

This message from Bishop Mansholt may be read in the place of the sermon on Sunday, June 4, 2006 or used or quoted at the discretion of the pastor. It is offered on the occasion of the Central States Synod Assembly, June 1-4, Bethany College, Lindsborg, KS.

Dear Partners in the Gospel,

I greet you on this Festival of Pentecost in the name of the Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

On the day of Pentecost recorded in Acts 2 people from all over the world were gathered in Jerusalem when the Holy Spirit was poured out upon them with great power. This weekend people from all across Missouri and Kansas have gathered at Bethany College in Lindsborg, Kansas for the annual Central States Synod Assembly. My prayer is that the Holy Spirit again will have been mightily at work in the voting members from our 205 congregations. We should pray for and expect nothing less than God's Spirit deepening our faith and understanding, building up the Church, and sending us forth in witness and service.

The theme of this year's Assembly is *Living in God's Amazing Grace: Called to Lead*. The theme grows out of the second objective of the Evangelism Strategy of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America: prepare and renew evangelical leaders. We need leaders in the Church who have been moved by the power of the Holy Spirit and called through the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We need people who have been given the gift of leadership to use that gift to keep the Church centered in Gospel of Jesus Christ and focused in its mission in the world. And we pray the Holy Spirit, at work in and among us, to raise up pastors, associates in ministry, and diaconal ministers for service in Christ's Church.

Pentecost is that strange and wonderful festival that celebrates God's pouring out of the Spirit. With suddenness there was the sound of a mighty wind and then tongues of fire upon the disciples. They were filled with the Holy Spirit and began speaking in languages that people from other nations immediately heard and understood. People were bewildered yet amazed and astonished at what they were experiencing. They began asking questions, "what does this mean? Have these men tipped the bottle too early in the day?"

Then Peter spoke and said everything happening was what God had promised long ago through the prophet Joel. God was pouring out his spirit in a mighty way upon all flesh. Sons and daughters now would prophesy, young men would see visions, and old men dream dreams. There would be signs all around us, in the heavens above but also here on earth. And everyone who called on the name of the Lord would be saved.

This powerful and rich story from Acts 2 is but the beginning of what was unleashed by the Spirit's power and presence. Disciples, timid, confused, and aimless since the first news of Easter, suddenly are on fire with Spirit. They know who they are and what they are called to do. They are transformed into vibrant, courageous apostles who go forth in witness to Jesus Christ, who was crucified and raised from the dead for the forgiveness of sins. The rest of the book of Acts tells of the power of the Holy Spirit leading them to boldly proclaim the Gospel, perform mighty acts, heal the sick, endure suffering, and be sent in mission to the ends of the earth. The fire of Pentecost was not only upon their head, but deep in their heart and soul and mind.

Lest we think otherwise this life giving Spirit is the same mighty wind of God that hovered over

the waters when God created the heavens and the earth. This is the same Spirit from on high: that filled judges and prophets of old and led them to speak the Word of the Lord; the same Spirit who overshadowed Mary, the Mother of our Lord, that she should conceive; the same Spirit that drove Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted; the same Spirit Jesus breathed upon the Easter disciples with words of peace. This is also the tender and compassionate Spirit who helps us in our weakness, interceding for us with sighs too deep for words. This is the Spirit of truth, the Advocate sent by the Father to testify on behalf of the Son.

In *The Small Catechism* Martin Luther says in explanation of the third article of the Creed:

I believe that by my own understanding or strength I cannot believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to him, but instead the Holy Spirit has called me through the gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, made me holy and kept me in the truth faith, just as he calls, gathers, enlightens, and makes holy the whole Christian church on earth and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one common true faith. Daily in this Christian Church the Holy Spirit abundantly forgives all sins—mine and those of all believers. On the Last Day the Holy Spirit will raise me and all the dead and will give me and all believers in Christ eternal life. This is most certainly true. (Kolb/Wengert edition)

I have been saying repeatedly the two biggest challenges before the Church in North America is that of spiritual renewal and recovering a passion for mission. Far too many of us know neither the Gospel of Jesus Christ nor the basic story of the Scriptures that testify to the Good News of God. And somewhere over the past few decades people have ceased asking *where is God calling us to be in mission* today and began asking *what am I getting out of Church*. We have become consumers of religious goods and services instead of a people formed into a body and empowered by the Spirit to be the presence of Jesus in the world.

The vision statement of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America states: *Marked with the Cross of Christ forever, we are Claimed, Gathered and Sent, for the sake of the World*. From the moment we were claimed in baptism the Holy Spirit has been at work calling us toward this vision. We are gather as a people and then sent to give witness. Everything that happens within the Church is meant finally for witness and service in the world.

Because of the promise of God I am filled with hope for the Church. Left to ourselves and given the challenges before us I probably would despair about future. But God already has poured out the Spirit and is calling us again to life and salvation in Jesus Christ. In ministries throughout the Church the young see visions and the old dream dreams. The Spirit is interceding for us according to the will of God. We have an Advocate who is guiding us into all truth. Abundantly our sins are forgiven. We have the promise of eternal life. By our own power we could not do this. But we have this Promise, the very Promise of God. This is most certainly true.

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