

John 3:16
Pentecost Monday
Kaiserslautern Ev. Luth. Church
May 29, 2023

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

Dearly-bought hearers by the blood of Jesus Christ,

Our sermon text is from the Gospel Lesson appointed for Pentecost Monday, John 3:16: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”

Today is Pentecost Monday and you might be asking yourself: “Why do we have church today? Wasn’t Pentecost yesterday?” Pentecost is one of the major festivals of the Church year, like Christmas and Easter. And traditionally, those major festivals are accompanied by a multi-day celebration. It used to be common to celebrate not only Pentecost Monday, but also Pentecost Tuesday.

The Gospel Text for Pentecost Monday, John 3:16, is often referred to as “the Gospel in a nutshell.” Most of you have known it since childhood. Maybe this was even the first verse you memorized. In a sermon for Pentecost Monday, Martin Luther said: “This Gospel is one of the most glorious sermons one can find in the entire New Testament, so that it would be proper, if it were possible, that one write it with golden letters in the heart; and every Christian ought to at least memorize such a text and repeat it in his heart at least once a day.”

But perhaps you noticed that our Gospel text, as well known as it is, does not mention Pentecost, or speaking in tongues, or the Holy Spirit. Nevertheless, He is there. At Pentecost we reflect on the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the birth of the Christian Church, and the

proclamation of the Gospel in all languages and among all peoples of the earth. And John 3:16, dear Christians, is the Gospel. And the Holy Spirit and the Gospel always go together.

In fact, if you look at the context of John 3:16, you will see very clearly how our text relates to the Holy Spirit and Pentecost. At the beginning of John 3, a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews, came to Jesus by night and Jesus told him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.” Nicodemus asked: “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?” Jesus answered, “Truly truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

Like the wind, the Spirit blows where it wishes over all the earth. For God so loved the *world*, that He gave his only Son, that *whoever* believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. Those are big categories! God did not love the Jews only, or a few disciples, or even all the good and upright people of this earth. No! God loved *the world*, the entire sinful world, so that *whoever* believes in him will live eternally, “for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you all are one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:26-28). “*Whoever* believes and is baptized will be saved” (Mark 16:16). *Whoever* believes and is baptized is a Son of God. The Gospel is for all people!

All this first became clear at Pentecost, fifty days after Jesus rose from the dead: “suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire

house where they [the disciples] were sitting. And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. And they were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance” (Acts 2:2-4). The disciples were not babbling nonsense, as many of the so-called Pentecostals imagine. No, our God is a God of order, not disorder (1 Corinthians 14:33). At Pentecost, the disciples miraculously spoke the languages of people from the Mediterranean world, from what is today the Middle East, northern Africa, and Turkey. The devout Jews in Jerusalem from every nation under heaven heard the mighty works of God in their own, recognizable languages—languages you could learn! The Holy Spirit works through human language.

So what did those devout Jews from every nation do next? They took the Gospel in their own language back with them to every nation under heaven. With the power of human speech, with the breath of man’s mouth, the Holy Spirit, like wind, blew where He wanted to. And the story of Pentecost tells us where He comes from and where He is going. The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. He spoke by the prophets and the apostles and continues speaking in his Holy Word, the Bible, in the languages of people all over the world.

Seeing as we’re all living in Germany, I can’t help but talk a little bit about the history of the German language. One of the regions mentioned in the Pentecost narrative in Acts 2 is Cappadocia. There were residents of Cappadocia present at that first Pentecost who heard the mighty works of God in their own language. Cappadocia is located in modern-day Turkey. A few hundred years later, in the fourth century, a Cappadocian of Greek origin named Wulfila was kidnapped by the Goths. He learned the Gothic language and later became a priest and bishop to the Gothic people. Wulfila created an alphabet for the Goths and oversaw the translation of the Bible from Greek into the Gothic language, which is the earliest Germanic language we have a

record of. In many passages of the Gothic Bible, such as the Lord's Prayer, you can see many similarities to both modern German and English. Just think, the Gothic Bible was written 1,300 years before Martin Luther translated the Bible anew into the language of the German people!

The Gospel of Jesus Christ is for all tribes, and nations, and languages, and peoples (Revelation 7:9). The history of the Church, our history, is the continuation of what Jesus commanded his disciples in the last chapter of Matthew: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." And for that, the Holy Spirit is required. Our history is the continuation of Pentecost.

"The wind blows where it wishes . . . So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." There is no way of telling where God will move next and how He will use His Christians to extend the kingdom. Because God loves the entire world, He sees to it that his Word is proclaimed throughout the world for all time until He returns again. And although the Spirit causes the Gospel to go out among many tribes, and nations, and peoples, and languages, it is always the same Gospel, the Gospel you have known since childhood: "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Him." Jesus did not come to condemn; He came to be condemned in your place by dying on the cross. He came to rise again that you, too, might have new life and rise from the dead on the Last Day.

However, there is also another side to the story. Whoever believes in the name of the only Son of God, Jesus Christ, is not condemned, *but* whoever does not believe is condemned already. The judgment is already taking place: Jesus Christ is the light of the world, the light no darkness

can overcome. And yet some love the darkness and stay away from the light because they want to hide their evil works. They deceive themselves by saying they have no sin. They hide their sin. But the Holy Spirit teaches us to know who we really are. “If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:8-9).

“Whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God.” The Holy Spirit leads us into all truth. He has called us by the Gospel, enlightened us with His gifts, sanctified, and kept us in the true faith, even as He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith. In this Christian Church He daily and richly forgives the sins of all believers. He teaches you to know God rightly, that is, as your Father, because you were made God’s children in Holy Baptism. The Holy Spirit leads you to Jesus Christ, the light of the World. He makes the bitter cross sweet and turns darkness into light. He opens the door to your heart by the preaching of the Gospel. He teaches you the fear of the Lord and stands with you at the final hour of death, easing your final suffering in this life. On the last day, He will raise you and all the dead, and give eternal life to you and all believers in Christ. Whoever receives the Holy Spirit in this life will be carried to eternal joy with the Father in the next life for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord. And so the Church goes into all the world baptizing and teaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ to all nations and in all languages, bringing those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death into the light of God’s holy presence, through the Holy Spirit, who is the Lord and giver of life. In the name of Jesus, Amen.