comforts us with the only thing that can comfort us: Jesus. He does not lead us to ourselves or anything within us...He leads us only to Jesus. He satisfies our begging hearts with the King of Kings and Lord of Lords; He convinces us that we are saved from our terrible sin by making us see the blood of Christ that covers our sin; He comforts us in the face of death by letting us see the resurrection of the Son of God. He comforts us today so that we know that even now it is Jesus who holds us; who never leaves us; and who never forsakes us. He keeps Jesus – the light of the world – before our eyes of faith so that the darkness of our souls and this world will not overtake us. He loves to give us Jesus, so that we are always safe. This is His harvest ministry.

I'm sure you noticed that He is also called "the Spirit of truth" in our Gospel. Truth by nature is understood as:

1. Something that is self-evident OR
2. Something that is logical and coherent OR
3. Something that simply corresponds to reality.

The Holy Spirit leads us to acknowledge the self-evident things in our conscience like for example that we have violated God's good Law; that we have sinned. He also leads us to what is logical, that for example cause and effect also applies to the universe. The universe did not create itself. The very cosmos shows the glory of God. The Holy Spirit also leads us to know what corresponds to the reality of God: for example that it is true that Jesus Christ is our Savior who calls us to know Him and to receive His new life.

And so when the Holy Spirit bears witness (and here the verb is in this future active form of "martureo"...where our English gets "martyr"), we get the idea that this witness is a powerful one. Just as the martyrs witnessed so powerfully that they gave their very lives for Christ and caused the Church to surge with growth, the Holy Spirit bears powerful witness to Christ that causes you to grow. He gives you the truth of the Word of Christ and it causes you to live for God.

The world isn't impressed. The world always wants to see power on its terms. I heard a radio preacher once criticize the Psalmist for his seeming depression and anguish. He said the Psalmist needed to be more like Paul who expressed joy. This was one of the most embarrassingly sad commentaries I'd ever heard. Such poor teaching! Didn't Paul also express his anguish and pain? Doesn't the Psalmist also express great joy?! Of course this is a both/and situation, not an either/or. But here's the thing: the powerful witness of the Holy Spirit is not to eliminate anguish and sorrow, but rather to give true joy and peace in the midst of anguish and sorrow!

Our Lutheran Confessions: "Scripture explains that Job's afflictions were not imposed on him because of his past misdeeds. So afflictions are not always punishments or signs of wrath. When in the midst of troubles terrified consciences see only God's punishment and wrath, they should not feel that God has rejected them but they should be taught that troubles have other and more important purposes, that God is doing his alien work in order to do his proper work, as Isaiah teaches in a long sermon in his twenty-eighth chapter....Therefore troubles are not always penalties for certain past deeds, but works of God, intended for our profit, that the power of God might be made more manifest in our weakness." (Ap. XII, Tappert, p. 207)

This is the harvest work of the Holy Spirit in your life: to keep you faithful through trials; to keep you joyful that you remain in Christ even through hardships! This is the harvest work of the Holy Spirit: it is to be in Christ who keeps you in the forgiveness of sins...so that sin cannot condemn you. And as you live in this Gospel through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, you indeed continue to show the harvest: your new life gives back to God in prayer; your new life gives back to people in love and service; and your new life leads to not proclaiming the saving Gospel less, but proclaiming it more than ever before. This is the life of first fruits. This is your life. The Holy Spirit bears witness about Jesus and so do you!

