

Pentecost: Love That Unites

5-Day Devotional

Overview of Sermon, Devotion Below



PENTECOST: *Love That Unites*

PENTECOST SUNDAY | COMMUNITY LUTHERAN CHURCH



THE BIG IDEA

We cannot sustain the mission on our own love — it is too small, too conditional, too tribal. God knows this. The Spirit is not a reward for courage; it is the provision made for our weakness. The same love that crossed every language barrier at Pentecost crosses every barrier in us.

MARTIN LUTHER KNOWS WE AVOID PENTECOST AS LUTHERANS



Pastors may be fine Easter preachers, but they are very poor Pentecost preachers, for they do not preach about the process of holiness and life in the Holy Spirit...

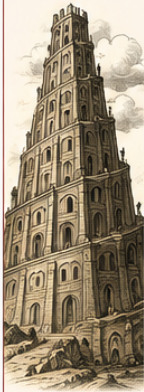
Christ did not earn only grace for us, but also the gift of the Holy Spirit so that we might have not only forgiveness of, but also cessation of, sin."

Luther's Works, Volume 41, Church and Ministry III



THE TOWERS WE BUILD (ABEL)

The Diagnosis — Selfish ambition and Arrogance isolates and eventually collapses



- Genesis 11: humanity builds upward — "We will make a name for ourselves." No God, no neighbor, just ambition unchecked.
- The tower doesn't just fail publicly — it isolates. The higher you build for yourself alone, the more alone you become.
- This is personal, not just ancient. Everyone in the room knows what a personal Babel looks like — the career built for status, the relationship managed for control, the version of yourself constructed for approval.
- Pride doesn't just precede the fall. Pride IS the fall — the ongoing one, the daily one.
 - *Incurvatus in se* — humanity curved in on itself. The tower is the architectural expression of a heart with no room for God or neighbor.



THE LOVE THAT COMES DOWN (PENTECOST)

The Reversal — God descends; no tower needed



- Babel: humanity reaches up — scattered. Pentecost: God reaches down — and gathers.
- The speaking in other languages is not the point — it is a window into the character of God.
 - Babel confused language to scatter. Pentecost multiplied language to welcome. The Spirit's first public act is radical, extravagant, unmistakable welcome.
 - "The Spirit spoke in every language — because everyone is welcome. That's what love does. It finds a way to reach you where you are." Then move on.
 - The real work of the Spirit is not a moment in history — it is the ongoing poured-out love that moves us beyond looking inward at our own wants and needs.
- The disciples in that room are not heroic volunteers. They are scared people who couldn't do this on their own. Unsure what comes next. The Spirit comes to people in exactly that condition.
- They weren't brave. They were filled. There is a difference.
- Romans 5:5 — the love of God poured into our hearts. Not a one-time fill. Poured — ongoing, available, given to people who keep running out.



OUR LOVE HAS LIMITS

The Honest Middle — naming why we don't go



- The mission is real and it is hard. That is not a failure of faith — it is taking the mission seriously.



Our resistance: What if I look foolish? I feel uncomfortable. I don't want to be that person.

- Acknowledge: the bad witness they've seen is real. Aggressive, shame-based, transactional. Their conscience is partly right.
- But the Pentecost model is the antidote, not more of the same. The Spirit gives language the other person can hear. That is not imposition — it's the opposite.



Our love is conditional. We like people like us. We include those who agree with our inclusion.

- Tribalism runs in every direction — conservative and progressive both. My progressivism can become an idol too. My inclusion can become exclusive.
- A church that only reaches people like itself isn't just failing the mission. It's building a tower. That's Babel with a cross on top.



We follow an inclusive God who declares everyone worthy to hear of Jesus' love, and everyone worthy to be included in the family of God — and by default the church.

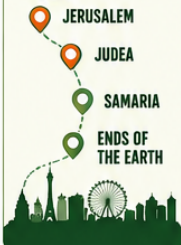


When we live beyond ourselves — when we think of others first — life grows bigger. Because you're growing love. But our love has limits. Jesus knows that too. That is why he promised the Spirit.



LIVE BEYOND YOURSELF (THE CALL)

The Commission — sent, equipped, not alone



- Acts 1:8 is a commission with a map. Jerusalem → Judea → Samaria → ends of the earth. Las Vegas is the ends of the earth for somebody but it is the starting point for us. For some it is Samaria.
- The mission reframed: you are not being sent out to convince people or win arguments. You are being sent out to extend the welcome and love that was already extended to you.
 - You were welcomed in. Go welcome others in.
- You don't have to lead a movement or invent a new philosophy. It's already here. And it is already better than anything we could dream up.
- Tribes come and go. The Kingdom is forever. Our ideas and opinions come and go. The Word of our God stands forever. Isaiah 40:8.

"God doesn't give the Spirit to the church because we earned it. God gives the Spirit to the church because without it, the mission simply stops. We know it. And God knows it too."

CONCLUSION

The seeds of the fruit of the Spirit can be planted right now and grow into something you had nothing to do with — but not if you keep throwing acid on the soil.

This image is Lutheran and Pauline. 1 Thessalonians 5:19 — "Do not quench the Spirit" — is Paul's own language for the same reality. The acid on the soil is the quenching of 1 Thessalonians 5 rendered in agricultural language, which is exactly the soil/seed/fruit language Paul himself uses in Galatians 5.



Day 1: The Spirit Who Unites

Scripture Text

Acts 2:1–13 (NIV)

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken. Utterly amazed, they asked: “Aren’t all these who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language?... we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!” Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, “What does this mean?” — Acts 2:1–8, 11–12

Devotion

The miracle of Pentecost wasn't just about speaking in tongues—it was about God's heart to unite and include. While the Tower of Babel scattered people through pride and self-ambition, Pentecost gathered them through love. The Spirit crossed every barrier so everyone could hear about God's wonders in their own language.

Consider the barriers in your life: cultural differences, past hurts, or personal preferences that keep you from connecting with others. The same Spirit that empowered those first believers wants to work through you today. Where is God calling you to bridge a gap? Who needs to hear about God's love in a “language” they can understand—through kindness, presence, or genuine care? The Spirit doesn't just save us; He sends us to love inclusively.

Reflection: *What barrier is the Holy Spirit asking you to cross today to share God's love with someone different from you?*

Day 2: Beyond Forgiveness to Transformation

Scripture Text

Romans 5:1–5 (NIV)

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us. — Romans 5:1–5

Devotion

Luther observed that Lutheran Pastors are good at preaching Easter but poor at preaching Pentecost—we emphasize forgiveness but neglect the Spirit’s transforming power. Yet God doesn’t just forgive our sins; He gives us the Holy Spirit to lead us away from sin toward holiness.

Paul writes that “God has poured out His love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit.” This isn’t passive—it’s active transformation. The Christian life isn’t merely about being forgiven repeatedly; it’s about being changed progressively. The Spirit plants seeds of love, joy, peace, patience, and self-control that grow into visible fruit over time.

Are you settling for forgiveness alone, or are you inviting the Spirit to actually change how you live? Transformation requires cooperation. Don’t put out the Spirit’s fire by clinging to old patterns or resisting growth.

Reflection: *In what area of your life do you need the Spirit’s transforming power, not just forgiveness?*

Day 3: Building Towers or Building Community

Scripture Text

Genesis 11:1–9; Proverbs 16:18 (NIV)

Now the whole world had one language and a common speech... Then they said, “Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves; otherwise we will be scattered over the face of the whole earth.” But the Lord came down to see the city and the tower the people were building. The Lord said, “If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them. Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other.” So the Lord scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city. — Genesis 11:1, 4–8

Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall. — Proverbs 16:18

Devotion

The Tower of Babel story warns us about the dangers of self-centered ambition. When we build towers to “make a name for ourselves,” we end up isolated. Pride always comes before a fall, and self-absorption leads to loneliness.

Modern towers look different—career status, curated social media images, control in relationships, or church preferences that prioritize our comfort over mission. These towers promise fulfillment but deliver isolation. We were created for community, not competition.

The antidote to Babel is Pentecost. The Spirit redirects our focus from self-promotion to loving service, from personal glory to God’s glory, from isolation to inclusion. When we stop building towers for ourselves and start building bridges to others, we discover the abundant life Jesus promised.

Reflection: *What personal ambition or preference is keeping you from deeper community with others?*

Day 4: Meeting People Where They Are

Scripture Text

1 Corinthians 9:19–23 (NIV)

Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings. — 1 Corinthians 9:19–23

Devotion

The Pentecost miracle demonstrates a crucial principle: love meets people where they are. The Spirit didn't demand everyone learn Hebrew or Greek; instead, He enabled believers to speak every language present. This is what love does—it adapts, includes, and finds ways to connect.

Paul embodied this Spirit-led approach: “I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some.” This isn't about compromising truth; it's about removing unnecessary barriers. It's sharing your story without religious jargon, showing genuine interest in others' lives, and demonstrating Christ's love in practical ways.

Without the Spirit, we naturally gravitate toward people like us and create tribal communities. With the Spirit, we're empowered to cross boundaries, embrace differences, and welcome the outsider. The early church didn't use threats or shame—they declared “the wonders of God,” and people asked, “What does this mean?”

Reflection: *How can you better meet someone in your life where they are, speaking their “language” of love today?*

Day 5: Don't Put Out the Spirit's Fire

Scripture Text

1 Thessalonians 5:16–24; Galatians 5:22–25 (NIV)

Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. Don't put out the Spirit's fire. Don't despise what God has revealed; hold on to what is good, reject every kind of evil. May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it. — 1 Thessalonians 5:16–24

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. — Galatians 5:22–25

Devotion

Paul's warning is urgent: "Don't put out the Spirit's fire." We can resist, ignore, or quench the Spirit's work in our lives. When we cling to unforgiveness, refuse to change, prioritize comfort over mission, or focus solely on our preferences, we're pouring acid on the soil where the Spirit wants to plant fruit.

The Spirit desires to cultivate love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control in you. But seeds need receptive soil. Are you creating conditions for growth or resistance?

You don't have to be spiritually stuck. The same Spirit that empowered those first believers is available to you today. When you're running on empty, come back to be filled again. Invite the Spirit to melt your hardness, mold your character, fill your emptiness, and use your life for God's purposes. This is not about perfection but about cooperation with God's transforming work.

Reflection: *What specific step will you take this week to cultivate the Spirit's fruit in your life rather than resist it?*