

Sermon 5-24-26
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Based on the Second Lesson and the Gospel for The Sunday of Pentecost, Acts 2:1-21 and
John 7:37-39

Day of Signs, Power and Baptism

On Friday and Saturday, the Jewish community around the church celebrated one of the important holidays Israel is commanded to observe. It's called Shavuot. Today it's our turn with the same festival. Why?

Yahweh gave a series of commands to Moses. Leviticus 23:4 -6, "4 These are the appointed feasts of the LORD, the holy convocations, which you shall proclaim at the time appointed for them. 5 In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month at twilight, is the LORD'S Passover. 6 And on the fifteenth day of the same month is the Feast of Unleavened Bread to the LORD; for seven days you shall eat unleavened bread." If you like Matzoh, the Feast of Unleavened bread is for you.

But within the week of unleavened bread there's another festival. Leviticus 23:9-11, "9 And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 10 'Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, When you come into the land that I give you and reap its harvest, you shall bring the sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest to the priest, 11 and he shall wave the sheaf before the LORD, so that you may be accepted. On the day after the Sabbath the priest shall wave it.'"

Two things here. First, the day after the Sabbath is what we call Sunday. So on the Sunday that falls within the Week of Unleavened bread an offering had to be made. Second, the offering had to be the firstfruits of whatever winter grains had ripened at that point and were ready for harvest. So, keep in mind Sunday and Firstfruits.

Leviticus 23:15, "You shall count seven full weeks from the day after the Sabbath, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering. 16 You shall count fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath. Then you shall present a grain offering of new grain to the LORD." Count off fifty days. This will bring you to another Sunday seven weeks later. Jewish people have a name for the counting of the days. It's the Omer.

What's to be done on the fiftieth day? Torah commands that various animal sacrifices are to be made. But here's the command that concerns us. Leviticus 23:17, "You shall bring from your dwelling places two loaves of bread to be waved, made of two tenths of an ephah. They shall be of fine flour, and they shall be baked with leaven, as firstfruits to the LORD." You just saw the word Firstfruits for the second time.

In addition, the fiftieth day itself is commanded to be a special day. Leviticus 23:21, "And you shall make a proclamation on the same day. You shall hold a holy convocation. You shall not do any ordinary work. It is a statute forever in all your dwelling places throughout your generations." So, we just saw two commanded harvest festivals, fifty days apart, that celebrate the ingathering of the winter crops by presenting the Firstfruits of those harvests to the Lord.

But in 33A.D., Yahweh Himself powerfully repurposed both those festivals. First, on the Sunday that fell within the Week of Unleavened Bread in 33A.D., Jesus of Nazareth, God the

Son, was raised from the dead. For this reason St. Paul wrote in 1Corinthians 15:20-23, “20 But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. 21 For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. 22 For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. 23 But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ.”

Jesus was the very first human being ever resurrected from death in an immortal, deathless human body. Therefore, His body became the firstfruits of the harvest of the resurrection. But He’s not going to remain alone. Every last human who has ever lived will be resurrected in one of those deathless bodies.

And on the day of resurrection all will be judged according to what they have done. Those who put their faith in Yahweh’s Messiah and followed Him will go with Jesus into eternal righteous life. The rest will go with the devil they followed in life into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. However, this has not yet happened. Therefore, Jesus still remains alone as the Firstfruits from the dead.

Now, second, on the fiftieth day in 33A.D., Yahweh repurposed the second harvest festival — Shavuot. Because it’s the fiftieth day, we call it Pentecost. Pente is a prefix meaning fifty. Yahweh repurposed the festival in several ways.

First, here’s what Jesus said to those in the upper room on Easter evening. Luke 24:46-49, “46. . . ‘Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, 47 and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. 48 You are witnesses of these things. 49 And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.’”

We’ve seen multiple times how on Easter evening Jesus breathed Lord Holy Spirit on the apostles and disciples and opened their minds to understand what Scripture says about a Messiah who must be a suffering Messiah before He can become the victorious Messiah. So, here on that same evening, Jesus promised that at the end of the fifty day Omer, on Pentecost 33A.D., the apostles and disciples would be clothed with Holy Spirit power to take the field for the fourth quarter of the greatest contest ever played — the contest for souls.

Next, there’s what Jesus said to His apostles and disciples in Acts 1:4-5, “4 And while staying with them he [Jesus] ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, ‘you heard from me; 5 for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.’” So, Yahweh repurposed Pentecost to be a day of power and a day of baptism. This is why Peter proclaimed to the crowd in Acts 2:38, “. . . ‘Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.’”

Third, Yahweh repurposed Pentecost as a day to commemorate great signs and wonders from Him. Acts 2:1-3, “1 When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. 2 And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. 3 And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them.”

Fire from God appears numerous times in the Old Testament. Moses turned aside to see a burning bush that was not consumed. In the wilderness a pillar of fire from Yahweh stayed over the Israelite camp by night. Fire from God consumed the offering that Elijah

offered in the presence of all Israel on Mount Carmel in the contest with the prophets of Baal. Fire came out from God and consumed Yahweh's enemies both at Moses' command and Elijah's.

But there's another aspect to the fire. We read in Zechariah 13:8-9, "8 In the whole land, declares the LORD, two thirds shall be cut off and perish, and one third shall be left alive. 9 And I will put this third into the fire, and refine them as one refines silver, and test them as gold is tested. They will call upon my name, and I will answer them. I will say, 'They are my people'; and they will say, 'The LORD is my God.'" The fire of God purifies from sin and unites His people with Him. Therefore, it was quite appropriate that a sign of holy, purifying fire rested on the heads of those initially called to proclaim the Gospel. They would succeed in refining Yahweh's people with the fire of the Gospel so that many called on the Name of Messiah Jesus.

Then there was the sign of the wind. A wind from the Lord caused the waters of Noah's Flood to begin to subside. Strong winds blew a plague of Locusts upon Egypt at the command of Moses. Also a strong East wind opened the Red Sea at the command of Moses so that Israel could pass through and the Egyptian army could be destroyed. Thus, on Pentecost 33A.D., the wind sound came as one more sign that God was delivering His people from their enemies — sin, death and the power of the devil.

And there were more signs on Pentecost. Acts 2:4, "And they [the disciples and apostles] were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance." A study of the term "filled with the Holy Spirit" in the book of Acts reveals that Yahweh filled the apostles with His Holy Spirit whenever there was persecution, fear and insecurity in the apostles' path. Being filled with the Holy Spirit is the same as being filled with courage. It's the same as being filled with resolve and with strength. These are the very qualities necessary when faced with danger, fear and death.

Now, nothing more severe confronted the apostles on the Day of Pentecost than mocking that they were drunk. Still, that mocking could have greatly discouraged them in their initial attempts at proclaiming the Gospel. They needed infilling with Lord Holy Spirit to stand firm.

Then, there was the sign of speaking in other tongues — other languages. Ever since the Pentecostal Revival of the early 1900's much has been argued about this gift. I'll briefly share here what my study has revealed. The only definition of this sign to be found in Scripture is given by St. Paul in 1Corinthians 14:2, "... one who speaks in a tongue speaks not to men but to God; for no one understands him, but he utters mysteries in the Spirit." The key here is that tongues is always directed to God alone and not to humans. Speaking to God is called what? ... Prayer! So, this spiritual sign is prayer to God.

Now, it may be that some human standing by may be able to understand the prayer in another language because the prayer is being spoken in his or her language. But the prayer is still prayer to God. Let's check this out with what happened on the Day of Pentecost 33A.D. We read in Acts 2:5-11, "5 Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. 6 And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. 7 And they were amazed and astonished, saying, 'Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? 8 And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? 9 Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, 10 Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from

Rome, 11 both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians—we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God.”

Let’s carefully go over the last statement. “We hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God.” What is a person doing when telling the mighty works of God? It’s possible they could be teaching. However, in this scenario, something else was clearly going on. We read in Psalm 105:1-2, “1 Oh give thanks to the LORD; call upon his name; make known his deeds among the peoples! 2 Sing to him, sing praises to him; tell of all his wondrous works!” When anyone speaks of the works of God, they are glorifying God. They are praising Him. The people standing around the person doing the praising and glorifying are meant to hear it. But only the being who has done the work is worthy of receiving the praise and glorification. Therefore, telling the works God is glorification and praise of God, no matter who hears it. But, since such glorification and praise can only be received by God, telling His works is prayer directed at the Lord alone — prayer that honors Him and His great Name. So, the sign of tongues is no great mystery. As the apostle Paul teaches, it’s always prayer to Yahweh alone.

However, Paul teaches us one other thing about the sign of tongues in 1Corinthians 14:22, “. . . tongues are a sign not for believers but for unbelievers.” To back this up he quotes from Isaiah 28:11-12 in 1Corinthians 14:21, “21 In the Law it is written, ‘By people of strange tongues and by the lips of foreigners will I speak to this people, and even then they will not listen to me, says the Lord.’” And the quoted verses from Isaiah reference Deuteronomy 28:49-50, “[If you do not obey the voice of the LORD your God to keep his commandments], 49 The LORD will bring a nation against you from far away, from the end of the earth, swooping down like the eagle, a nation whose language you do not understand, 50 a hard-faced nation who shall not respect the old or show mercy to the young.”

Therefore, just as Yahweh sent the merciless Babylonians speaking a strange language to punish Israel for refusing to repent after He had sent so many prophets speaking Hebrew, so on the Day of Pentecost, the sign of tongues was spoken as a judgment against those who had crucified God the Son.

However, on the Day of Pentecost 33A.D., the sign of tongues turned out to be a merciful sign. For, when Peter preached the Suffering and Victorious Messiah Jesus raised from the dead, the people repented. Thus, we read in Acts 2:36-38, “36 ‘Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.’ 37 Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Brothers, what shall we do?’ 38 And Peter said to them, ‘Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.’” And, the result of Peter’s invitation was spectacular. Acts 2:41, “So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.”

Unlike Israel prior to the Day of Pentecost 33A.D., Israel post Day of Pentecost 33A.D. was able to repent of rejecting Yahweh and the Messiah He had sent so they could be saved. Apparently this was because Yahweh finally fulfilled the prayer Moses had made long before in Numbers 11:29, “. . . ‘Would that all the LORD’S people were prophets, that the LORD would put his Spirit on them!’”

Indeed, Peter announced the coming of Lord Holy Spirit when the people asked what the sign of tongues meant. He quoted to them from the prophet Joel, chapter 2:28-32 saying in Acts 2:17-18, “17 ‘And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my

Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; 18 even on my male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy.” So, the will of the Lord was fulfilled on the initial Pentecost crowd of 33A.D. The three thousand were the firstfruits of the harvest of Christ’s Church.

And Yahweh’s will has been fulfilled upon millions ever since. For, just as Yahweh, the Holy Spirit, opened the hearts and minds of the disciples and apostles to the suffering and victorious Messiah, so He has done the same for millions down through the millennia, empowering within them the faith to believe the Word about Jesus that was preached to them.

I close with two sayings of Jesus. John 5:24-25, “24 [Jesus said] ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life. 25 Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live.’” Without Lord Holy Spirit’s work none of us can hear the voice of the Son of God as He clearly calls us from sin, death, hell and the devil to eternal righteous life in Him. But, praise God, with Lord Holy Spirit, the Word of God not only makes sense, we also recognize it as “the Truth” with a capital T.

And today’s Gospel reading — John 7:37-39, “On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, ‘If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. 38 Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, “Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.”’ 39 Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive. . . .”

During the Easter season we’ve spoken a lot about the fact that Yahweh designed our physical bodies so that they might be His temple, His dwelling place. This means that baptized into Messiah Jesus and believing in Him, our bodies truly become inhabited by Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In this way, the living water of Yahweh’s righteousness can flow out of the believer, strengthening, encouraging and comforting whoever happens to be close at hand at any given moment. May the Lord do so, and more, with us, through us and for us. Come Holy Spirit. Come Lord Jesus. Bring in the final harvest and everything in between. Amen.

All Bible quotes are from the ESV.