

In the Driver's Seat

The Day of Pentecost
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Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church

Acts 2:1-21; Romans 8:22-27; John 15:26-27; 16:4b-15

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

The best Pentecost is a gift of the Spirit that comes when the need is greatest. That's what Pastor Mark Harris said. ***The best Pentecost is a gift of the Spirit that comes when the need is greatest.*** I think we'll just leave those words up on the screen for awhile as I preach. Let's chew on them a bit . . .

Jesus promises his disciples that the Holy Spirit will come, and it will come when the need is greatest. In our Gospel lesson, Jesus is on his way to the cross to die; he will leave his disciples—and then, even after his resurrection from the dead, he will leave them once again, when he ascends to his Father in heaven. Oh, the disciples' need is great, all right. For they had relied on Jesus to teach and guide them; he fussed them at times, but even they had to admit it was always for their own good. And Jesus had loved them, how he loved them!

So, they wonder, how can they ever live without his constant presence? Jesus responds to their wonderings. In today's lesson from John, Jesus says: "*When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father, he will testify on my behalf.*" Jesus says here that he will send the Spirit to lead the disciples in his stead. In fact, Jesus makes clear how important the Spirit will be for them: "*When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth . . .*" Jesus promises his friends that the Spirit will help them live and remain in the truth he's given them. The truth about a loving God who comes to be with his people.

Unlike the first disciples, maybe we don't realize that our need is great, that we need Jesus—and his Spirit—in our life. You know, we spend most of our years mastering things, accomplishing things. Have you ever looked in your baby books, which your parents might have kept on you? Well, those books detail moments like when you first learned to walk and learned to talk, first rode a bike and read a book. Now today you're here in **this** place, having taken a year's worth of catechism classes, read some Bible, answered a few theological questions, and reflected with your pastors and mentors on what it means to be a baptized child of God. You'll get a nice certificate which your parents will stick in that baby book. So it's easy to say, "I've mastered this Christian thing. I've accomplished what my parents promised on the day of my baptism that they'd help me do. There. Done." And you go and move on to the next thing you'll master.

Which will be what? Emily—your older sister Amanda affirmed her baptism here two years ago. What was the next big thing she accomplished? Yes, learning how to drive. Turning 16, getting permit in hand, and figuring out who was willing to sit in a vehicle with you while you put your pedal to the metal—er, I mean, your foot to the accelerator. I propose that what's involved in the process of getting your driver's license is a helpful way to understand our need—

our great need—for the Spirit of God in our lives as we try to walk in Jesus’ footsteps, as we try to be his faithful disciples.

During most of the years I was growing up, my family didn’t own a car. Neither my father nor mother knew how to drive because as they grew up, **their** parents didn’t have cars. Maybe that sounds strange, but we used other means of transportation in our small town—they call them *feet*? It wasn’t until my brother Danny turned 16 that our family got a car. He was a year older than I, so when I became 16, it fell to him to teach me how to drive. There was a lot to learn—rules for driving on the highway, rules for how near you could park to a fire hydrant or stop sign, rules about ambulances and school buses. There was a book to read and a test to take on the information. And, of course, there was the practical aspect of driving itself. My brother had his work cut out for him with me. He quizzed me on facts in the book and he took me out on the road. He helped me learn so much.

The first thing you should know about the Christian life is that, well, there’s a lot to learn. Frankly, you will always be learning. Maybe your mentors who worked with you all year could vouch for that. Jesus told his disciples that the Holy Spirit would help them remember all **he** taught them. You can see where this Spirit is at work doing that. First, there’s the Bible. We can read in the Bible what Jesus teaches . . . That loving God and loving neighbor sum up every commandment God ever gave his people. That God’s promises can be trusted. That God listens to prayer. That God offers new life to those who call on his name. Maybe these truths don’t seem like a lot to learn, but somehow we keep on managing to forget them, so Jesus sends us his Spirit to help us learn them again. If we don’t learn them through reading the Bible, we’ll learn them through sermons preached and songs sung and lives well-lived by those who are our Christian role models. We’ll learn these truths through all the times we gather with God’s family and have fellowship. The Spirit will help us learn so much together.

Of course, all the learning in the world doesn’t mean we’ll ace the test. I failed my first driver’s test. Oh, I passed the written exam. That’s the stuff I could always pass. My problems came when I was sitting behind the wheel of the car with the local police officer who gave the driver’s exams. What happened? I believe that, rather than stopping at a stop sign, I kind-of cruised through the stop sign. And my 3-point turn (you know, when you need to turn around in a street, you should do it in 3 moves? Forward, backward, then forward again?)—well, my 3-point turn was more like 7-points. I failed. I was embarrassed. No one else I knew had failed. All my friends passed theirs. I cried. I was inconsolable.

Until my brother Danny consoled me. He endured my tears and my hiccups from crying and my wailing “I’ll-never-learn-to-drive-and-life-is-terrible-and-I’m-going-to-lock-myself-in-my-bedroom-and-never-come-out.” He listened patiently, then took me to the Tastee-Freez and bought me a lime-green Slushie and drove me home. (I felt much better after the Slushie.) And I discovered something important about my brother. He genuinely cared about me.

The reality is you, too, will fail sometimes. You will make mistakes, do stupid things, choose the wrong course of action, find yourselves in a real predicament, hurt someone—even yourself—in the heat of the moment. Just because we know a lot about Jesus doesn’t mean we won’t sin. We will. And just because we know a lot about heaven doesn’t mean we won’t

sometimes experience hell on earth. We will. And there will be times, I'm sad to say, that you and I will consider ourselves inconsolable.

Except that Jesus sent his Spirit into our world to console us. (St. Paul puts it this way in his letter to the Romans: "*Likewise, the Spirit helps us in our weakness . . .*") If the Holy Spirit has been given to us to remind us of all that Jesus has taught, then we'll be reminded—at our times of greatest need—that he genuinely loves us, and has loved us so much as to die for us—for our sins, our mistakes, our failures. And will continue to love us so much that we might, finally, be freed and transformed by that love.

So that we can what? Lock ourselves in our bedrooms and never come out? Or hang the consequences and do pretty much as we please? No! The Spirit has been given us that we might be brave enough to enter the world and do what pleases God. And hang the consequences. The Spirit will continue to teach, console, advise, and give courage to us every step of the way. Jesus Christ—your savior and mine—promises us that.

After I finished my Slushie, I didn't lock myself in my bedroom, though I kind-of wanted to. Instead, Danny went back over a few details. Like, you need to stop at the stop sign. And a 3-point turn is exactly that—3 points. And that maybe taking the test on a hot summer August afternoon, when the police officer has already endured 6 other exams in an un-air-conditioned vehicle is not such a bright idea. Danny suggested I go at 9:00 in the morning, in the cool of the day. He gave me good advice. And when I went back, one week later, to take my driver's exam a second time, I knew Danny was rooting for me.

Not only is the Spirit sent to testify to Jesus, but Jesus tells his disciples in our Gospel lesson that they, too, are called to testify on his behalf. That goes for all his disciples, past, present and future. We are to testify, to witness to Christ in the world, share his love, offer his gifts of compassion and forgiveness whenever and wherever the need is greatest. In other words, ultimately, we must get in the driver's seat and do the challenging work laid before us as his followers. Not because we've mastered that skill, but only because we've been strengthened by the Spirit to follow our **Master**.

Know that as you follow him, the Spirit of Christ which dwells in you will be rooting for you. We—your parents, family, friends, mentors, and pastors—we will be rooting for you, too. **AMEN.**