

“From Eve to Eve”
John 15:26-27; 16:4b-15

May 20, 2018

The Day of Pentecost

“Evening” is not a very exciting word. It’s just a reference to the time when the sun is gone and it’s dark. However, if you shorten that word to “Eve”, then it carries with it a feeling of excitement. Something special is going to happen. “All Hallow’s Eve” would’ve been exciting to people at Luther’s time because it was the day before All Saints’ Day. Today, in its shortened form, “Halloween”, it’s a time to be excited over the consumption of candy. New Year’s Eve is another example of the use of this term. Many see this is an exciting time when a new year is going to come on the next day.

However, “Eve” can also refer to the arrival of someone the following day. The “Eve” that most people think of when they hear this word is Christmas Eve. Someone is coming and that someone is coming to do something very special and important. For many people in this world, that special person is Santa Claus. He comes to do something. He comes to give something – presents - to all the good little boys and good little girls.

In the Church, Christmas Eve is very important for different reasons. Someone is coming and that someone is coming to do something very special. This “Eve” celebrates the coming of the Son of God, Jesus Christ, into human flesh by being born of the Virgin Mary. He is coming to do something very special. He is coming to rescue us from our sin and all of its consequences. He does that by first taking our place under God’s Law and doing what we were supposed to, but didn’t: doing all which the law of God required and doing none of which the law of God forbade. He then would pay the price for the sin we had committed by offering His body as sacrifice for the sin of all people. He also is coming to give life eternal which transcends the grave and lasts forever. He would do this by tasting death Himself on the cross and yet overcoming death by rising to life on the third day.

However, the occurrence of this “Eve” would mean nothing in our lives or help us at all if it were not for another Eve which you probably don’t even know about. It’s relatively unknown because it’s hardly, if ever, celebrated. I’m talking about Pentecost Eve. Did you know that there was even a Pentecost Eve? I didn’t – except that it is listed in my Pastoral Desk Diary. This “Eve” is a special day because someone special is coming to do something special. Without this obscure Eve and what took place the next day, the first Eve which we know so well – Christmas Eve and what took place the next day would mean absolutely nothing.

The One who’s arrival Pentecost Eve anticipates and Pentecost Day celebrates is the arrival of the Holy Spirit. His work and role in salvation is crucial. Our Lord Jesus Christ, throughout His ministry on earth, foretold the coming of the Holy Spirit and the “power from on high” which He promised to send. On the night before Jesus died, Jesus took the time to again remind His disciples of the coming of the Holy Spirit. Fifty days later, that promise was fulfilled. The Holy Spirit arrived and began doing the crucial work which was necessary: applying the work of Jesus Christ to the hearts and minds of people everywhere.

There has always been a great need for the benefits of the work of Jesus Christ, namely, the forgiveness of sin and a new life which lasts eternally. However, the world is so mired in sin and rebellion against its Creator, that it is unable to know how God plans to rescue it. In previous times, people knew this and tried their hardest to escape from sin and its consequences by being religious or by doing good works. The flaw in this way of thinking is that such an effort is possible. A holy God requires holy living from his creatures. Once you have strayed and committed sin, it is impossible to get back to holiness.

Today, while many people are mired in sin because they've tried hard to get out and failed, there are two more prevalent reasons why people are still stuck in sin. First, some people are simply ignorant about the will of God and are in sin without knowing it. Since our culture no longer supports the will of God as it often did in the past, the morality which people may think is Christian is not. People growing up today are perfectly fine with such things as living together before marriage, no-fault divorce, abortion, euthanasia, and so on, not because they think they are good, but because that's the only morality they've been taught by the culture.

Others however are deliberately and directly rebelling against the law and will of God. We see that in the debate on many of the sexual issues of our day: homosexuality, same-sex marriage, and so on. People know that such teachings and practices are contrary to Christian teaching, but they don't care. In fact, many are intentionally fighting against the will of God by making evil good and by making good evil.

Even if people come to care about violating the will of God, many have no idea how God can rescue them. In the time of the apostles, it would have been considered embarrassing and outrageous to think that trusting a criminal executed on a cross could somehow establish your relationship with God and give you eternal life. The Jews missed it because it wasn't powerful enough. The Greeks missed it because it made no sense.

Today, one would think such knowledge would be improved, but it hasn't been. People are still unaware of God's plan of salvation. The story is told by a pastor of a young lady who was shopping for a cross in a jewelry store. The clerk, a Christian, was quite pleased that a young lady would be buying such a piece of jewelry. However, her good feeling about this quickly changed when the clerk wanted to determine if the girl wanted a cross or a crucifix. When shown the difference the young woman replied, "Oh, I want one with the little guy on it."

The world is a very dark place because of sin, intentionally or unintentionally. Sin and evil are often very strong. Jesus' apostles were ill-equipped to handle it and probably were quite afraid. Jesus would no longer be visibly with them after His death and resurrection. That could be terribly disheartening and difficult.

In addition to that, the apostles would likely feel ill-equipped for this great job of going to all the world, preaching repentance and forgiveness of sins to every living creature. They couldn't possibly remember all that Jesus had told them and, from our text for this morning, Jesus indicates that he had much more which he wanted them to know, but they weren't ready for it yet.

It is no wonder that Jesus promised to send them power from above. Although we often think that we are weak, but the apostles were strong in their faith and understanding of the will of God, they were no different than we are and we are no different than they were. They and we need a power which is able to overcome evil, sin, the world, and the originator of evil himself, Satan. As we heard last week in our celebration of the Ascension of our Lord, the situation was so dire that the apostles were told not to even do anything until they had received this power from above. In our Gospel reading for today, Jesus tells us how the Holy Spirit would come to the apostles and what that means for us today.

First, the disciples were probably quaking in their boots (or sandals, since they didn't wear boots) when they heard that Jesus was going away. Who among us would feel confident if our teacher, mentor, trainer, etc. for a very important project suddenly decide to leave? However, Jesus says that it was to their advantage for him to leave. For, if He did not leave, the Holy Spirit could not come. So, the situation was right for the disciples.

Secondly, the disciples probably wondered how they could possibly complete the mission Jesus set out for them – evangelizing the entire world. Could they give a clear presentation of Jesus teaching and ministry? Would they forget crucial items? Would they leave out that which Jesus had not told them? Not at all. That was the work of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus gives a special title to the Holy Spirit. In most of our translations, this title is “the Helper”. The Greek word here is “Paraclete” which means “the One called to stand by you.”

The Holy Spirit would “stand by” the disciples in their mission for Jesus. Unlike many groups of Christians which emphasize the Holy Spirit by emphasizing all of the speaking in tongues and other special gifts which point to the Holy Spirit, Jesus said the Holy Spirit would testify about Him. The Spirit would bring to mind all that Jesus had said and done for our salvation. The Spirit would guide them into all truth so that they would not err or leave anything out. By that, the disciples were able to take the Gospel of Jesus Christ to all of the world.

Many people will take a look at the account of the first Pentecost or Jesus' words in our text leading up to the first Pentecost and wonder what the role of the Holy Spirit is in their lives. Many will think that they must have a Pentecost experience like the apostles – speak in tongues in different languages, convert thousands at a time, miracles, and so on. They will try to fit the words of our text into their own personal experience.

However, the words spoken by Jesus on the night before He died were spoken only to the apostles. They are not for us. However, this does not mean the Holy Spirit is not active in our lives nor that He is not present. The Holy Spirit is active and is present in us and in our lives by the work of these apostles.

The word used here for the Holy Spirit, “the Paraclete”, is also used in the Greek language to refer to an attorney, one who stands by you in a court of law. Jesus says that the Spirit's first job will be as a prosecuting attorney who will bring about the world's conviction. The Holy Spirit will convict people of sin for not believing in Jesus.

The Spirit will convict people of their inability to save themselves and “that their righteousness before God depends not on their own efforts, but on Christ’s atoning work for them.” (Morris) The Spirit will convict and judge them when the ruler of this world – Satan – is judged as well.

However, the Holy Spirit will serve as a defense attorney for His people. He will bring the forgiveness of sin, a new life of righteousness now, and a judgment of not guilty by connecting them to Jesus Christ – His perfect life, His forgiveness-earning death on the cross and His life-giving resurrection from the dead.

How Has the Holy Spirit done that for us and millions of people since that first Pentecost Day? At the end of Peter’s sermon on that Day of Pentecost, thousands of people in Jerusalem were wondering the same thing. How would they receive what the apostles already have? Peter answers them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 2:38) This is the Holy Spirit coming to us with the washing away of our sin and the creation of faith in Christ. Our Baptism Day is really our Pentecost Day.

The Holy Spirit uses the same tool to convict the world as He is done to convert us: the Word of God. In the days of the apostles, the Holy Spirit use their verbal proclamation of God’s Law to convict of sin those who refuse to believe in Jesus, those who try to gain access to God by their own righteousness, and those who align themselves with the ruler of this world – Satan. He used their verbal proclamation of God’s Gospel to create faith in Jesus Christ, give the gift of forgiveness, create new life, and bring everlasting life.

The Holy Spirit does the exact same thing today. Only today, instead of using the verbal proclamation of Law and Gospel by the apostles, the Holy Spirit uses the written proclamation of Law and Gospel. This is just as much the work and activity of the Holy Spirit today as was the verbal activity and work of the Holy Spirit was back then. Peter said as much later on in his life. In fact, he indicates that the written proclamation of the Word of God is even more sure. Peter writes in his second epistle, “And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone’s own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.” (2 Peter 1:19-21)

Therefore, if you’re looking for evidence of the Holy Spirit’s work in your life and you want to experience His power, don’t rely on enthusiastic experiences like speaking in tongues, dynamic miracles of healings, or any of the other things experienced by the apostles on the first Pentecost Day. Look to that which the Holy Spirit accomplished through the apostles: the proclamation and writing down of the Word of God. Through that Word of God, you have faith and all that faith gives – forgiveness, life, salvation. So, hear the Word of God. Read the Word of God. Meditate on the Word of God. Do this often. Do this with others. Do it by yourself. And the work of the One whose arrival was anticipated on the Eve of Christmas will be made complete in you by the work of the One whose arrival was anticipated on the Eve of Pentecost. Amen.