

### ***This Jesus Whom You Crucified***

In the name of him whom God the Father has made both Lord and Christ, dear friends: This morning's reading from the Book of Acts picks up right where last week's left off, so a little review is in order. It's the day of Pentecost. The comparatively small group of Jesus' followers in Jerusalem are gathered together in one place for worship and prayer. They are obeying the Lord's last instructions. Ten days earlier he told them to wait in the city until they had been clothed with power from on high. Then they watched as he ascended into heaven removing from them his visible presence, but having assured them that though unseen, he would be with them always – to the end of the age.

If they weren't sure before what Jesus meant when he said they would be clothed with power or how they would know it when it happened, there was no question in their minds afterwards. First they heard the sound of a mighty rushing wind filling the house where they were seated. Then above them they saw what appeared to be a flame of fire, which split itself up and spread out over them so that individual tongues of fire came to rest upon the heads of each one. And then, moved by the Spirit, they began to speak; but the words that came out of their mouths were like nothing they'd ever heard before. Mind you, they knew *what* they were saying, they were speaking of God's work through Jesus his Son; but they were speaking in languages they'd never learned. They were astonished.

And they weren't the only ones. Jerusalem was packed with visitors for the Pentecost festival, pilgrims who lived in Jewish communities scattered throughout the Roman Empire. Naturally in each of these places, the Jews who lived there picked up as their primary language whatever was spoken by the indigenous people. Drawn by the sound of the strange wind, a large crowd gathers around the house where the Christians are meeting. This crowd consists of Jews of Jerusalem and many of the pilgrims from faraway places. Now out come the Christians – all of whom are from Galilee – and they're speaking in a cacophony of different languages. Ah, but the ears of each hearer are drawn to the one who is speaking the language he most easily understands. The crowd is baffled. How is it that this group of rustic Galileans has sudden command of at least fifteen languages? It forces them to ask that most Lutheran of questions: "What does this mean?"

Peter steps forward to address the entire crowd – presumably in Koine Greek, the one language everyone there understands. The other apostles fall silent. All eyes are on Peter. And what they see is a changed man. He's gone from one who cowered in fear of the Jews even to the point of denying that he knew the Lord Jesus to become a bold and confident preacher of the Gospel. Such is the power of the Spirit in him. He explains to his hearers that the strange goings on they are witnessing is the fulfillment of what God spoke through the prophet Joel: how in the last days the Lord would pour out his Spirit on all flesh, and how moved by the Spirit, God's sons and daughters would prophesy.

That much we heard last week. Today's reading is the rest of Peter's message to the crowd. And if you're one of the people standing there, what Peter has said thus far is going to raise a question in your mind. You're going to be thinking, "Okay, I can see that this amazing display of linguistic ability is the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy. But what's changed that makes this possible? What event or turning point has made *these* the last days?"

That's what Peter explains now. And his answer is Jesus. He begins by reminding them of what they already know: that Jesus proved he was great man of God by performing many mighty miracles, signs, and wonders. And no one could deny that. Remember that the public ministry of Jesus had ended less than two months before. Everyone there would have had either first or second hand knowledge of the sorts of powerful things Jesus did. Even if they hadn't witnessed a miracle themselves, they would have known someone who did. And besides, there were many folks around still talking about how Jesus had healed them.

Peter then speaks of Jesus' death – another event everyone there would have known about. No doubt there were people in this crowd who had actually seen Jesus nailed to the cross. It was a public execution. And everyone knew that no one survived a Roman crucifixion. But Peter slips in a fact they don't know: that the death of Jesus by the hands of lawless men was according to the plan and foreknowledge of God. God meant this to happen. It was his will that his Holy One should suffer and die so.

And then Peter moves on to his main point: that God raised Jesus from the dead. And this is what is so fascinating about Peter's sermon: he doesn't start with his and the other apostles' eyewitness testimony that they'd actually seen Jesus alive and well after his death. No, instead he proves the resurrection of Jesus from the Holy Scriptures. Men can lie, but God cannot.

He quotes from the 16<sup>th</sup> Psalm where David wrote, "I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand that I may not be shaken; therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced; my flesh also will dwell in hope. For you will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One see corruption. You have made known to me the paths of life; you will make me full of gladness with your presence."

The interesting thing about this passage is that it's spoken from the perspective of a dead man. He's saying that his soul and body are separated: his soul is in Hades and his body is in grave. But he's certain that they're not going to stay that way. In fact he's confident that his soul will be returned to his body before the latter has time to decay.

Peter then shows it's not possible that David was speaking about himself. After all, he died at least a thousand years before. And his grave is still here. You all know where it is. Safe to say his body has long since turned to dust. No, David was speaking prophetically of the descendant whom the Lord had promised him: a son of David who would sit on his throne forever and whose kingdom would have no end, that is, the Christ. He is the One who would die and rise again in a short space of time. It's the Christ whose body would not see corruption.

This is where Peter brings in the eyewitness testimony. "This Jesus God raised up, and of that we are all witnesses." Having proven from Scripture that the Christ must rise, he points to himself and to the others with him – who number about 120 persons – and says, "And we've seen the fulfillment of this in Jesus who was raised from the dead."

But he doesn't stop there. He moves right on to the exaltation of the Christ: the fact that he has ascended to God's right hand and from there has sent the Holy Spirit. The crowd can't see the risen Lord Jesus. But they can see the result of his work in the outpouring of the Spirit. They are looking at it – or rather they were hearing it in the multitude of languages the apostles had been speaking. Thus Peter confirms the truth of what he has said by the crowd's own witness.

And then he slams the door shut on his argument by bringing in yet another passage of Scripture – one that affirms the Christ’s exaltation. The passage is from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Psalm, also written by David, where he writes, “The Lord said to my Lord, ‘Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.’” In the course of his arguments with the Jewish religious authorities, Jesus had used this passage to prove the divinity of the Christ – that he is both God and man. He asked them, “Tell me about the Christ. Whose son is he?” They replied, “Everyone knows the Christ will be David’s son” – that is, a direct descendant of David. Then Jesus asked them, “Well, how is it then that David calls him ‘Lord’ – ‘the Lord said to my Lord’?” Jesus’ question stumped them. In that culture that paid such respect to elders, a king could never refer to one of his descendants as “Lord” – unless, of course, that descendant just also happened to be God, which was Jesus’ point.

It’s the same point Peter is now making. Jesus, risen from the dead – according to the Scripture, ascended to the right hand of God – according to the Scripture, and having poured out the Spirit – according to the Scripture, fits the bill. He has done everything the Scripture says the Christ was supposed to do – which means that he is the Christ. More than that, the Christ has to be God. And this brings Peter to the climax of his message: “Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ this Jesus ...”

And if you’re standing there in the crowd following Peter’s careful argument, you’re nodding your head in agreement. “Yes, this makes sense. I see all the connections. Well done, Peter. You’ve convinced me.” And then Peter drops the boom, “this Jesus *whom you crucified.*”

Having convinced them, Peter now convicts them. All of them. He holds them all responsible for the death of Jesus. Now, it could be that there were some in this crowd that had a direct part in it: maybe some of the religious leaders who conspired against him, or some of those who bore false witness against him at his trial, or some of the soldiers who arrested him, or some of those who called for his death at the trial before Pilate. But surely there were many others who weren’t even in the country when it happened. It makes no difference. Every sinner who ever lived is equally guilty of the death of Jesus because Jesus died for their sins. Thus it is that Peter points his convicting figure also at you and me when he says, “this Jesus whom you crucified.”

The crowd who heard Peter on Pentecost accepted that verdict. They recognized their guilt. Trembling in fear of God’s righteous judgment, they asked, “What shall we do?” Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins, and you too will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” If what they’d seen and heard up to this point astonished them, then Peter’s final words must have completely blown their minds. “Wait, what? Here I am standing before the Lord with the divine Christ’s blood all over my hands, and the solution is to be sorry for it and receive God’s free forgiveness? And not just his forgiveness, but also the gift of his Holy Spirit? That’s it?”

Yes, that’s it. That’s why the Father in love sent his Son into the world. That’s why the Son took on human flesh and carried out the Father’s plan for salvation. And that’s why Jesus, the ascended Lord and Christ has poured out the Holy Spirit: to convict sinners of their guilt before God and to work in them the faith that receives the forgiveness of God for Christ’s sake. And of this we are witnesses. We didn’t get to see the risen Lord Jesus, but we believe in his resurrection. We didn’t get to see the Spirit poured out on Pentecost – what with the flames of fire and the speaking in tongues; but we believe it happened just as the Scriptures declare. Why? Because the same Spirit is at work in us creating faith in our hearts through the power of

the Word, convicting us of our sins and pointing us to the accomplished work of Christ to save sinners.

We believe Peter's words, "that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified." And we have been baptized in his name for the forgiveness of our sins. That's the proof that we too have received the gift of the Holy Spirit, and that even now the exalted Lord Jesus is pouring him out upon us. May he continue to do so as we attend God's Word. And in response may we give all thanks, honor, and praise to our God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, now and forever. In Jesus' name. Amen.

***Soli Deo Gloria!***