

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

Today is the Feast of Pentecost. It is a feast day in our worship cycle that we give thanks for the blessings of the Holy Spirit poured into the body of the church...a Spirit that activates us and allots the church in every way to be the body of Christ. We also give thanks for our call as Baptized Children of God to be sent as the Father sends the Son. According to an old Greek designation for this day, "Pentecost" it is actually named after the ancient festival mentioned in the Old Testament books of Leviticus and Deuteronomy, where this festival mentioned is referred to as the Feast of Weeks.

We know the word "penta" to mean five. We know the Pentagon building has five sides and is named because of that. We also know that the Pentateuch, or the Torah as it is also called, refers to the first five books of the Bible: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. These books form the foundation of both the Jewish and Christian faiths, covering the creation of the world, the history of Israel, and God's laws given to God's people. However, today, Pentecost is referring to the fifty days that have elapsed since Passover. And within this feast day today, we will remember and celebrate the beginning of the church as we know it today and how it has developed into one, holy, catholic, apostolic church.

This church, this assembly, this gathering, though many, is and remains the one physical body, or the one physical presence of Jesus Christ for the world. We are one, holy, catholic, apostolic church and we confess our faith in this church with these very words found in the Nicene Creed, which we have been confessing for the last eight weeks during our worship together.

Looking closer at this description of the church as One, holy, catholic, apostolic church, we seem to say these words habitually without much consideration, that is until we get to the word catholic...then there are some who seem to have a problem. I have been asked quite a few times if we are confessing to be the Catholic Church, meaning the Roman Catholic church. Since we are celebrating the birth of the church today, it's fitting then that we look at what we are confessing about the church and what we say about it each time we gather to worship. What does it mean to be one, holy, catholic, apostolic church?

To begin with these *four marks* of the church, we confess that the church is one. This means exactly what it is saying, that we the church are one, as St. Paul reminds the church in Corinth in his first letter:

¹²For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. ¹³For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. (1 Cor. 12:12-13)

Holy is also very obvious in that we, in a sense, are set apart for a special purpose by God and for God. The Church is holy NOT because *we* have made it holy or that *we* have established a holiness, or that we ourselves are holy. No, the church's holiness is derived from Christ's holiness and through that holiness we the church have been set apart to do God's work simply because God is present in it...and we are sent by that presence.

The term catholic, as I said, causes the most confusion and misunderstanding. When we confess one, holy, catholic church we are NOT confessing that we are the Roman Catholic Church. We are however, confessing that we are catholic derived from the Greek adjective *καθολικός* meaning general or universal. This Greek word is a combination of the preposition *κατά* meaning “according to” and the adjective *ὅλος* meaning “whole.” This is to say that in the Church the wholeness of the Christian faith, is full and complete, all-embracing, and with nothing lacking. It means that the Gospel, the Good News of Jesus Christ is proclaimed to all people without excluding any part of the faith or any class or group of people.

I include this explanation because I wish the folks who like to exclude this term from this confession of faith research this word catholic and understand it to mean more than just the Roman Church...and yes, in essence, this is how the Roman Church is named and how it is to be in the world just like us, the Lutheran Church who like the Catholic Church confesses to be one, holy, catholic, apostolic church.

And finally, we confess our Apostolic nature in that this term apostolic describes the Church's foundation and beliefs as rooted in Jesus Christ and we, as the apostolic church continue in the living tradition of Christ's apostles who like each of us are sent.¹ This basically means that as the very apostles were commissioned and sent by Jesus, we too as apostles are commissioned and sent by Jesus in the same way.

It is the “catholic” sense of the church that I want to lift up today because it is here in this place, this assembly, this gathering, we call the church that the wholeness of our faith is to be full and complete...all embracing and with nothing lacking...that means this Holy Gospel is to be made manifest in truth and in action to all people because the Gospel is to be proclaimed to all people without excluding any one or any class of people. To be one, holy, catholic, apostolic church means that we welcome the world into our community.

IN THEROY we love this idea, we would love for the whole world to come streaming through our church doors. Can you just imagine every seat in our pews filled; can you imagine folks standing in the isles, standing in the Baptistry at the entrance of the church and standing out in the narthex? Can you just imagine our financial statements? I am speaking of *all manner* of men and women, boys and girls...as the image in our first lesson says, all speaking in other languages but understanding others in our own native language.

We confess that we are a church who welcomes the whole world, we confess that are welcoming of folks that we might not ordinarily associate with. That means the building is going to be used, the bathrooms are all going to be used, all the cookies are going to be eaten very quickly, we will have to make more coffee and some of these folks may not look like us or speak like us...but as we hear in our first lesson, we will all understand each other...they will understand us and we will understand them. Just image the church this way...can you just imagine this church, all the people...this would truly be the church.

But then again...I can just imagine this...hold on there, pastor...yes, this is what the church is to be, but with all these people...they going to making a lot of noise, they are going to do something

¹ These terms: one, holy, catholic, and apostolic are defined with the help from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Four_Marks_of_the_Church

wrong...I'm NOT GOING TO be upset...but you know someone is going to get upset. Where are they going to park, the parking lot is going to be full. But most of all...someone is going to be sitting in my seat. But let's be honest, aren't you glad we are not this church? I'm not because I have been in extremely diverse churches and it is wonderfully humbling.

Unfortunately, we like to *think* we are one, hoy, catholic, apostolic church, and we will even confess that we are one, holy, catholic, apostolic church but when it comes to *being that church*, we'll just continue to say the words and overlook the reality of what we are saying because this is our church and we don't want those others to mess it up.

Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., was heard addressing the shameful tragedies of our nation at that time on the long running television show, Meet the Press on April 17, 1960. On that show, he said that 11:00 on Sunday morning is the most segregated hour in America. He was of course speaking about the church and the time of worship that generally happened on Sunday morning and what it looked like inside the churches at that time. I believe that this still holds true but I also believe our segregation has become more insidious and just as menacing as it was in the 60's. Now, we are dealing with the segregation of our politics and our socioeconomical divisions, as well as our sexual and racial divisions. We may even place signs and flags on our lawns and around our churches about who is right and who is wrong, but they only indicate and amplify the divisiveness of the segregation within our church bodies. Look at our titles, Catholic, Episcopal, Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian...we as the Lutheran Church are part of the ELCA, or the Missouri Synod, and now the NLAC or the North American Lutheran Church...this is what we call the church...in order to pick and choose what suites us.

My elbow does not look like a certain part of my body and I may not know that certain part of my body from my elbow, but nonetheless, it is one body, just as the church, in all of its titles, disfunction, and segregation is and will remain the *one, holy, catholic, apostolic body of Jesus Christ* that is the church according to the Gospel of Jesus Christ...but most of all according to our likes and dislikes. "Our church" or "MY church" is what we know and what we are comfortable with when it comes to our understanding of God, who God is, and how we get to experience God in the world, and we can call this church...according to our sensibilities and sensitivities. But this is what we choose to call church. In other words, we choose ourselves and not God.

Nonetheless, we are a fearful-broken-human institution that gathers each week behind the closed and locked doors of our titles, our understandings, our segregation, our prejudices, and our pride...but in each and every place Jesus enters through those locked doors that have become our boundaries and says to us: "Peace be with you." And in this proclaimed Word and in this Holy Meal, Jesus reveals himself to us and we see his hands and his side...we see his death and resurrection as our salvation. And just as he said so long ago, he says to us again here today:

"Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." ²² When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."
(John 20:21-23)

And as we go into the world in the grace and peace of Jesus Christ, let us not forget that we are sent as his apostolic church in this his Great Commission:

¹⁸ ... 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ 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, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.' (Matt 28:18-20)

Jesus is saying to us, GO THEREFORE, and see the one, holy, catholic, apostolic church out there beyond OUR walls and locked doors that keep us in here. Go therefore, beyond our self-centered-conclusions and understandings, go, beyond our disfunction, go beyond the segregation and prejudice, go beyond our prideful-self-righteousness, go therefore as the *one, holy, catholic, apostolic body of Jesus Christ* to make disciples of all nations...through the love that has been given to each one of us...go to love and serve God and our neighbor just as we have been loved and served by God. And as we go, remember, that we are the presence of the *one, holy, catholic, apostolic body of Jesus Christ* who is given for others. And remember Christ is with us always leading and guiding us all with the mercy and love of forgiveness and life, to the end of the age.

Happy birthday, dear church!

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