

**THE DAY OF PENTECOST, June 4, 2017**  
**Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, Honolulu, HI**

**THE LESSONS**

**Acts 2:1-21**

**Psalm 104:24-34, 35b**

**1 Corinthians 12:3b-13**

**John 20:19-23**

**THE SERMON: "Praise the L-O-O-O-RD...!"**

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

**Introduction**

Most of you know my parents were Pentecostal so when I worshiped with them I went to their church. Most Lutherans would feel very uncomfortable in a Pentecostal service because they worship by shouting "Amen" and "Hallelujah" throughout the service and many of them loudly "speak in tongues" during the prayers. We called them "Holy Rollers" when I was in high school. Well, my joke is about a Lutheran farmer who wanted to buy a mule from a Pentecostal farmer. The Lutheran and the Pentecostal agreed on a price and the Lutheran got on the back of the mule and shouted "Giddap!" but the mule didn't move. After several attempts, the Pentecostal told the Lutheran, "Brother, you have to remember this is a "born-again" mule. To get it to move you have to shout "Praise the Lord!" The Lutheran shouted, "Praise the Lord!" and the mule started walking. The Lutheran suddenly remembered and yelled out over his shoulder, "How do I make him stop?" The Pentecostal shouted back, "Just say "Amen" and he'll stop. The Lutheran shouted "Amen" and the mule stopped. He shouted "Praise the Lord" and they started home. On the way they approached a cliff and the mule plodded steadily toward the edge. The Lutheran forgot the word to make the mule stop and frantically shouted various religious phrases and the mule plodded toward the cliff. Finally, as they got to the edge, the farmer remembered and shouted, "Amen" and the mule stopped right at the edge of the precipice. Relieved, the farmer shouted, "Praise the L-o-o-o-r-d...."

**Acts 2:1-21**

Well, that isn't exactly what Luke was describing in our lesson from Acts when the day of Pentecost had come. And, even if we don't know if the Jews at that time actually observed Pentecost as the ancient festival of the gathering of the first fruits of the harvest, we do know that early Christians interpreted Pentecost as God's sign of the first fruits of Christ's kingdom. As Luke remembers it, Jews from all over the Near East (Parthia, Mede, Elam and other places) were returning to Jerusalem for Pentecost. It was similar to the pilgrimage of Muslims to Mecca during the Hajj. But, from Luke's account, it's not clear where the disciples were gathered but it must have been fairly public, like a Starbucks or an open area, when suddenly, as Luke says, "... there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind... Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared... and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability." Can you imagine the noise? It's no wonder they attracted a crowd and Luke says, "... at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. Amazed and astonished, they asked, 'Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?'

And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language?" If this were the 60's, people would have asked, "What are they smoking?" but Luke says, "All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, 'What does this mean?' But others sneered and said, 'They are filled with new wine.'" And, that's when Peter speaks up, "... these (men and women) are not drunk... for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel: 'In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams... in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy... Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'" And, Luke tells us 3000 people joined them. Now, that's evangelism!

### **1 Corinthians 12:3b-13**

I think that's what my Mom and Dad's church was trying to replicate in their services but much of the time it just didn't seem genuine and, as David Platt would say in our Men's Study, it seemed "superficial" and inauthentic. I think Paul was speaking to that problem in the Corinthian church. There was a lot happening in Corinth... people were prophesying and demonstrating wisdom, healing and working miracles, discerning of spirits, were speaking in tongues and interpreting... you'd think Paul would be excited! But, he saw that all of those gifts were dividing the church and that's why he wrote, "Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good." When all of those gifts are activated by the Holy Spirit, then Paul says, "For 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." In other words, what good is the church if everyone's doing their own thing and thinking their thing is the only thing the church should be doing? The Body of Christ should be united, not divided as the Corinthians were. Paul is hinting that their actions really weren't saying "Jesus is Lord;" instead their actions were saying "prophecy is my lord," "speaking in tongues is my lord;" when Jesus is Lord, every ministry glorifies God in Jesus Christ. So, as good as the Corinthians were, what were they lacking? That's why in the very next chapter, 1 Corinthians 13, Paul tells them exactly what they were lacking.

### **John 20:19-23**

Contrasting the Corinthian church with the disciples gathered on Easter night, the disciples were lacking all kinds of things. It makes me wonder why Jesus chose these eleven men. But, on the night of his Resurrection, John tells us, "When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.' After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side." This reminds me of what John saw in his Revelation and how all the saints stood before the Throne and worshiped a Lamb that looked as if it had been slain. The revealed Jesus bears the scars of our sins. Is this the Jesus we worship? When the disciples saw this Jesus, the crucified Jesus, they rejoiced. Why? Like the Corinthians, most of us can give the right answer in words but we don't act as if they know the answer. Why did the disciples rejoice when they saw the crucified Lord? The question John raised for his First Century church was "Do you rejoice when you see the crucified Lord?" Well, why? Then, John adds, "Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.' When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of

any, they are retained.” I think that’s why they rejoiced. Here they were gathered in what some scholars think was the same room in which they shared the Last Supper. How do you think you’d feel? I think they felt ashamed, guilty, cowardly as well as afraid. But, here the crucified Jesus enters this locked room and says, “Peace be with you... if you forgive the sins... if you retain the sins...” then they knew why Jesus was crucified. It was for the forgiveness of sins. Jesus was telling them they were forgiven of their betrayal, their cowardice, their fear. They were forgiven! That’s why they rejoiced!

### **Psalm 104:24-34, 35b**

But, then, why did we sing Psalm 104 today? What does that have to do with the crucified Jesus? Nothing? No, everything! Psalm 104 is a Creation psalm! This psalm reminds us that, when we know we are forgiven, we are re-created. Paul says in 2 Corinthians, “... if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!” Look at how the psalmist sees Creation, “Yonder is the sea, great and wide... There go the ships, and Leviathan that you formed to sport in it. These all look to you to give them their food in due season... When you send forth your spirit, they are created; and you renew the face of the ground. May the glory of the Lord endure forever... I will sing to the Lord as long as I live... for I rejoice in the Lord.” As that Lutheran farmer shouted, “Praise the Lord!” On this Festival of the Pentecost, the scholars want us to remember that we are the first fruits of the message, “Christ has died; Christ is risen; you are forgiven; you have new life!” And, what is the Lutheran response? Our response is “Thank the Lord and sing his praise. Tell everyone what he has done. Alleluia...” But, instead of singing as if it’s a funeral dirge, we are to join all of Creation with joy! The disciples rejoiced when they realized the power of forgiveness. Jesus forgave them and they rejoiced. The Keys of the Kingdom unlocked their bondage to guilt and fear and imperfection; they were free to be what God intended for them to be.

### **The Call and the Challenge**

And, it seems that the world around us wants to be freed of the bondage of fear and uncertainty around us. Jesus chose twelve unlikely people to confront the powers and principalities. They didn’t preach that the kings and powers to be were wrong; they preached Christ crucified. Paul told the Philippians, “... who, though he was in the form of God... (he) emptied himself... And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death - even death on a cross...” Jesus taught his disciples that we don’t confront power with power; that only results in violence. Jesus confronted power with love. Human power resulted in Jesus’ death; God’s power resulted in a new creation. In this chaotic and violent world, even Christians are caught up with asserting human power as we try to change the world. But, is that Christ’s way? What would happen if Christians confronted human power with God’s power; what if we confronted human power with God’s love? Who knows...? Jesus did it and he died... But, we know the rest of the story...