What a Difference a Day Makes  
Acts 2:1-21  
May 19, 2013

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 them speaking in his own language. Utterly amazed, they asked: “Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language? Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!” Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, “What does this mean?” Some, however, made fun of them and said, “They have had too much wine.” Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: “Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. These men are not drunk, as you suppose. It’s only nine in the morning! No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: ‘In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy. I will show wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord. And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’

Some of us might remember an old love song with the same title as today’s sermon. The opening lines of the song were:

What a difference a day makes  
Twenty-four little hours.

One day can certainly make a difference. Throughout history there have been days that changed the course of the world.

December 7, 1941 – The day the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor and America learned it had a new enemy.

April 15, 1947 – The day Jackie Robinson hit his first home run for the Brooklyn Dodgers and the race barrier in pro sports was officially broken.

May 9, 1960 – The day the birth control pill was released and a sexual revolution started that lowered moral standards around the world.

February 26, 1993 – The day of the World Trade Center bombing when America chose to ignore the warning of another new enemy.

April 19, 1995 – The day the Oklahoma City Federal Building was bombed and
Americans learned that there are enemies within.

September 11, 2001 – The day al-Qaeda attacked America and worldwide terrorism could no longer be denied.

These and countless others are single days that changed the course of human history; days that have made people reevaluate their long-held concepts of the way things really are. Days like this have been happening since the day God said, *Let there be light* (Gen 1:3). World-changing days will continue to happen until the day of ultimate change, when Christ returns and changes everything back to what God intended.

Today’s text is about a day that changed the world. It’s about the day the Church began. For many people, this day not only changed their world, it changed their eternity. This is the story of the first Christian Pentecost. This was the day God, the Holy Spirit, changed the world. We are going to look at three aspects of this most important day: its timing, its meaning, and its blessing.

There are three things with regard to the timing of Pentecost that are worth noting. First, the timing was important as it related to the Divine Person of the Holy Spirit. Two things had to happen before the Holy Spirit could come.

The first was the death of Jesus. Jesus told his disciples, *It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you* (Jn 16:7 NIV). Before the Holy Spirit could come and do his work among God’s people, Jesus had to deal with the of sin that infects the human race.

After the scourge of sin had been dealt with, Jesus had to be glorified by his resurrection and ascension into heaven. Jesus foretold this in the 7th chapter of John and then John commentates on what Jesus said: “Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.” By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified (Jn 7:38-39 NIV).

Timing was also important as it related to the Divine Promise. The promise of the Holy Spirit was assured: *I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever* (Jn 14:16 NIV). But why was the timing so important? Timing was everything because without it the disciples’ task was impossible. Even with the Great Commission in their hands they would need more than willingness if the world was to be won.

In the shelter of the upper room, the disciples had no idea of the immense task that lay before them: the stubborn unbelief of the people; the entrenched vested interests of government, commerce, and religion that would oppose them; or the cruel persecution that awaited them. This is a good time to ask yourself: Are you trying to do the Lord’s work without the Holy Spirit?

The third aspect of timing that was crucial was the timing according to the Divine Plan. The Jewish Feast of Harvest, so called because it ushered in the harvesting period, was
also known as Pentecost. That’s why earlier I said we were looking at the first Christian Pentecost and not the first Pentecost.

One of the last instructions Jesus gave his disciples was: Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about (Acts 1:4 NIV). Jerusalem could be a risky place for the followers of a crucified criminal, so why would Jesus want his disciples to wait there?

On the Feast of Harvest, Jews from all the known world would congregate in Jerusalem. This day was the beginning of the divine plan to spread the Gospel message throughout the Gentile world. When the people returned home after this Pentecost, they carried the message of Christ with them.

The Holy Spirit came, the people heard the sound of a rushing wind, and they saw tongues of fire on the disciples. This fulfilled Jesus’ promise: John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:5 NIV). The disciples were baptized with the Holy Spirit and they were filled with the Holy Spirit. That’s what enabled them to speak in the foreign languages of all the pilgrims in the city. The Spirit empowered Peter, a mere fisherman, to preach a sermon so moving that 3,000 people were convicted of their sin and baptized in the name of the Triune God.

According to the text, these miraculous events left the people: Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, “What does this mean?” (Acts 2:12 NIV). There are two things that answer the people’s question.

The events of that Pentecost point to the reality of the presence of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is truly present at every baptism. When you were baptized in the name of the Triune God, you were baptized with the water and the Spirit.

Furthermore, just as the Holy Spirit was present to fill those believers on that Pentecost, he lives in believers today. Speaking of the Holy Spirit, Jesus said: The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you (Jn 14:17 NIV). And Paul writes: Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? (1 Cor 6:19 NIV).

The Holy Spirit resides in the heart of every believer. The question believers must ask themselves is, “Now that the Spirit resides in my heart, does he preside in my heart?” There is a difference between the Holy Spirit living in your heart and the Holy Spirit ruling in your life.

The second answer to the people’s question “What does this mean?” is that these events point to the availability of the power of the Holy Spirit. Many Christians don’t realize the power they possess because of the indwelling Spirit. Too many people equate being a Christian with being weak. But weakness isn’t what Jesus promised. He said: You will receive power (δύναμιν) when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8 NIV).
After Jesus ascended, the disciples were locked away in hiding. They weren’t out preaching and baptizing. If you had been in that room with them, you would probably have been hard pressed to find much peace, contentment, or power. But what a difference a day makes. When the Spirit arrived, those timid disciples turned into power-filled evangelists.

That’s power. And the power that filled and changed those disciples is the same power that resides in you. You have the same Holy Spirit they had. That means that you and I can do the same things those original disciples did.

There is a two-fold blessing that comes from the coming of the Holy Spirit. The first is the blessing of repentance in the world. Repentance is more than just being sorry for the sins you have committed against God and your neighbor. Repentance means you stop doing wrong and start doing right.

The problem with repentance is that humans, in their natural sinful condition, can’t be repentant. We don’t have the power to stop doing wrong and start doing right. Only the indwelling of the Holy Spirit can make such a change in the life of a sinner. The power to have that life change is now available to Jew and Gentile alike.

The second blessing is the revival of the church. For the church, the blessing of the Holy Spirit is the blessing of Spirit-filled believers, who can make a difference in the world. Making a difference isn’t easy, but it isn’t impossible either. To help you see what believers can accomplish when they allow the Holy Spirit to take control, let’s look at what the Spirit did in that early church.

The Holy Spirit made the believers fearless to speak: Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: “Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say” (Acts 2:14 NIV).

The Holy Spirit gave the believers joy: Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people (Acts 2:46-47 NIV).

The Holy Spirit enabled the believers to shine: When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus (Acts 4:13 NIV).

The Holy Spirit gave the believers a willingness to sacrifice: There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need (Acts 4:34-35 NIV).

The Holy Spirit gave the believers a readiness to serve: Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility
over to them (Acts 6:3 NIV).

The Holy Spirit gave the believers a steadfastness to stand: *Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness* (Acts 4:29 NIV).

It is my prayer that the believers of Prince of Peace, and especially our confirmands, become so filled by God the Holy Spirit, that we, too, can fearlessly, joyfully, brilliantly, willingly, sacrificially, readily, and steadfastly point the unbelieving world to our Savior, Jesus Christ.