

The Rev. Joel Petruschke
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Our Saviour Lutheran Church
Pentecost

Let us pray...May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, for you are our strength and you are most certainly our redeemer. Amen.

Sisters and brothers in Christ, Pentecost is the day in which God's blesses God's people with the gift of the Holy Spirit.

On our birthday, we receive gifts.

On Christmas, we receive gifts.

But we forget that on Pentecost God has given us the most amazing gift of the Holy Spirit.

Today, we remember the gift of the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

And Martin Luther explained that the gift of the Holy Spirit is at work doing four things in our lives.

The Holy Spirit calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies.

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As you are listening to this sermon, I want you to repeat those four things with me...The Spirit call, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies.

PAUSE

Now, in Luther's explanation of the Third Portion of the Apostle's Creed, Luther wrote these words.

"I believe that I cannot by my own understanding or effort believe in Jesus Christ my Lord, or come to him."

“But the Holy Spirit has called me through the Gospel, has enlightened me with his gifts, and has sanctified and kept me in true faith.”

“In the same way, the Holy Spirit calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth, and keeps it united with Jesus Christ in the one true faith.”

So, it is here in Luther’s explanation of the Third Portion of the Creed, that we get this fourfold ministry—the Spirit calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies.

Now this fourfold ministry is also evident in the story of Pentecost.

On Pentecost those many, many years ago...there were people...people from all over.

People from Parthia, from Media, and from Elam...

There were people from Mesopotamia, from Judea, and from Cappadocia...

There were people from Pontus and Asia, from Phrygia and Pamphylia...

There were people from Egypt, from Libya, and from Rome...

There were people from all over who had gathered to Jerusalem. They had heard a “call.”

Granted they had heeded the call to celebrate the Jewish festival of the “Feast of Weeks,” the week of weeks, 7 times 7, and a day.

Forty-nine plus one equals fifty. Pentecost means fifty.

Pentecost was the Jewish festival of “Feast of Weeks,” which was a harvest festival, celebrated on the 50th day after Passover.

So, the peoples of the ancient world were “called” to celebrate this harvest festival.

The peoples of the ancient world were “gathered” in Jerusalem to offer the first fruits of the wheat harvest.

And it is there while gathered in Jerusalem that something amazing happens.

While gathered in Jerusalem, the Holy Spirit shows up.

The Holy Spirit shows up and is poured out upon the apostles.

A rush of violent wind overtakes the apostles.

Divided tongues of fire appear and a tongue of fire alights on each apostle.

And all of apostles begin speaking in other languages.

And all the people gathered there in Jerusalem are stunned.

They don’t know what to make of this spectacle.

And they start to ask, “What does this mean? What does this mean?”

And Peter stands up and Peter quotes a passage from the prophet Joel.

Or as I like to joke, Peter quoted from the prophet “me.”

And the passage Peter quotes from Joel is about the Spirit inspiring all flesh.

Sons and daughters shall prophesy.

Young men shall see visions.

Old men shall dream dreams.

Even slaves, men and women alike, shall prophesy.

Yes, Peter explains to the called and gathered people what they are witnessing before their very eyes.

The Holy Spirit has shown up.

Peter is enlightening the people, telling them how it is.

And subsequently 3,000 persons are so moved then to be baptized. They are sanctified in baptism.

They are set apart to serve the purpose of the Gospel.

Called, gathered, enlightened, and sanctified—yes, this is what the Holy Spirit does, according to Martin Luther.

This fourfold ministry is evident at Pentecost in Jerusalem many, many years ago.

And this fourfold ministry is just as evident today.

That is the amazing thing.

The Holy Spirit functions in the same way today as it did two millennia ago.

The Spirit of God calls, gather, enlightens, and sanctifies God's people today, just like it did with respect to all those people in Jerusalem on that festival day marking the "Feast of Weeks" 2000 years ago.

The Holy Spirit is not limited to one particular time or place, but is active in all times and in all places.

It is like the laws of physics that function in the same way wherever or whenever in the universe.

We look at one corner of the universe over here and the laws of physics are the same as those in this corner of the universe over here.

Similarly the Holy Spirit is at work in the same way wherever and wherever in our world—calling, gathering, enlightening, and sanctifying.

And so, the Spirit of God is at work via the fourfold ministry not just within the Church.

But the Spirit of God is evident in other groups and organizations: calling, gathering, enlightening, and sanctifying.

For instance, over these past several years, the news media has called out the injustice done to African Americans, who have been killed by police officers and by whites motivated by hate.

And people have rallied around that “call” of injustice.

People have gathered and they have become informed, they have become enlightened about injustice and the Black Lives Matter movement has spawned.

And those committed to the cause have been “sanctified” as members of this organization, set apart for the purpose of justice.

Or consider the attention given by the news media to cases of sexual harassment and sexual abuse.

People have heeded the call, and they have gathered and have enlightened themselves, they have become informed, and they have started the MeToo movement.

Those committed to this cause have been “sanctified” as members of this organization, set apart for the purpose of justice.

Yes, the Spirit of God calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies through the work of the Church, but also the Spirit of God is powerfully at work in society.

Truth be told , most everyone in life is empowered by the fourfold ministry.

Young people experience a sense of call to pursue a certain career path.

They go off to college, where they are gathered with other students to be enlightened, they are educated, so as to be able to work in a particular profession.

And after graduation, a young person is licensed, or certified, or accredited, or what have you...a person is “sanctified” to serve in a given field.

Or consider the process of marriage. Two people are called together by their hearts, and they gather to get to know one another.

And as they date and learn about the other, they become enlightened about the other, and if it is such that they desire to live their lives together, they marry.

They are “sanctified” to serve as marriage partners to each other.

Yes, the fourfold ministry—that activity of the Holy Spirit, is a most powerful force at work in the world.

The fourfold ministry is who we are as people.

It is what we do as people, almost such that it is instinctual.

Think about the very questions we instinctually ask someone when we meet them.

What’s your name? That is how are you called?

Where do you live? Where are you from? That is how and where do you gather with others?

Where did you go to school? That is how were you enlightened?

What do you do? Are you married or single? That is how are you sanctified for a particular purpose?

These are the conventional questions we ask one another.

They are the general accepted questions—why? Because they speak to the commonalities we all share as humans who have been called, gathered, enlightened, and sanctified by the Spirit.

I would dare say that the fourfold ministry is as common as our DNA.

It seems to be that God made us with the fourfold ministry very much in mind.

We were “called” into being. And God said, “Let us make humankind in our image.”

And furthermore, humans were made to be a “gathering.” God made them male and female in God’s image.

We were made in community, like our God who is community—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

And in the Garden of Eden, humanity experienced enlightenment when our ancestors ate of the Tree of Knowledge and Evil.

And God sanctified humanity—giving us the purpose of caring for each other, and for Creation.

This is who we are—called, gathered, enlightened, and sanctified.

This is the gift of the Spirit in which we rejoice on this day...

This is the gift of the Spirit—this fourfold ministry—in which we rejoice on this day of Pentecost.

Today, we are reminded that God is always at work in human lives by these four activities.

And so what does it mean when our ability to gather—one of the those four main functions of human existence—has been so disrupted?

What does it mean that we have to practice social distance when we gather?

What does it mean when we have to limit how many persons can gather together?

Indeed, what does it mean when we have to exclude persons from our gatherings, because it would exceed the amount allowed when gathering?

I mentioned in a recent Daily Message that my wife and I were told that for my daughter's graduation ceremony, only eight persons were allowed to attend for each family.

What does it mean that we have to limit how many persons can be together?

What does it mean that we have been quarantined, told to stay-at-home for so many weeks?

These, and many questions like them, will continue to plague us in the weeks and months ahead, as we continue to grapple with what it means to gather as people during this pandemic.

But I don't think we need to fret too much about "gathering".

For remember, if God has entrusted the fourfold ministry to the Spirit...

If it is the Spirit's work to call, gather, enlighten, and sanctify...

If this is what the Spirit has done for many ages past, and will do for many ages to come...

Then, we can be very certain that the Spirit is going to find a way to bring God's people safely back together to do the Spirit's work in this world.

Even now we are gathering virtually.

Even now we are gathering via Zoom and FaceTime.

Yes, the Holy Spirit will always find a way always to call us together. It is in our spiritual DNA.

This what the Spirit of God does. This is what we remember today on Pentecost.

Yes, many and various ways, you and I, and all of God's people will always be called, gathered, enlightened, and sanctified by the Spirit to do the work of God in the world. Thanks be to God. Amen.