

Sermon for Pentecost
May 31, 2009
John 15:26-27; 16:4b-11

Today is Pentecost. This is the day we celebrate the work of God's Holy Spirit who was given in all His power 50 days after Christ rose from death. The Lord first got the attention of all who had gathered. There came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Tongues of fire lighted over the heads of the apostles. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.

Teachers have different ways of getting the attention of their students. For some it is a subtle, shhhh. Others will turn off the lights as a sign to be quiet. I know of one teacher who does a 3, 2, 1 countdown to quiet. At camp, when you see the right hand of others raised in the air, you know it is time to be quiet. You close your mouth and raise your hand. When you have something important to say, you want to make sure that everyone in the room is paying attention so they don't miss the information. Tongues of fire and the sound of a mighty rushing wind certainly got the attention of those gathered on that first Pentecost. Now it was time to listen so that the Spirit could do His work.

The work of the Spirit is to bear witness about Christ. The Good News about Jesus, who He is and what He has done for us, always remains our central focus. He brings this truth about Jesus into our hearts, so that by the Spirit's power we trust in Him as our Savior from sin.

Let's see what we can learn about the Holy Spirit and His work from discovery I made on Thursday morning. I was out for my early morning walk around our development at about 6:20 am. I was just past the halfway point of our normal route in the opposite corner of our development. You know, it's really close to where Honey the horse lives. As I was walking I noticed these blue disks on the street. As I looked closer I came to discover that these blue disks weren't just disks. They were nail caps, and yes the nails were present as well. As I looked more broadly, I discovered that there weren't just a few of these 1 ¼ inch nails. They were scattered across an entire lane of the street in two different places.

A few questions came to mind. I wondered if anyone else had noticed them. Would a person driving in their vehicle see them in time to stop? I had almost walked over them without noticing. How many flat tires might result no one picked them up? At first I thought I would let someone else deal with the problem. Then I thought about how frustrated I would be if I were the one to end up with one or more flat tires. So... I started picking them up, one by one. When my hand was full, I started a little pile on the edge of the road. I had a fleece jacket with pockets but knew that my pockets weren't big enough to hold all of the nails. As I was just about done picking up the first section, I looked around to see if there might be some kind of container that would hold them. As I looked off in the distance, back in the direction from which I had come, I saw something blue sticking up out of the grass in the ditch. As I got closer I recognized that it was the original container for these nails. I loaded the one pile into the box and then went to the second scattering of nails and began gathering into the box as well.

As I was picking up those nails, I thought about the person who was now missing a box of nails. Even though it clearly looked like an accidental spill, the conspiracy thinker in me wanted to accuse someone of deliberately pouring those nails on the street to bring hardship to another person. As I think about it now, what probably happened was that the box of nails was in the back of someone's pickup. The box fell off from a five gallon bucket upon which it was setting and opened, releasing the first wave of nails. As other stuff shuffled it pushed the second half of nails onto the street through the open tailgate. Moments later, the wind blew the empty box out into the ditch.

During the ten or so minutes that I walked, three vehicles passed me on their way to work. Would they now have flattening tires had I not gone for my walk that morning?

Let's see what application we can make between my walk with nails on the street and the work of the Holy Spirit pointing to Jesus. "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come." (v. 13)

The Spirit of truth will guide you into all the truth. The truth of the matter is that nails are not supposed to be sprawled all over the street. That is not their purpose. They are designed to secure things to wood. When they are used with paneling or siding or shingles, nails are doing the work they were designed to perform. Nails are a gift that make life better. If there were a commandment about nails it might read, "You shall not scatter nails on the street." There they will puncture tires and make life miserable for drivers. It is the Spirit of truth who inspired the writers of God's Word to write every word that we have been given. In His Word the Lord shows and tells us how to use more than just nails. He has given us directions to bring joy in our lives using all of the gifts He has given.

Our tongues are a God-given gift. We are to use our tongues to build people up and encourage them. We are to speak the truth in love. We are to use our tongues to tell others about all that Christ has done out of love for us sinners. Sadly, our tongues spend more time bringing hurt as we spread rumors and seek to destroy the reputation of others when we don't have all of the facts. I could have had the nail box fingerprinted to find out who last handled it. Then I could have called the police to have that person arrested for seeking to puncture tires in our development. It gets worse. Who hired the man with the box of nails to inconvenience me on my walk? And yet, that is often what we do, when some one does something that we don't understand, we automatically talk about them rather than talking to them about our concerns.

So the nails can certainly represent of the gifts that the Lord gives us and we use in the wrong way. That includes everything from our relationships with spouse and children to how we view money and our attitude in the work place.

The Spirit steps in and says, "We have a problem here." There are nails on the street. Either someone has already been hurt or will get hurt if nothing is done to remedy the situation. In the case with the nails, I'm guessing he didn't even know that they were gone. Now it was placed on my heart to do the right thing. Part of the meaning to the Seventh Commandment says that we are to help our neighbor to improve and protect his possessions and income. The consequence for not doing so would have been flat tires for some neighbors. I would have been sinning by just letting it go, knowing the impending danger to property.

Every day, the devil, the father of lies, places dangerous obstacles in our path to destroy us. He wants us to believe that God placed those nails in our path to hurt us. But you see, God has a different plan. Through His Word, the Spirit shows us God's real plan for our lives. He shows us how much God loves us. He even finds a different use for those nails. Yes, nails were designed to attach things to wood. The solution to our problem of spilled nails and every other problem in our lives is found in Jesus, who was nailed to the cross. More than just letting air out of a tire, these nails released the blood of sacrifice for your sins and mine.

That was the message on that first Pentecost as Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, preached that sermon where He spoke words like this. "And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." The Word of truth does convict. This Jesus, who you have crucified. Yes it was your sin, my sin, that placed Jesus on the cross. Through our thoughtless and our deliberate thoughts, word, and actions, we have placed nails on the road to cause harm to others. But you see, the Holy Spirit has come to sweep them all away. They are all placed upon Jesus. The Holy Spirit keeps pointing us back to Jesus who died and rose for us.

You might recall that I mentioned the three or four cars that passed by as continued my walk. They were unaware that was anything wrong. They didn't see the nails and no one told them that were there. In real life, there are dangers all around. The Law and the Gospel need to be proclaimed in their truth and purity so that people will first of all see that it's not okay to put nails on the road, and secondly, that there is a consequence for doing so. It is a death penalty. For the wages of sin is death. They also need to realize that there is more to the story, that our Lord has picked up those nails that were driven into his hands and feet leading to His death in our place.

Jesus is alive. He returned to life on the third day. Now 50 days after His resurrection He has given us the Counselor who will lead us into all truth, focused on Jesus, who is the way, the Truth, and the Life.

The Spirit is still very much at work in our world. Sometimes we become discouraged because we think we don't see sufficient evidence of his witness to Jesus, His encouragement to present-day disciples, or His convicting power. Yet, if we were to widen our focus to include the whole world, we will see the Spirit being poured out in abundance on people of every tribe and nation and language. He continues to come into the lives of the lost as God's Word is preached in its truth and purity, and as the sacraments are administered. He is working even now in you who believe. He comes even now, not with the sound of a mighty rushing wind or flashing, cloven tongues of fire, but with the soft spoken words of this liturgy, in the blessed bestowal of absolution following confession, in the sound of water poured out over the candidates for Baptism, in the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper. Yes, he comes, the Holy Counselor, the Spirit of Truth – and he will continue to come to us day by day in this same way.