

June 8, 2025

Acts 2:1-21:

“What’s Next?”

- I. The Same Spirit: Pentecost for Them,
Pentecost for Us
- II. Living Between the Promises
- III. The Spirit and the “spirit”
- IV. It Has Come to Pass

Pilgrim Lutheran Church
2155 N. Oakland Avenue
Decatur Illinois 62526

“What’s Next?”

Acts 2:1-21

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ,

Ten days. Ten days had passed for the Disciples of Christ after having watched Him ascend into Heaven. Ten long and dragging days waiting for the promise of the Holy Spirit to come upon them. All they had to keep busy was the casting of lots to replace Judas among the twelve, and Luke tells us they stayed in Jerusalem, praying together in the upper room. But how long can you pray before your mind starts to wander to a nagging question: **“What’s Next?”**

We all face times of waiting with anxiety, uncertainty, and wondering what’s next. But their waiting was charged with a promise, a command, and a coming power they didn’t yet understand. What would the Holy Spirit coming upon them entail? What was to follow, and what would it all mean? What does it mean that they will be witnesses to Christ? We can hardly imagine what it was like to wait on the edge of a moment that would change not just their lives but the world.

I. The Same Spirit: Pentecost for Them, Pentecost for Us

At God’s perfect timing and perfect place where they were all gathered, it finally happened. A sound that could be likened to a rushing wind filled the house where they gathered and was heard throughout Jerusalem. To the Disciples’ great relief, this powerful roar of the presence of the Holy Spirit came with what appeared to be tongues of fire to rest on each of the twelve men. Just like that, what Jesus had promised came to fruition before their very eyes. Christ always keeps His promises. As 2nd Corinthians 1:20 states, “For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory.”

The same men who once misunderstood Jesus and hid in fear after His death were now prepared to speak the clear and powerful Word of the Lord to every nation. Equipped with every gift from the Holy Spirit, the Disciples of Christ were faced with their mission, their purpose, their calling, to bring the Good News of Jesus to all the nations. This would mean that their lives were no longer in service to themselves but in service to their Lord and their neighbor. By their witness, that is, what they had truly seen and heard from the Lord Jesus, the world would come to believe in His name, words, and works, and be saved.

On the day of Pentecost, we give thanks and praise to God for sending His Spirit to the apostles. Without that day, we would not have the complete, Spirit-inspired Word of God in our pews and in our homes. We would be lacking the comfort that only the Scriptures can give. We would be lacking the knowledge, insight, and understanding of Christ that only God can give. Pentecost for the disciples was a day that not only marked the joy of the continued presence of God with them but also marked the continued presence of God with us until the day He returns.

And yet, we know what it's like to live in those ten days of waiting. Don't we? We know what it's like to sit with uncertainty, wondering, **"What's Next?"** What will be the next tragedy in our lives that will cause our one step forward to become two steps back? What sin will creep into our lives that damages our relationship with God? What will be the consequences of the next big thing that our society attaches to without thinking? What will be next in our lives that will cause more grief, more pain, more suffering, and more heartache? What will tomorrow bring? Questions like these can torment us if we let them. Our sinful nature clings to fear of the future like it clings to control.

But Pentecost answers the question. What's next is not chaos, uncertainty, and fear that we are so used to. It's Christ's return. It's the Spirit working in us through the Word. It's the Church of God standing strong till the end as it is filled with that same Spirit of the living God. It's the task set before us by Jesus in Matthew 28:19-20, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you."

II. Living Between the Promises

As we live between the promise fulfilled to the Disciples and the promise of Christ's return, we come to realize from the scripture that we are not left waiting in a **"What's Next?"** type of question. As a result of Pentecost and because of the great gift given to the Disciples, we have the answer right before our very eyes from Matthew to the book of Revelation. Yes, we are living between promises, but we are not left with nothing to do. Our calling, though different in its own way, is the same exact calling as that given to the followers of Jesus. It is to proclaim all that Jesus proclaimed, both Himself and through the prophets and the apostles.

That proclamation is this: justification by grace through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. It is the complete overturning of our previously rotten relationship with God that, through faith in what Jesus did, is changed into a right relationship with the one who loves us dearly. It is the proclamation of forgiveness granted from the holy and precious blood of Jesus, who is the propitiation for our sins. This means that Jesus satisfied God's righteous anger against sin by offering Himself in our place. He took the punishment we deserved, so that we could be forgiven and reconciled to God.

As a result of Christ's love at the cross, we are reminded on this day that the Holy Spirit is not just given to the Disciples, but it is given to us in our Baptisms. We have been washed clean, made anew, died and risen with Christ, and now are equipped with just the same ability to tell the Good News to everyone we encounter in our day-to-day lives. The comfort of Pentecost is that the same Spirit who filled the disciples fills you.

No, we don't get a tongue of fire, and we certainly don't get the ability to speak Russian and Swahili without years of training and study. But we do get this: the marks of the Church. While living between the promises, we have the inspired and inerrant Word of God that brings us

to faith. By the power of that same Word, Christ has made His home in our hearts in Holy Baptism. By the power of that same Word, Christ is present with us in, with, and under the bread and wine. Christ has not forgotten those of us who now live between the promises.

III. The Spirit and the “spirit”

In today’s world, the day of Pentecost becomes not only a reminder of the gift of the Holy Spirit given to believers, but it becomes a time to recognize when alarm bells should be ringing in our heads when we hear people talk about having the “spirit” or “believing in the power of the Holy Spirit.” In Acts 2, we see very plainly that the consequence of Pentecost was confusion among many. They did not understand what was occurring as the Disciples exercised the gifts given to them by God. The text says, “And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, ‘What does this mean?’” But others mocking said, “They are filled with new wine.”

Much like those confused and mocking, many have twisted Pentecost and the gifts of the Spirit into something they are not. The result has been doubt sown into the hearts of believers if they do not “feel” the Spirit, or speak and understand tongues, or witness miracles. The search for truth has shifted from the Word of God to signs and miracles, rather than the cross. Worst of all, the Spirit’s true work has been missed in the Word, Baptism, Absolution, and the Lord’s supper.

Let us not be deceived, the spiritual gifts given at this time were given for the fulfillment of the New Testament scriptures. Now that we have the written Word of God, we, by faith, have become witnesses to all that the Bible bears witness to. The gifts given to the Disciples here and to others have served their purposes. According to our Lutheran Confessions, the Holy Spirit gives gifts to serve one clear purpose: to bring people to faith in Christ and to build up His Church through the Word and Sacraments. Any gift or claim that leads us away from Christ, away from Scripture, or away from the cross is not from the Spirit. But where Christ is preached and sinners are comforted by His grace, there you can be certain the Holy Spirit is at work.

The Bible and the confessions make it clear that the modern idea that the Spirit primarily works through internal feelings or supernatural signs is not what Pentecost is about. What Pentecost truly shows is that the Spirit’s first and foremost work is to reveal Christ. When Peter stood to preach, he didn’t talk about his own experience or the intensity of the moment. He proclaimed Jesus, His life, His death, and His resurrection. The Holy Spirit didn’t come to glorify the apostles or even Himself. He came to glorify Christ and to call sinners to repentance and faith. That’s how we know where the Spirit is present, not by how loud, flashy, or emotional something is, but by whether Jesus is preached faithfully from the Word.

IV. It Has Come to Pass

This day is about the fulfillment of God’s ancient promise through the prophet Joel. Joel’s prophecy quoted here by St. Peter is all about the long-awaited gift of the Holy Spirit poured out

upon Christ's Church. Peter stands before the doubting crowds aptly equipped with the word, stating, "And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh,"

Indeed, the Spirit has been poured out just as promised. Indeed, it marks the inauguration of the "last days." Intricately connected to the cross by its saving nature, the Spirit's coming declares that the long-awaited restoration of the people of God has begun. As these gifts given to us by God renew us, uplift us, and sanctify us, we are then equipped to stand as firmly as Peter proclaiming Christ crucified, calling sinners to repentance, and building Christ's Church for the final day.

Joel goes on to say, "And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." This promise is the heart of our hope. The pouring out of the Spirit means salvation is extended to all who call on Jesus. It no longer simply shall come to pass; it has come to pass.

As we live now in the age between Christ's first coming and His promised return, the Spirit empowers us not only to endure this time of waiting but to proclaim boldly the gospel of grace and forgiveness, to witness to Christ's victory over sin and death, and to strengthen the Church amid the trials of the world. No longer do we worry about "**What's Next?**" On this day, we have the assurance that the restoration and judgment are certain, and for Christ's sake, we will come out perfect on the other side.

But more than that, it fills us with the peace and courage to live faithfully now, as citizens of God's kingdom already. Let this be our confidence and strength by the same Spirit who filled Peter, who raised Jesus from the dead, and who will raise us on the last day. God's promises are fulfilled. The Spirit is here. Christ reigns. And the best is yet to come.

Amen.

Pastor Lucas Abbott