

Acts 2:1-21.

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. ² Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. ³ They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. ⁴ All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. ⁵ Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. ⁶ When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard them speaking in his own language. ⁷ Utterly amazed, they asked: "Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans? ⁸ Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language? ⁹ Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰ Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome ¹¹ (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!" ¹² Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, "What does this mean?" ¹³ Some, however, made fun of them and said, "They have had too much wine." ¹⁴ Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: "Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. ¹⁵ These men are not drunk, as you suppose. It's only nine in the morning! ¹⁶ No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: ¹⁷ "In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. ¹⁸ Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy. ¹⁹ I will show wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke. ²⁰ The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord. ²¹ And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.'

We have been given the same Spirit

- 1. As we gather together***
- 2. As we go out into the world***

Just yesterday about one thousand cadets graduated from West Point Military Academy. It was an impressive sight as they stood in their iconic dress uniforms; the ones with the gray jackets and the shiny brass buttons, the white pants and matching white hat, the sash, and the saber. Shoulder to shoulder they stand united. The uniform is a visual reminder that they are united in education, and training, in purpose and now service. Having gone through the academy they celebrate their graduation together and wait to be commissioned. They will go out to serve in different places, different positions, but unlike most university graduations these graduates will go out from this place not just as individuals on to a variety of careers, but these graduates go out from this place as part of a unit, a corps. While in their separate stations, they will serve together as they carry out the important unifying work of protecting our country and her people.

For the disciples on that day of Pentecost there was no special uniform, no formal dress code that identified as them as united, but they were gathered together for a special unifying reason. As they gathered together for this festival of thanksgiving and praise, the Holy Spirit, whom Jesus had promised to send, came in a special way. And now an ordinary gathering had become so impressive that strangers off the street started to gather. They heard the sound of a rushing wind, but there was no actual blowing about of anything. They saw a strange sight, what seemed to be tongues of fire separated and came to rest on each of those believers who were gathered in this place. But what they heard was the most remarkable. The disciples were speaking different languages and speaking of the wonders of God. Standing next to each other with those tongues of fire over their heads and different languages coming from their lips, this first generation of believers was united in faith and in the knowledge of their Savior. And now each one of the members of this group, this unit, this body of believers was enabled to go and share the message of salvation through Christ Jesus with many more people as they went out into the world. What an impressive scene this must have been, and today we celebrate the fact that we are united with them and we have a similar calling and mission because **we have been given the same Spirit: as we gather together, and as we go out into the world.**

Around the year 2006, the United States Army started using the following slogan for recruiting purposes: "Army of One". The slogan didn't last that long, because in the minds of many it had missed the mark. The army is not about rugged individualism, but it is about being part of something greater than yourself. Service in any branch of the military is about being united in mission and cause. Soldiers are trained and molded for that very purpose to work and fight as a unit, to protect, and sacrifice for the good of the unit, their corps, their country. These men and women of the military are very much united as they carry out their individual positions of service.

In a similar way God's people are not given the gift of spiritual life so that we may simply stand as individuals and be saved by our lonesome. Instead God sends his Spirit to us through his Word and Sacraments so that we may be saved as individuals but also be gathered into his kingdom, his family, his flock. Through word and sacrament we are given the same Holy Spirit that was given to Peter and those 1st century believers. We are gathered together into God's Holy Christian Church and into our local congregations as well. Today we sit together in this one place because we have been given the same Spirit. We are united in faith, and in love, and in Spirit as we gather together and as we go out into the world.

Now some of us have personalities that favor the idea of being part of something greater than yourselves, others of us prefer the idea of being an individual, of "being our own man, our own woman." Whatever your preference or personality, all of us need to watch out for the sinful tendency to overlook the importance of coming together for worship. The lazy skeptic in you, in me, says, *"We all believe in Jesus. We all have God's Word. We all even have the Spirit working with us. Why do we need to come together?"* Especially as the summer and all its enticing attractions and distractions approach we get into that thinking more and more. *What's the harm if I take a few weeks, a few months, the summer off?* Well, one of the dangers is that our sinful nature might get us to question the whole concept all together. *Why do we even need to come together anyway?*

We gather together because we have been given the same Spirit. As believers this is who we are and what we as believers do. We are God's people who set aside some time to honor the preaching and teaching of God's Holy Word. We come together to celebrate what our God has

done for us. We come together in one place to be assured of our Savior's love, his protection, his care. We gather together because this is who we are, we have been given the same Spirit.

Travel in your minds to that valley of dry bones that Ezekiel saw. God told his prophet to speak the word of the LORD to a valley of dry bones, and when he did, these bones by the power of the Word came together and were brought to life. What happened to those bones then? What description was given of those who were brought from death to life? They are called a vast army. These bones are brought to life not for a life of spiritual solitude, or rugged individualism, but these living beings stood together as the house of Israel. They were given life through the same Spirit, the same breath of God. They were brought to life through the Word of God spoken through the prophet and they stood shoulder to shoulder, united in service to God.

That picture can be used to describe us as well. Through the gospel we are given the gift of life in Christ. Spiritually speaking we were dead dry bones with absolutely no life in us, but because of God's grace the breath of spiritual life has been breathed into us. The Spirit of God was working through word and sacrament that this one precious soul is saved, but we are also given life so that we may be gathered to our God and to service in his kingdom. He has called us to faith; he has given us life, so that we may be part of this army of believers. We are given the same Spirit and we are strengthened as we come together to hear his Word. We are given the same Spirit as we gather so that we may go out into the world in confidence, in peace, in joy.

This has been the case since Pentecost as it was the case for the Old Testament believer. We remember how the psalmist was led to eagerly exclaim, "I rejoiced with those who said to me, 'Let us go to the house of the Lord.'" As we celebrate this birthday of the Christian church as we know it on this festival of Pentecost we are shown what believers have always done and are to continue to do. Peter and the others are gathered around the word. As they wait for the gift of the Holy Spirit that Jesus had promised they are together in one place to consider what God has done and what he would do. They were gathered together to praise and thank the LORD of the harvest and to wait for the gift of the Holy Spirit as Jesus has promised. The Bible tells us simply that they were all gathered together in one place.

It is good to come together in this place and places like this to be encouraged by those who have been given the same Spirit. As we gather together around God's word we are strengthened by the Spirit. We praise our God. We consider what he has done. We are encouraged by his promises of what he will do for us. We are encouraged by one another, and refreshed by his word and filled with his Spirit we go. We take that message of salvation with us as we go out into the world knowing that this is not just something I think or I believe, but this is what unites me with the members of this congregation, and this is what God's people everywhere believes. I am united to them in faith. I am given the same Spirit that was given to Peter that was given to all those who believed on that day. I am given the same Spirit that unites the whole Christian church. As we consider this unity there is a certain peace comes over us, a wonderful assurance is given to you and to me as we are strengthened by the Word and the Spirit.

It must have been a thrilling sight to be there, to experience all the extraordinary circumstances that surrounded that particular festival of Pentecost. It must have been so encouraging to hear Peter stand up and give his powerful Pentecost sermon. But the power that day was not found in Peter's passionate preaching technique, it was not found in the sound of the rushing wind, or the strange tongues of fire that rested above the disciple's heads, but it was the Spirit working through the gospel in Word and Sacrament. Even for those disciples it was

the case. Those few disciples who had hid in fear, locked behind closed doors, were now given the courage to speak boldly, to share their faith. They were made bold not just by standing in the presence of Peter on this This was not simply a great motivational speech but this was God the Holy Spirit working through the words Peter's sermon as he was sharing the message about the Christ. The Holy Spirit was working through the gospel to assure and comfort, to give peace and confidence to those who were hearing so that they might go out to the ends of the world and share this message.

It was incredible, impressive, this army of believers, standing in this one place having the word of God come to them and sharing that message with the world as God enabled them. They were united in service to God. They were given the same Spirit.

It's incredible, impressive, to think that God has united us to this same Christian church. Through the Word he gives us this same Spirit as we gather together, as we go out into the world. As we gather around God's Word we are encouraged and strengthened in the faith. We are reminded that we are part of something larger than ourselves. We are assured that we are part of God's family and we are reminded of our mission and calling as part of God's vast army. This is something that God wanted for his church then, now, and always, and so he has given us his Spirit. We gather because that what God has called us to do. This is who we are. We have been given the same Spirit. We are united with him. We are united with each other. Through word and Sacrament the Spirit comes so that we might be strengthened in the faith together. Before we go out our separate ways, to serve our God in our individual lives we gather, we celebrate what God has done, we are assured of what God will do, and we encourage one another. This will help us in our individual lives as we go out and carry out our individual callings. As I face the challenges that I face, as you face the challenges and the temptations that arise in your life, we are strengthened we are encouraged that we are united by one Spirit, that we have been called to serve the same God and Savior. Through this reminder of our unity, and more importantly strengthened by the Word and the Spirit working through that Gospel, we are sent out to serve our Lord and to carry his love and his message with us in confidence and in peace. Christ Jesus has forgiven us, saved us, and we are his own called to give him glory and praise.

And finally we are given one last hope that brings us all together. One day the Spirit of God, the breath of the LORD, will come and breathe life into lifeless bones and this great army of believers that served and praised their Lord in this life, in their individuals positions, will be raised from the grave, raise to life and will be gathered together, with their Lord in the peace of heaven. With all the extraordinary and strange circumstances that will surround that Last Day, this will truly be an impressive sight that we in faith all look forward to. Dressed in the impressive bright white righteousness of Christ, joined together by the same Spirit, standing side by side with fellow believers, we will be brought from the church militant, to the church triumphant as we stand together at our Father's side. Now that will be an impressive sight and it is all because our Lord enabled his believers to take His Word from this one place to the entire world! Praise be to our God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit! Amen.