

4 June 2017
The Feast of Pentecost
The Confirmation of Jonathan Skura
Farewell and Godspeed to Neely and Martha Owen

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“Amen!”

Text: Acts 2:1-21; John 7:37-39; Numbers 11:24-30; Romans 10:10

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.

That is what today, the Day of Pentecost, is all about. For, as Jonathan has learned in his catechism instruction, that is what the Holy Spirit is all about. His job is to point us to Christ. His job is to connect us to Christ. His job is to give us Christ. If you want to see signs and evidence of the Holy Spirit today, do not look for tongues of fire, mighty rushing winds, speaking in tongues, or other spectacular or unusual things. Look for this: *those calling upon the name of the Lord*. Where that is being done, there is the Holy Spirit. There the Holy Spirit has worked and is working still.

And calling upon the name of the Lord is far greater than those other things. For while spectacular and unusual signs might be cool, they cannot save. But this we can say for certain: ***that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.***

Jonathan will make that confession in a few moments now. And we will rejoice. But we will not rejoice that Jonathan is doing such a great thing, but rather in what the Holy Spirit has done in him. We will rejoice that Jonathan has come to know that he is a far greater sinner than he ever imagined! But that he has come to know this, too: that he has a far greater Saviour than he ever imagined as well. A Saviour who baptized him and made him his own. A Saviour who absolves him. A Saviour who feeds him with His own Body and Blood. The Holy Spirit has pointed Jonathan to Jesus and said: *Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world* (John 1:29). Who takes away your sin, Jonathan. And today, Jonathan really will say just this: **Amen. Truth.**

So today we don't rejoice that Jonathan has memorized all his catechism: *he hasn't*. And we don't rejoice that he knows all he needs to know: *he doesn't*. We rejoice that he has learned to say *amen*. Truth. That he is baptized *in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*. **Amen**. That he is a poor, miserable sinner. **Amen**. That *I forgive you all your sins* is Jesus absolving him. **Amen. This is the Word of the Lord. Amen.**

This is My Body. **Amen.** This is My Blood. **Amen.** Truth. All this is the Holy Spirit giving you Jesus. **Amen.** Truth. Gift received.

And so true is this, so sure is Jonathan's *amen*, that he will stake his life on it. Twice, in fact, he'll say that - that he would rather suffer even death than fall away from this truth. But he'll say this, too: *by the grace of God.* That is, *by the gift of God.* That is, *by the Holy Spirit.* Jonathan cannot make that promise on the basis of the strength of his own faith, will power, or determination. If so, he will fail when the insults are hurled his way. He will fail when the threats come his way. He will fail if, one day, the cold steel of an Isis knife is held against his throat. He can only say that because the Holy Spirit has shown him and given him the one who is more powerful than death. The one who broke the power of death and the grave in His resurrection. Because the Holy Spirit gives him Jesus. He doesn't have to cling to his life in this world because the Holy Spirit has given him a life this world cannot take away. Because Jesus is clinging *to him!* And to that Jonathan says, as we say: **amen.**

And thus confirmation. Learning to say **amen.** The Holy Spirit working *amen* in you. To *confirm* with your mouth: *this is the truth.* For as was sung in the Gradual, words from the apostle Paul: ***With the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.*** Even when that confession ends your earthly life. For you confess the one who is more powerful than death and the grave. And whenever that happens, it is a reason to rejoice.

And it is the reason we rejoice on this day of Pentecost. For the reason the Holy Spirit was poured out on the Church was not just to do cool and unusual signs, but for Peter and the eleven to do what they did: **to stand up and preach Jesus.** To stand up and point to Jesus as the Lord through whom comes salvation. That the Lord who worked in the Old Testament has now worked through the cross. That the Lord who made promises in the Old Testament has now fulfilled them in Jesus. That what Moses had wished for and Joel had prophesied has now happened. *It is finished.* And that all those people who had gathered in Jerusalem that day, ***from every nation under heaven*** and speaking all those different languages, might believe and confess and say **amen.** Truth. Jesus is Lord. For this gift is for all. For ***everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.***

And that's also why we're rejoicing as we bid Farewell and Godspeed to Neely and Martha today. For Neely desires to stand up with Peter and the eleven and preach Jesus as a pastor.

Now, before I go on here, I have to tell you that Neely and Martha aren't here today. We were planning on bidding them Farewell and Godspeed as this was going to be their last Sunday with us before leaving for the Seminary. But God had other plans. Instead of us

bidding farewell to them, they bid farewell to Martha's mother, who passed away yesterday. So we'll keep them in our thoughts and prayers . . .

So Neely and Martha will leave this week for the Seminary, as Neely desires to stand up with Peter and the eleven and preach Jesus as a pastor. But you don't have to be a pastor to proclaim Jesus. All Christians do that. You do that whenever you speak Jesus at home, at school, at work, to your neighbors and friends, or wherever you are. But Neely desires to do this also now as a called and ordained servant of the Word. For the Holy Spirit now to use him in this new way. That through the Word preached and taught, to young and old, many more might say **amen**. Truth. Jesus is Lord.

So while we will miss him and Martha, we rejoice also that the *living water* that has been poured into their hearts by Jesus will also continue to flow out of their hearts to others. For the Holy Spirit poured out upon you in Holy Baptism (Titus 3), satisfying your thirst for forgiveness and life, works not just in you but also through you for others. For this river of living water is no small trickle, but rather more like a tidal wave, working to drown the Old Adam in you and raising to life a new man, a new woman, *to live before God in righteousness and purity forever*. That you die and rise with Christ to a life that starts now and will never end. That the **amen** you proclaim now you will proclaim forever. Now before the Lord who is hidden; then before the Lord you will see.

So next week Neely is going to begin learning a new tongue: Greek. He'll begin ten weeks of intense study of that language, and probably not a few times in those ten weeks he'll wish the Holy Spirit would just come to him and give him that language like on the first Pentecost. But as he plunges in and begins to read the Scriptures in their original tongue, he will be blessed; the Holy Spirit will be working in him; he will drink deeply of the living water of Christ.

And yes, he will be *filled with new wine*, as the *amazed and perplexed and mocking* onlookers thought of the apostles that first Pentecost. But he *won't be drunk, as they supposed*. The new wine he is filled with is the same new wine you are filled with here: not just the Spirit, but also the new wine, the Gospel wine, you receive at this altar. The Blood of your Lord first shed on the cross and now poured over your lips, which, as Jonathan has learned, is *given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins*. And that *whoever believes these words has exactly what they say*. And he and you will say: **Amen**.

So consider what will happen here today: a new confirmand, a new seminary student, a pastor and people, visitors and members, a Church, gathered as one, gathered around font, pulpit, and altar, to receive Christ, His life, and His forgiveness. That's what happened on that first Pentecost. That's what this day is all about. And that's what will continue to happen as this day fades in our failing memories and new days and new

challenges rise to meet us. But Christ and the work of His Spirit will remain. Christ and His Spirit will continue steadfast. Christ and His Spirit will come to you and work in you to gather you to Himself and keep you with Him. For this is His very work. For as Jonathan also learned:

I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith. In the same way He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith. In this Christian Church He daily and richly forgives all my sins and the sins of all believers. On the Last Day He will raise me and all the dead, and give eternal life to me and all believers in Christ. This is most certainly true (Small Catechism, Explanation of the Third Article).

Or, instead of that last sentence, simply this: **AMEN!** True. Gift received.

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of the faithful, and kindle in them the fire of your love (Introit).

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.