

I've got to tell you, I've been looking forward to this Sunday. This whole year, we've been immersing ourselves in God's story, from the creation of this world, to God's covenant relationship with Israel, to the repeated breaking of that covenant, and finally to God's plan to rescue His people and make us a new creation in Christ.

But, early on that first Easter morning, the disciples didn't yet see or understand God's plan, and so their eyes were on the Lower Story.

"He is finished" they thought. They had just lost their leader and their teacher. And they were grieving the loss of the person who loved them and believed in them, and gave them hope.

Even though Jesus had given them a glimpse of the Upper Story when he told them that he would die and rise again on the third day, they just couldn't grasp it.

But on Easter, when he called Mary by name, and when he appeared to the eleven, and later when he met Peter by the lakeshore, and restored him by three times asking him "do you love me" "Feed my sheep" in each of these encounters, Jesus changed their lives forever. The old was gone, a new day, a new beginning, had come.

Well, today I want to talk to you about a new day for Community Lutheran Church and for you and me.

Each time we baptize a child or an adult in this church we say these words: "you have been sealed by the Holy Spirit, and marked with the cross of Christ forever" And then we say, "We welcome you into the Lord's family, as a fellow member of the body of Christ and into the priesthood we all share in Christ Jesus."

I want to talk to you this morning especially about that last phrase, the priesthood of all believers.

Because on that first Pentecost Sunday God poured out his Holy Spirit, not on prophet or two, not just on a few charismatic and powerful church leaders... rather, God chose to pour out His Holy Spirit upon every believer.

The Story we have been reading this year is not a story that ends with Jesus' resurrection, that's not the last chapter. And God's Story doesn't end with the disciples who followed Jesus 2000 years ago.

Because just as God sent the Holy Spirit upon them God sends his Holy Spirit upon the church in every time and every place. Just as Jesus' disciples became the "priesthood of all believers" because the Holy Spirit was given to them, we become a priesthood today, a priesthood of witnesses, because the Holy Spirit has been given to us.

On the Day of Pentecost, the crowds heard Jesus' disciples speaking about God's power in foreign languages they had never studied. Some people, stood back in amazement, but others sneered and said, "They are drunk..."

So Peter stood up before the crowd and explained the miracle that had turned these ordinary fisherman, and even a tax collector, into priests, into people who spoke about God's power.

"In the former days," Peter explained, "God's word was spoken only by prophets,"
 "but, the prophet Joel, foretold a day, when God declares,
 'I will pour out my Spirit upon all people, upon the young the old
 upon men and women, sons and daughters,
 and even upon those from whom you would least expect it.'

The church was born on Pentecost and it continues to be born in every place and in every way that God pours out His Holy Spirit.

Like today.
 Right here in this congregation.

The Bible teaches us that the Holy Spirit is our Teacher, our Advocate, our Comforter, the one who comes along beside us in our times of need, and intercedes for us, when we can't find the words.

But the Bible also teaches us that the primary work of the Holy Spirit is to create and sustain faith. And that's what God does in your life and mine, and in every person who receives the promises of Holy Baptism.

Over the next several weeks here at CLC, we have three baptisms scheduled. And each of these baptisms, happens to be of a young child.

Now some Christians who don't baptize infants might say to us,
 "how can you baptize a baby, they can't understand what is happening."

But Lutherans believe that the Holy Spirit has been poured out on each of us for a specific purpose. We have a calling to be witnesses to be the priesthood of all believers.

Today and each Sunday the Gospel is preached,
 is a day when the Holy Spirit is being poured out upon young and old, men and women,
 parents and baptismal sponsors, so that we might raise these children in faith, and so that we

might tell each person in this congregation, and in this community the good news of Jesus Christ – the good news of new life, and forgiveness, and salvation in Jesus' name.

That's what it means to be the Priesthood of all believers.
That's what it means to be witnesses, shining the light of Christ.

Pastor Randy Frazee wrote something important about witnessing that I think we are all wise to remember.

He wrote that "witnessing certainly includes telling others about Jesus.
But it is also expressed in how we live – in how we treat others."

Being faithful witnesses in word and in deed, each day of the week is hard.
It would be impossible if it weren't for the power Jesus promised.
Without the power of the Holy Spirit at work within us, we could do nothing.

But when others begin to see how our lives are changed,
when they see the hope and the joy and the peace God gives us through the Holy Spirit,
they are drawn to Christ.

I love thinking about those very first followers of Jesus.
and the believers who received the gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost - 3,000 new believers
were baptized that day.

They met together in the temple courts, but they also met in smaller groups.
They came together in hundreds of homes spread out all over Jerusalem.

And what did these new followers of Jesus do when they met?

Luke writes that:

"they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers."

They were sharing a very close fellowship with one another, and they generously provided for the needs of anyone.

They were a church family.
They prayed together, and studied God's Word together.
They took care of their neighbors.
They helped others, without expecting anything in return.
God has poured out His riches in Jesus Christ, and so now they were echoing that unconditional love.

That's what God calls us to do here, at Community Lutheran.

We are called to be witnesses to Jesus' unconditional love.
We are called to tell the story and live the story.

We are called to share our hope and joy and peace, not just on Sunday, but wherever we go all week long.

With the power of God's Spirit living within us,
God will use us to draw others into this life-giving community.

This where life as a Christian becomes exciting because our lives intersect with God's Upper Story. God works through you and me, to bring His joy and peace and love to all those around us.

How cool is that?

May God empower you by the Holy Spirit
to be His faithful witnesses this week and every week. Amen.