

## Pentecost 2 / June 14, 2020

### Matthew 9:35

**“And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom.”**

The time after Pentecost is known as the semester of the church. I bet you didn't know the church operated on the semester system. The first half of the church year focuses on Jesus. His coming in to the world clothed in our humanity, conceived by the Holy Spirit through the Blessed Virgin Mary. It continues with His unveiling as Son of God, His path of suffering, leading to the cross and His death for the atonement of human sin. The first semester of the church year concludes with Jesus' glorious resurrection. Jesus' resurrection is the culmination of the Christian faith and the highpoint of church year. Jesus' resurrection proves that His teachings are truth. Jesus' resurrection demonstrates The Father accepted His sacrifice for human sin. Jesus' resurrection validates the promise given to believers in our baptism that even as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so too will all who have fallen asleep in Him.

The semester of the Church focuses on the work of the Holy Spirit, who through the voice of the church, proclaims the good news of Jesus' victory over sin through His cross and death through His resurrection. In the early weeks of Pentecost, the scriptures show how the good news spread throughout the Roman world. We see the powerful effect the gospel had on the ancient world, as multitudes of Jews and Gentiles, became believers in Jesus, received forgiveness of their sins and the promise of eternal life through baptism into His death and resurrection.

The semester of the church concludes with the last Sunday of the Church year, as we anticipate the return of Christ, the consummation of salvation: in the creation of a new heavens and a new earth, and the resurrection to everlasting life of all who have believed in Jesus and been baptized in the divine Name: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In the time between Pentecost and the return of Jesus, it is the privilege and responsibility of the church, to proclaim the gospel of salvation and to call people to enter into the kingdom of heaven; through repentance, baptism and faith in Jesus' name!

Jesus proclaimed the kingdom of heaven and called people to enter through faith in Him. Jesus began His ministry upon the completion of a forty day fast in the wilderness. During that time Jesus overcame the devil and endured temptation, by relying on the power of God's word. Upon leaving the wilderness He began to preach the word of God, calling people to “Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” Jesus taught the righteous rules of the kingdom of heaven in the Sermon on the Mount; saying that they begin with God's love for us and are expressed in our love for others. He said the Kingdom of heaven is founded on His words and that whoever takes His words to heart, has built on a sure foundation.

He showed His power over creation as the Son of God, by calming a storm on the Sea of Galilee. He showed His spiritual authority over sin, the devil and death: by healing the sick, restoring the dead to life and by casting out evil spirits. He showed His power to establish God's kingdom in the human heart, by gathering a group of disciples to Himself. The kingdom of heaven was at hand, was manifested in His person and is realized through faith in Him.

The kingdom of heaven is not a place, such as the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, or the Kingdom of Belgium. The kingdom of heaven is God's righteous reign, which begins in the human heart through faith in Jesus. It's not a kingdom of power, material wealth and politics. It is a right relationship with God, based on the forgiveness of sin. It is initiated and established by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. We come into God's kingdom through repentance, as we acknowledge our sin and confess our sinfulness. God begins His righteous reign in our hearts, by blessing us with faith in Jesus and washing away our sins through baptism into His death and resurrection.

God establishes His kingdom in our hearts, makes it strong and gives it growth, by nourishing us with the word and feeding us with the sacraments. The Holy Spirit strengthens our faith, by helping us exercise it, in living according Jesus's words and by witnessing His name and His love with others. God will bring us fully into His heavenly kingdom at the return of Jesus, when we will receive our share of His resurrection to a new and everlasting life.

Jesus is the embodiment of the kingdom of heaven. In Him all the riches of God's mercy appeared in bodily form. He announced the kingdom of heaven, by proclaiming Himself as the one who brings us into God's kingdom through the forgiveness of sins, received by faith in His name. God establishes His kingdom in the human soul through the word of the gospel, as the Holy Spirit breaks down the barrier of disbelief and creates faith in Jesus in our hearts. Even as Jesus cast out evil spirits with a word, so through the word Jesus casts the evil spirit from our hearts, so the Spirit can make it His home.

Jesus showed His power over the devil, by reversing the effects of sin; healing the sick and raising the dead. Jesus shows His power and extends God's righteous rule in our hearts, by empowering us to resist sin and by impelling us to overcome temptation. The kingdom of heaven is the gracious reign of God in the human heart, in which the Holy Spirit enables us to seek first the things of God; and to extend His righteous rule, by telling others the good news of Jesus and calling them to faith in His Name!

The work of the church on earth is to proclaim the kingdom of heaven; by sharing the gospel of God's forgiveness in Jesus; and by calling others to faith in His Name and to receive baptism into His death and resurrection. Jesus trained the apostles for this work, by teaching and sending them to the towns and villages of Israel to proclaim that the

Kingdom of heaven was at hand; and to call people to repent and believe the gospel. Even as The Holy Spirit gave great signs on the day of Pentecost to underscore the truth of the gospel, Jesus gave signs to accompany the apostles and show the truth of their words. He said, "Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons!" Those were awesome powers and great signs, but they were signs and not the full reality. They were the physical manifestations of a greater spiritual reality. They showed that He is the Son of God. They showed He has come to put an end to the reign of the devil, human bondage to sin and the condemnation of death. They showed that He had come to establish God's heavenly kingdom on earth, beginning in the human heart!

The kingdom of heaven, which begins in the human heart through faith in Jesus and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, grows within us, as our knowledge of God increases through our study of scripture. The kingdom of heaven is fortified within us, as our faith deepens through our daily walk with Jesus. The kingdom of heaven spreads throughout the world, as through our witness, others come to faith and walk with Jesus. The kingdom of heaven will come in its fullness when Jesus returns; destroys sin, the devil and death; and God wipes the tears from every eye. The kingdom of heaven is offered for all to receive. The kingdom of heaven comes to all who believe!

Jesus trained the twelve apostles to proclaim the kingdom of heaven, so they in turn would teach and train others to share in the ministry of faith and repentance from dead works. They were the ministers of the church, but the ministry of the church is the privilege and responsibility of the whole body of believers. They were to teach and train the church for the work of proclaiming the kingdom of heaven, by sharing the good news of forgiveness and life through faith in His name. God both wants us to have faith in Jesus and to share our faith in Jesus with others.

It would be nice if He gave us the power to heal the sick, raise the dead and cast out evil spirits, to accompany our words. But the problem is that it is our nature as humans, to put more emphasis and importance of the outward signs of the Spirit than on the inner work of the Spirit; which is to raise the spiritually dead to life in Christ, cast the evil from our lives and ultimately bring us to share in Christ's resurrection to everlasting life. No matter what special gifts Jesus gives or doesn't give, He gives His Holy Spirit to inspire, encourage, impel and empower us to share the good news of the kingdom of heaven! We speak the word. The Spirit does the work

The Spirit did His work in the lives of the apostles and other believers. On the day of Pentecost, the church did the work Jesus gave it. The church proclaimed the wonders of God. The great crowd listened in silent amazement. Peter called them to repentance. When they confessed their sin and helplessness, he proclaimed the gospel of forgiveness, saying, "Repent and be baptized every-one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins." The Holy Spirit did His work and opened their hearts to faith and three thousand were baptized that day. When Jesus was training the disciples, He told them to restrict their activities to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. But when their training was complete, the Holy Spirit empowered them and the whole church to tell the world, the good news of God's love in giving Jesus to lift the burden of sin, the condemnation of death and the oppression of the devil from the hearts of those who believe. The Spirit continues to do His work in the life of the world through witness of the church on earth, calling all people to repentance and life through faith in Jesus' Name. Come! Receive! Believe!

The work of the church began on Pentecost Sunday. As the church was gathered in prayer, God poured the Holy Spirit out upon the believers. They proclaimed the wonders of God, the name of Jesus and the promise of salvation that "everyone who calls on the Name of the Lord shall be saved." The work of the church began with Pentecost and so the semester of the church also begins with Pentecost. This half of the church year focuses our attention on our share of the work of proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and calling people to turn to God in repentance through faith in Jesus.

The work of the church, which began in earnest on Pentecost long ago, continues in our lives and the lives of all believers. In our words and by our actions, the Holy Spirit empowers and impels us to proclaim the good news of God's righteous reign in the human heart, through faith in Jesus. Through the voice of the Church, the Spirit calls others to repent and receive forgiveness and eternal life through faith in Jesus' Name! As on the day of Pentecost, so today: The church speaks the word. The Spirit does the work!

In our gospel, Jesus prayed the Lord of the harvest to send workers into the harvest field. The believers in Jerusalem were an answer to His prayer. They saw an immediate harvest, as the Holy Spirit brought three thousand to faith that day and many more in the days that followed. God continues to answer Jesus' prayer through us and all believers. We may not be blessed to see the fruits of the proclamation of the gospel of the kingdom as readily as the believers in Jerusalem, but we can be sure the Holy Spirit is doing His work and will bring many more to faith, and all of us to the fullness of salvation; when faith passes into sight and we take our place in the kingdom of heaven in the resurrection of Jesus. God bless us with His grace and keep us to that Day for the sake of Jesus, our Saviour and Lord. Amen