

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Here we are gathered today, the last day of the Eastertide, or the fiftieth day after the Passover on the day the Greeks called Pentecost. This is the Greek name given to the day known to the Jewish people as the Feast of Weeks or Shavuot. But long ago on this day something happened to mark this day as a pivotal moment in Christian theology. We hear that all were gathered together in one place and suddenly the Holy Spirit descended upon the apostles and other followers of Jesus. The Holy Spirit didn't just descend like a dove; it breaks upon the gathering as a violent wind. This gift of the Holy Spirit that was poured out upon this gathering fulfills Jesus' promise and empowers us, the church. It does not empower the church as a ruler or a domineering power over others...this of course is loveless power that oppresses and beats down. The Spirit's indwelling presence empowers believers like each of us to share God's love, God's grace, God's mercy, and God's forgiveness NOT in word or speech but in deed and in truth...this is what we have been empowered with and sent into the world with. The Holy Spirit's indwelling also empowers us to experience God's grace and mercy in our lives as well.

But Luke's image of Pentecost before us from the Acts of the Apostles shows us a very important lesson. This passage in our first lesson demonstrates God's desire to embrace diversity and unite people from all nations in Christ. It *shows* us that all these different cultures and all these different races of people were being understood as they were and not who the others thought they should be, nor was any one group denied, run out, or cast away from the Holy Spirit because of who they were. So today, we hear of a Holy Spirit that unites us with others, and we celebrate a Holy Spirit that is upon us as we listen to the many different ways the Spirit is with us throughout all our appointed readings today. But more importantly, the Holy Spirit shows us something that we may not even notice or are able to see.

Regardless of our blind misconception, we are shown anyway...and what we are shown is the Good News. And that Good News is where it has always been, right before us and within us. But unfortunately, we sit here today in this gathering that consists of a non-threatening uniformity and a sameness as we listen and celebrate the diversity that we hear about in our first lesson. Ironically then, we look at our world, our nation, our towns, and communities and see them as dark places where the decline of moral and ethical values are the fault of those out there who are not like us. In turn our world and our lives become wracked with fear, with prejudice and ignorance stemming from violent hate speech, political propaganda, and social shaming within the social media platforms, advertising, broadcasting, and even the entertainment industry...all with potential effects on individuals, on society, and even on our faith itself. Some even argue that this type of media violence desensitizes some and increases aggressive thoughts, and can normalize aggression and potentially influence behavior. Because of this, our world and our lives have become so egocentric because our culture or our society have become dark and fearful places that cause us to isolate ourselves and our faith in order to protect them both from the world. In turn our faith itself along with God are seen and understood as egocentric and individualistic, despite all we know about Jesus Christ.

We don't have the opportunity like Philip in our Gospel lesson today to physically challenge Jesus with our selfish pleas, so we draw on our conclusions about God from our own assumptions, from our own fears, our own prejudices, and from what we pick and choose from scripture...all of these

things influence and shape “our god,” along with who we assume God to be. Nonetheless, in our self-assumed confidence about God, we like Philip still want to be shown the Father. But we don’t want to be see something we don’t like...nor do we want to be shown something that does not agree with our notions of God. Rather, we want to be shown “A” Father that agrees with our perception in order to crush those out there and to step on others to elevate ourselves up from the assumed muck and mire that exists out there. We want to be shown the Father so we can show others that “I” know God and you don’t...the world is going to hell, so live like me, think like me, look like me, and you too will know God...just like I do.

But as Jesus points out to Philip, he also points out to us that even when God is shown, we don’t see...nor do we understand because we already have a preconceived notion about God. Look at the two disciple on the road to Emmaus walking *with* the very presence of God and they have no clue. How many times have we entertained the presence of God and not been aware?

What then are we seeking? Are we seeking affirmation for our preconceived notions about God? Jesus addresses this in this exchange with Philip and Luther addressed it as well in his commentary on this passage from Jesus’ Farewell Discourse. Luther says this:

This is a very beautiful discourse or conversation and sermon of the Lord Christ. He had said much to the disciples about His Father: that He would go to Him and would also take them to Him in order that they, too, might see Him, yes, that they already knew Him and had seen Him. Then the apostle Philip, being somewhat sharper and more sagacious than the others, blurts out the profound question which has always troubled the greatest and wisest men, which they pondered and explored painstakingly but no one had been able to answer, which, in fact, is impossible for human nature and reason to answer, namely: “What is God? How can one know God? How can one find God?”¹

So, what is God? How can we know God right now? How do we find God? Think about this question...what is God? We all can answer it I’m certain...but can we really answer it.

This is not like asking what is a Subaru or a Volvo? It’s more like asking what is air? Yeah, we all know what it is, but show it to me...get me a pound of it...and bring it here and place it on this table before us all. We all know the effects of it, but do we really know what it is and can we really see it to explain it? For me, it’s like explaining the color red to someone who has been blind from birth.

With these questions Luther seems to be taking the response of Jesus to Philip to say, would you even know it if you were face to face with God? NO! Because you have been in the presence of the very manifestation of God and you still ask to be shown the Father. And I believe this to be the case for us all as well...myself included.

Again, Luther continues in his teaching on this passage:

Thus Philip, too, shows and betrays that he has never understood and does not now understand this, although he had often heard Christ preach and speak about the Father. This is because he still wants to understand this with *his* reason and fathom it with *his mind*.

¹ Pelikan, Jaroslav, Editor, Daniel E. Poellot, Assistant Editor. *Luther’s Works Volume 24, Sermons on the Gospel of St. John, Chapters 14-16*. Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1957. Page 56.

Although Christ wants to direct Philip solely to His Word and to Himself, saying that he already knows and has seen the Father, this does not yet take hold of (Philip).²

Perhaps the problem with Philip is the same problem we all have...we want to *SEE* the Father instead of recognizing the Father in some other way. Philip wants to be shown, what God is, just as Luther asks, what is God? But the problem that arises with all of this is that we try to visualize and construct God from our perspective. Maybe we shouldn't be looking, rather, perhaps we ought to be opening our hearts to feel, and to, discover God there. Maybe we shouldn't *LOOK for God*, because we know that God cannot be seen but we can feel and experience the effects of God. Maybe we ought to look into our hearts to feel the Father. What I mean is this, St. John reminds us in his first epistle:

3:¹⁸ Little children, let us not love in word or speech but in deed and in truth. ¹⁹ By this we shall know that we are of the truth, and reassure our hearts before him

4:⁷ Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God, and he who loves is born of God and knows God. (1 John 3:18-19, 4:7)

In our first lesson from the Act of the Apostles we hear the crowds respond to the diversity of languages. The crowd asks, how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language and what does this mean? It means God is not seen in a physical sense, rather God is experienced.

How then do we find God? We don't find God, even when we have been shown we still don't find God because God finds us, has found us, and will find us. We know this when we open our hearts, we discover that God has found us just as God is found in this gathering in Acts through the understanding, NOT of language, but through the understanding and acceptance of diversity and difference...the understanding and acceptance of one another for who they are and NOT who we think they should be.

Perhaps it isn't the language this Pentecost gathering was understanding...perhaps it was the culture or the people themselves and who they were that the crowd was understanding through the power of love that has just burst into the gathering. The words conveyed through the many and various languages...separated the different peoples in this gathering, but the love and grace from God through the Holy Spirit enabled them all to understand NOT THE LANGUAGES, rather, to accept, respect, and love each other...to accept each other for who they were, not who they wanted them to be...to respect one another as they are, and to love as God loves...freely and unconditionally...this is God...and it is in the diversity that we find God.

We have all seen the Father, NOT with our eyes but within our hearts we have felt the presence of God in the love we have all felt. And like the air that is our very life, so too the affects of God can be seen in the love we see around us, the love we share in the grace and mercy we give to the world that is so desperately in need of love. We all have seen love shared and love given...this is the Father who has been shown, but we are so blinded to the true presence of God in our fear to give that love as freely as it has been given to us.

Lord show us the Father...is what we cry out in the darkness of tragedy, in the darkness of our culture, and in the darkness of our fear. But even in the most oppressive darkness the Father is

² Ibid. page 56

there...and in that darkness stands a cross. And from the darkness of our fears and the tragedy of death, God's love...empowers us to be in that love...empowers us to know that love... and to know God is love because in that love we are found and lifted from that darkness into the light of new life. What to be shown the Father...go in peace to love and serve the world...and see the love that is God.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.