

8 June 2025
The Feast of Pentecost

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“The Power of the Word”

Text: Acts 2:1-21; Genesis 11:1-9; John 14:23-31

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

Stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high (Luke 24:49b).

That’s what Jesus told His disciples right before He ascended into heaven.

So what were they expecting?
What would this power be?

Jesus had promised them many things. He promised to send them **a Helper**, an Advocate, **the Holy Spirit**, the Spirit of truth (John 14:26; 15:26; 16:13). He promised to be with them always and not leave them as orphans (Matthew 28:20; John 14:18). He promised them that the gates of hell would not be able to stand against His Church (Matthew 16:18). And this promise: they would be *clothed with power from on high*.

Now they had received power from Jesus before. Jesus had sent them out, two-by-two, into the towns and villages ahead of Him, with the authority, the power, to heal the sick and cast out demons. What power would they now receive? Well, power even greater, for sure! Right? From the resurrected Jesus, now enthroned at the right-hand of the Father!

And then the Day came. They were in the city, just as Jesus had instructed. **All together in one place**. And suddenly . . . *the sound! Like a mighty rushing wind* that **filled the house** where they were. Not like the sound of wind just rushing through open windows, rushing past them. Something, someone, was *there*, with them, all around them. In a sound like a mighty rushing wind, it says . . . *but not wind?*

And then . . . *the sight!* On each of the twelve it looked like fire; like a tongue of fire resting on each one of them. But not burning them. Just resting there, marking them.

Well, this must be it, right? Jesus fulfilling His promise. What else could these signs mean? So what happened to them? What great power did they receive?

They could *speak in other tongues*, other languages.

Oh. That's it? That's what we were waiting for? A little anti-climactic, perhaps.

But that's enough. No, more than enough. **For the power of God is His Word.** The Word of God that in the beginning created all things. The Word of God incarnate that by His death and resurrection re-created all things. And now the Word of God the Disciples-now-Apostles would speak to people *from every nation under heaven*, gathered there in Jerusalem for the Feast.

And how powerful was this Spirit-given and Spirit-filled Word? Well, through their preaching that day, as we will hear next week, 3,000 people were baptized. Now, was it the electric personality of the disciples that caused that? No. Their great charisma? Uh, no. Their looks? Their popularity? No, and no. It was the power they had received. **The power of the Word.**

And words *are* powerful. We know that. We see it in politics, in international relations, words that can send the Stock Market tumbling or soaring, words that start wars. Words can bring people together and soothe; they can also divide and hurt.

We heard about the power of words **in the Old Testament reading**, about the Tower of Babel. *The whole earth had one language and the same words*, we are told. So they gathered together in one place not just to build a tower, but to **make a name for themselves**. That is, to exalt themselves. To use the gift of a common language not to exalt the name of God, but to exalt themselves. So *they* would be the ones everyone talked about, not God. *They* would be on top. *They* would be god. So God confused their language, and without the power of a common language, without the power of words, they dispersed **over the face of all the earth**.

But now, on this Day of Pentecost, God reverses that, just as He prophesied He would. He is again using words to gather, not scatter, and to make a name *for Himself*. In order to save. All people. Because **everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved**. That's what God wants. And that's what the Apostles were being sent to do. Proclaim that God has done it. The sin of the world has been atoned for. The blood of the Lamb of God has been shed. There is forgiveness and life for all people; all who believe and call on the name of the Lord. The name of Jesus.

That might not be the sexiest power, the power that everyone is going to talk about. The power that awes people like fireworks on the Fourth of July. But it is the power we need. Power that lasts not just for a time and then goes away, but power that gives *eternal* life.

We heard Jesus talk about His word today, that **whoever keeps His word** - which doesn't just mean obey, but more than that. It means to treasure His word, to guard it and treat it as something valuable, precious, important. **Whoever keeps His word will have the Father's love and presence.** That's a pretty powerful word! That's a word worth keeping.

But if you're like me . . . and especially as I get older . . . you forget things . . . So Jesus promises to **send a Helper, the Holy Spirit**. And, Jesus says, **He will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.** That is, He will help us remember all Jesus words, His life-giving words. So that we will keep them and treasure them in our hearts, and if in our hearts, then also in our lives, and in our speech.

And then, Jesus goes on to say, **not as the world gives do I give to you.** This gift of the Word the world may look at say, *Oh. That's it? We'll pass.* There's other power, other glory, other gifts we'd rather have. And we'll take two of those please! This? This ain't much.

Except it is. For the Word of God turned nothing into everything, blind into seeing, deaf into hearing, sick into health, sinners into saints, bread and wine into Body and Blood, gives peace to the troubled, confidence to the fearful, faith to the doubting, and raises the dead to life. To this end: not that we make a name for ourselves. That I go viral and become a social media celebrity, or that our Church or Synod name be known. But so that **it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.**

For in the end, that's all that matters.

So, you make a name for yourself. OK. That name will get etched into a tombstone and last a bit, but that's really just to mark the place where your body is rotting in the ground. Maybe if you're *really* successful, your name will make it in a history book - but that, for how long? Your wealth you will leave behind to others, maybe your children. But as Solomon once lamented, what if they're foolish and just waste it all (Ecclesiastes 2:18-19)? All that you worked so hard for? What gives you pleasure now you might regret a year or ten down the road. What you thought was so important now may prove to be as lasting as the morning dew. This world keeps changing, things and people come and go, and one day this world will end, too.

But **everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.**

Saved from just being a name on a tombstone. Saved from being forgotten. Saved

from meaningless pleasures and unimportant pursuits. Saved from foolishness and emptiness. And ultimately, saved from death and raised to life. And not just reincarnated into another temporary life in this world. But raised to that life that has no end.

That's the power of the Word - the Word of God. For it is a Spirit-filled Word. And to proclaim the saving words and work of God to all people of all languages and all nations is now what the Church will do as she goes into all the world. She will forgive sins in Swahili, Baptize in Farsi, preach in Creole, celebrate the Supper in French, confess the Creeds in Russian, sing hymns in Chinese, study the Scriptures in Spanish, and pray in Inuit! And through it all, the power of God is at work, so that ***everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.***

You have heard that Word, and that's why you're here. That powerful Word has worked in your heart and brought you to confess Jesus as Lord and to live a new life. And the Spirit is continuing that work in you, for it's not one and done, but a daily bread, a daily sustenance, the daily feast we need to live.

So it is here that we come. The disciples were to *stay in the city until they were clothed with power from on high*. We come here to be clothed with that power. To be renewed, refreshed, forgiven, and then take that forgiveness and life - that power! - we've been given through the Word out into the world, into our homes and schools and workplaces and neighborhoods. Not to make a name for ourselves, but bearing the Name that is above every name, and living a life that's not just for a while, but will not end.

That's the power Jesus poured out on His Apostles that day, and which the Apostles then poured out in Baptism upon the 3,000. To which we say not oh, but OH! And rejoice in the gifts and power and Word we continue to receive; the forgiveness, life, and salvation we need; in the water, words, and bread and wine we see, but which are so much more. And these we will keep and treasure. For life.

And so we pray, ***Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of the faithful, and kindle in them the fire of your love.*** Come, Holy Spirit, as You did on that Day of Pentecost. Come, Holy Spirit, to us! Come, Holy Spirit, with the power, forgiveness, life, and love we need.

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.