

Pentecost Sunday
Galatians 5:25
Sermon #690
May 24, 2015
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If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit.

Dear Friends in Christ,

Today is unique in the life of the Christian Church. While most of the great festivals and observations in the church center around an event in the life of God the Son (Jesus Christ), Pentecost does not. Pentecost is all about the work of the third person of the Trinity, God the Holy Spirit.

That's why today is sometimes referred to as the "Festival of the Holy Spirit," because, as we just heard from the lectern, it was on this day, fifty days after Easter, that God the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples in a fuller and richer measure than ever before. They were enabled to do great and wonderful things, and were filled with a boldness to speak and live the Gospel message.

And it wasn't just a one time thing. The fire that was kindled in their hearts on that first Pentecost Day stayed with them the rest of their lives. Pentecost was the launching pad that propelled those who experienced it into a life of active mission work. Historically, then, this episode stands as one of the major events for God's people on earth. Which is why along with the "Festival of the Holy Spirit," Pentecost has also been called "The Birthday of the New Testament Christian Church."

Yet, there is more to Pentecost than its significance as an important historical event. Like all of Scripture, in the end it always gets personal. So today is more than a time to remember the story of grown men with tongues of fire on their heads; it's the time for us to gratefully remember that the same Holy Spirit who stirred the hearts of the disciples has lit and continues to kindle the ongoing fire of faith in each of us as well. Likewise, the same Holy Spirit who equipped the disciples for a life of service to Christ has also equipped us with the desire and the tools to live our lives for the Lord.

These are the things we'd like to talk about today. On the basis of our single verse text, let us spend the next several minutes

FANNING THE FLAME OF PENTECOST IN OUR LIVES

1. By appreciating the work of the Holy Spirit
2. By resolving to follow the Spirit

In keeping with the imagery of faith as an internal fire that has been lit in us by the Holy Spirit, the question we must put to ourselves is this: How do we keep it going? How can we fan the flame of Pentecost in our lives? What is it that can serve as a bellows to stoke the furnace of our faith?

The answer is simple. Appreciation for the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives fans the flame of our faith. In our text Paul says: **“If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit.”**

Indeed, Christians **“live by the Spirit.”** This can be understood to mean that Christians live a certain way as directed by the Holy Spirit through the Word of God. That is certainly true. But there is an even more basic understanding. Christians live by the Spirit in the sense that Christians live because of the Holy Spirit. To fully appreciate this, we must understand where we were and where we would be without the Holy Spirit. Let’s review.

Within the last few decades personal genealogies have become quite popular. Maybe you’ve become interested in this and have done research into your family lineage. But whether we have or not, we know where the family tree begins. It all begins with Adam and Eve back in the Garden of Eden. And when they sinned, they passed on their sinfulness to every naturally conceived relative. That means us.

The Bible also tells us that people who are born in sin (that’s everybody) are born not with an “I don’t really care” or “whatever” attitude toward God, but with an open resentment toward Him. Paul tells us in Romans that **“the sinful mind is hostile to God.”**

Note the word “hostile.” By nature, people don’t really like the idea of answering to anyone, including God. So there’s a rebellion going on.

Besides being a Scriptural truth, we see evidence of this hostility all around us. On a social level things like murder and violence and every type of crime can be traced back not to lack of jobs or poor self-esteem or a poor social engineering, but to the fact that man is sinful. On a personal level things like chronic unhappiness and selfishness and despair may have contributing causes, but the base cause is the fact that man is sinful.

So there's actually a pretty simple rule at work. If God is not the Master of a person's life, then Sin is more than happy to step in and fill the void. And where sin rules, there will be trouble. Moreover, if a man is not in a right relationship with God, he will also not be in a right relationship with his fellow man – or even himself. Sin brings conflict.

But the fact that sin makes life troublesome on planet earth isn't even the worst part of it. The worst part of sin is not what it does, but what it is. As indicated a moment ago, sin is rebellion against God, and rebellion rightfully deserves punishment. You've seen the signs along the highways which say: Speed kills. Along the highway of life God's sign says: Sin damns.

However, that's not the end of the story. Illogically and surprisingly, but thankfully, the sordid story of man's sin has a happy ending. Because introduced into our mess is God's overriding love. And God's love culminates in the work of His Son, Jesus Christ. In the words of Romans 5: **“But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”** Jesus took the whole damning load of sin, put it on his back, nailed it to cross with Himself, and then buried it in the tomb.

And while He came out of that grave alive three days later proving that everything necessary for our salvation was complete, Sin did not. Jesus lives while Sin as our Master died. Which means we who make Jesus our Master through faith are fully forgiven and free to live with Him in heaven eternally.

As beautiful as it all is – and this is the point we've been leading up to – the work of Jesus Christ would be meaningless to us without the work of the

Holy Spirit upon us. God through the Apostle Paul tells us that **“no one can say Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit.”** Meaning: It is God the Holy Spirit who lit the fire of faith within us.

Life without the Spirit would be much like a person who cannot hear attending a symphony, or a person who cannot see browsing about an art museum. Without the Spirit we cannot hear or see the beauty of the Gospel. With Him, we can grasp and understand it in its glorious entirety...

Therefore, let us fan the flame of Pentecost in our lives by first and foremost simply appreciating the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. It is because of Him we are here today. It is because of Him that we can boldly and confidently into the future with the knowledge that our loving God will never leave us or forsake us. It is because of Him that we know where this journey we call life ends – in a new beginning that will last forever.

Then let us continue to fan the flame by resolving to follow the Spirit who dwells within us. **“If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit.”**

The Bible tells us when the Holy Spirit brings us to faith a transformation takes place. Instead of being at odds with God because of sin, we are now in a right relationship with Him. Instead of being spiritually dead, we are spiritually alive. Instead of living only for ourselves, Christ’s love compels us to live for Him who died for us and now lives for us. And instead of viewing God as a threat to our independence, we see Him as our wise, loving Heavenly Father and depend on Him for guidance.

This transformation brought about by the Holy Spirit is what Paul is referring when he says: **“Anyone who is in Christ is a NEW CREATION; the old has gone, the new has come.”**

As new creatures who find our identity in Jesus Christ, we are encouraged to **“keep in step with the Spirit.”** This means we allow the Spirit to direct or set the pace for our steps so we can make progress toward becoming the kind of complete Christian that both God and we wish to be. Granted, we

will never reach perfection on this side of heaven, but it is our goal nonetheless.

“Keeping in step” is a military term which reminds us of an army on the march. If we can press this illustration a little farther, you’ve heard it said that an army marches on its stomach. This means proper nourishment is needed for soldiers to be effective and successful. The same thing applies to Christians on their spiritual march through life. Nourishment is needed to be effective and successful soldiers of the cross. And that nourishment is the Word of God.

You have often heard from this pulpit the importance of spending personal time in the Word, because that is how we nourish ourselves spiritually. An army advertisement some years ago challenged young people to “be all they can be” by joining the army. As Christians, the only way we can “be all we can be” is through active, devoted, intentionalized contact with Word and Sacrament. That’s how we gain strength to withstand whatever obstacles we find strewn along the paths of our lives. The most important thing we can do to keep in step with Spirit, then, is to actively dedicate ourselves to receiving proper spiritual nourishment.

And you know what happens as we do that? The Christian life happens. Earlier in this chapter Paul enumerated the fruit of the Spirit in a Christian’s life as being “**love, joy, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.**” Those are virtues we wish to have as Christians. But they don’t happen by our effort. They happen as a result of being connected to Christ through an ever deepening relationship with Him; they happen through listening to the Spirit’s guidance through the Word.

So here is the bottom line. We do not have the power to come to faith. This the Holy Spirit has done for us. We live by – that is, because of – the Spirit. Reflecting on this cannot help but move us to a profound sense of appreciation.

But once the fire of faith has been planted within us, we have both the power and the responsibility and the privilege to consciously live for our

Lord. Knowing the blessings that result moves us to a desire to deepen our relationship with Christ.

So on this Festival of the Holy Spirit let us who have been brought to spiritual life by the Spirit fan the flame of Pentecost in our lives by resolving to **“keep in step with the Spirit.”**

We’re often warned against acting on our impulses, but acting on these impulses will bring us great blessings. God grant it. Amen.