

Pentecost Sermon by Bishop Michael Hawkins

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He dwells with you, and will be in you. +

Humanity is divided in so many ways and along so many lines. Some of these distinctions are part of that glorious symphony of creation, the most fundamental being male and female. We are also distinct in our race and culture and history. The Scriptures do not put any moral significance on these differences. But the division of humanity by languages is regarded, at least at the outset, as a punishment from God. God scattered humanity from the tower of Babel by the confusion of languages. That inability to communicate with one another is the enduring curse of Babel.

Yet, in our salvation, the different languages which were once part of the curse of sin are redeemed. They become the vehicles of the gospel of salvation and the various tongues whereby Almighty

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God is praised on earth and in heaven. God gathers humanity together and unites the different languages of the world, in the preaching of the Gospel and the telling of his praises. Acts says, “We hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God.”

The story of the tower of Babel stands in relation to the fall in Eden in a way parallel to the relation between Pentecost and the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. By the cross and death of Jesus, the curse of the fall is undone, Eden is restored. Jesus says to the thief on the cross, “Today you will be with me in Paradise.” So at Pentecost, we see the fullness of this salvation, which redeems us from the fall and the tower.

But the tower of Babel is not the only fruitful Old Testament background to the events of this sacred day. This is the day of Pentecost, fifty days after the Passover, when the first fruits of the

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Spring harvest were brought to God, and when the giving of the law on Mount Sinai was recalled. On the Christian Pentecost, we celebrate these first fruits of the Spirit, giving the Apostles the ability to communicate the gospel of Jesus to men and women in their own languages. And this Christian Pentecost recalls our law, the giving of the new law, the law of love written on our hearts by the Holy Spirit.

Jeremiah's prophecy has been completely fulfilled: "This is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each man teach his neighbour and each his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."

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So in the Gospel words of Jesus to us today, he tells of how the Holy Spirit will empower his followers to keep his commandments, to love as he loved, and will teach them the truth and bind them to God, and in God, for ever. This Holy Spirit, Jesus tells us, the world cannot receive. And why not? Because the world only knows what it can taste and see and touch, and consume and use and buy and sell. It is spiritually blind. The world cannot receive the Spirit because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you, and will be in you.

Jesus puts our relation to the Holy Spirit in two ways. 1. He dwells with you. 2. He will be in you. The Holy Spirit is the Lord, the Giver of Life, and we are aware of his presence and power. We know that in him, we live and move and have our being. But there is something new promised here: he dwells with you, that is right now, and he will be in you. The Spirit of God is not just out there. God is not just up there, over there, far off, not even just beside you, he will

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be in you. That indwelling of the Spirit is the gift of Christ at Pentecost.

What does it mean for us to have the Holy Spirit in us? “I will come to you,” Christ says. By the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, we have with us always the presence of Jesus, the power of Jesus, and the love and friendship of Jesus. By the Spirit we know Jesus, we see him, we hear him, we feed with him, we talk with him in the Holy Spirit. The Spirit brings us Jesus’ new and eternal life. We will come to him and make our abode with him. The Holy Spirit in us makes us the temple of God, the dwelling place of the Father and the Son. And by the Holy Spirit we are taught, we are granted faith, and we are recalled to the teaching of Christ. Finally, by the Holy Spirit, Christ conveys his peace to our hearts and minds.

All that Jesus describes in that Gospel - Christ’s presence and life and nearness, and love and power and peace - these are all ours

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by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. The Good News of this day is that the gift of the Holy Spirit is not only for the Apostles, but for all the world. And what must we do? The Scriptures associate the gift of the Spirit especially with water Baptism and the laying on of hands. Yet, we must remember that the work and influence of the Spirit is not something we control. He is the Lord. So what must we do that the Spirit might dwell more fully in us? “Ask, and it will be given you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For every one who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. How much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”

Let us come, then, made bold by the words and promise of Jesus, praying the Father that his Holy Spirit may descend upon us. He dwells with you and will be in you. For your heavenly Father will give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him. +