May 23, 10 Graduation & Pentecost Acts 2:1-8; 38, 39

THIS GIFT IS FOR YOU

Hear ye! Hear ye! The Word of God for the People of God. Hear ye the words of the Book of Acts through the writing of Luke about the Gift God have for you for Pentecost Sunday. **Read Acts 2:1-8, 38-39**

Most people like getting gifts. Under the tree at Christmas there are generally many gifts, especially if you have a large family. Throughout the year people give gifts for birthdays, anniversaries, special occasions, weddings and all that. Then there is Mother's Day, Father's Day and of course some of what we are celebrating today, graduations. Gifts! We enjoy unwrapping them, seeing what we have received and all that. It's just a fact. We love getting gifts. We love getting special gifts for no occasion at all. Sometimes a greeting card makes one feel good. A bouquet of flowers generally uplifts some, especially patients in hospitals, or that certain loved one, or that one that was in a play or musical. Or maybe a candy bar or buying lunch makes one feel good knowing someone cares. Hallmark greeting cards advertise their cards by saying "send the very best. Send a Hallmark Card."

Well we know God cared for us and sent us the very best, for he sent us his Son. And then when it was time for his Son to go back to his rightful place he went a step further and he sent the third party of the Trinity as he breathed into the people the Holy Spirit. You see, he still sends the very best. The Holy Spirit is

God within us, the counselor, the helper, the convictor, the wisdom of God, the teacher of God, the makeover artist and so much more.

Jesus told his disciples when he had risen from the grave to sit tight in Jerusalem because in a few days they would receive the power of the Holy Spirit that would transform them, and send them out into the world to present the Good News of Jesus Christ. This Holy Spirit which was promised would be within them to give them the strength that they needed, the wisdom to understand the things Jesus taught, and the power to proclaim it wherever they went. So the disciples and others that numbered 120 where in the Upper Room that day doing what they did for the last few days or weeks… praying. They were praying for the power to come as Jesus had promised. They prayed it would come soon. So they prayed, and while they were praying a mighty wonderful thing happened. The gift of the Holy Spirit came. It came as the wind and it blew in through the windows and filled that room but did not destroy or move anything. Then there was the tongues of fire that appeared and though nothing was consumed those tongues of fire fell on the heads of each person in that room and before they knew it, the wind and the tongues of fire seemed to take over their whole being and they were driven into the streets and they began to open their mouths and out came words of God's love for his children. People from all nations who were there for the feast of Pentecost began to hear preaching in their own language. It was a one on one type witnessing

as the 120 men and women in that Upper Room spoke to others a powerful message. Those around were confused, amazed, didn't understand what was happening. You see these disciples who did not know other languages were speaking so that they all could understand. For some it was puzzlement…for others they realized it was God at work. And a great crowd gathered around some saying these guys had begun to celebrate the feast a little early because it was as if a party was going on and the noise of everyone speaking at once was truly amazing. (Sounds like when we are home around my brother. We all talk at once.) But Peter filled to the brim with the power of the Holy Spirit, calmed and quieted the crowd and began to preach the message of salvation and they grasped every word he said. He spoke about Jesus. He spoke about how much love God had that he sent the promised Messiah to his people and they crucified him. But he was not dead. For on the third day something wonderful happened. When the women went to the tomb it was empty and angels told them that Jesus had risen. In fact Peter witnessed the risen Jesus, and so did the other disciples as well as many others.

And throughout that encounter the Holy Spirit began to work as heart after heart became convicted of their sins and tears flowed wanting to know how they could change their lives. (Boy isn't that something we all might like, a change in our lives. Wouldn't it be nice if we all asked the question, "What can we do to be changed?"?) Peter grasped onto the opportunity and told them to repent of their

sins, be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, and they would be saved. With great joy and with great praise, the disciples received each one who came to them to repent, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. The results: over 3,000 people received Jesus and the church began as they dedicated themselves to prayer, the teachings of the Apostles, to sharing in the breaking of bread and much more.

My friends there was excitement in the air as what had been promised by Joel came true. Hearts were strangely warmed…people repented…were filled with the love of God and the love of Jesus as <u>they came together in one accord.</u> And the power of the Holy Spirit that came that day has been around ever since challenging, calling, knocking on hearts, cleaning sinful souls, giving understanding and wisdom where it is needed. It's God's free gift for changes in our lives.

That gift my friends, is for YOU! That gift my friends are WITHIN YOU!

Let me share a few stories with you this morning. Thanks to a couple of emails these stories fit the occasion of today.

The first is a video. So listen carefully to this young lady as she tells her story. **(CHAR PLAY)**

I know she talked too fast in her rap message, so I don't want you to miss it so here it is again. **(CHAR PLAY AGAIN)**

The second one comes through another email. “Easy Eddie” was Al Capone’s crafty lawyer who kept Al Capone out of prison for many years. In appreciation Capone paid him well. He received a fenced-in mansion with live-in help and all the conveniences of his day. The estate was so big it filled an entire City Block. Easy Eddie lived the high life of the mob and gave little consideration to what was going on around him. His only soft spot was for his son whom he dearly loved. He saw to it that his son had all the things he needed, like clothes, cars, and a good education. Nothing was withheld. Price was no object. Even though Easy Eddie was involved in crime, he tried to teach his son the difference between right and wrong. He wanted his son to be a better man than he was. Yet, with all his wealth and influence there were two things he couldn’t give his son; he couldn’t pass on a good name or a good example. One day, like the Prodigal Son, Easy Edie came to his senses and wanted to rectify the wrongs he had done. He went to the authorities and gave up Al Capone and the mob. He knew his life wasn’t worth much now and within a year Easy Eddie’s life ended on a lonely street in Chicago. In his eyes he had given his son the greatest gift he had to offer, at the greatest price he could ever pay. Police removed from his pocket a rosary, a crucifix, a religious medallion and a poem.

Story number 2.

World War II had many heroes. One was a fighter pilot assigned to the aircraft carrier Lexington. One day when his squadron was sent on a mission after he was airborne he realized someone had forgotten to fill his plane full and he knew he would not have enough fuel to make it to his target and back to his ship. He was told to head back. As he was returning to the carrier he saw a squadron of Japanese aircraft speeding toward the American fleet. The fleet was pretty defenseless as all the planes were on a mission. He couldn't reach his squadron to tell them what was happening, nor could he warn the fleet about the approaching danger for fear of giving away their position. There was only one thing to do. He must divert them from the fleet. Never thinking about his own safety he dove into the formation of the enemy and tried to shoot down as many enemy planes he could. He dove and dove and dove at each plane until at last he was out of ammo. He then tried to use his plane to catch a wing or a tail of another plane in order to disable it. Finally, in desperation, the enemy took off in another direction and Butch limped back to his carrier. When he relayed the story to his commanding officer they checked his film from onboard and found he had destroyed 5 enemy aircraft. For that Lt. Commander Butch O'Hare became the Navy's first Ace of WWII and the first Naval Aviator to win the Medal of Honor. A year later Butch was killed in combat at the age of 29. His home town would not allow the memory

of their hero to fade and so today millions of people pass through the airport honoring his name …Chicago's O'Hare Airport….

What links these two stories? Butch O'Hare was the son of "Easy Eddie." One heart convicted by the Holy Spirit that led him to do the right thing so that his son would not follow in his footsteps… to another heart who saved many lives on those ships as he was willing to die so others could life. That's how a hero is born.

My friends, the gift of the Holy Spirit is for you. That gift can transform your life into whatever God wants you to be or do. That Pentecostal power is still being poured out in every heart that says yes to Jesus. It's within us. The problem is, we fail to turn on the key and let the Holy Spirit run our lives. We run our lives as if we have a engine but no key. We sputter and smoke but our spiritual life goes nowhere because we try and do it our way leaving God out. But that is not why God breathed the Holy Spirit into the members of his church. We are to be his witnesses in our neighborhood, our town, our state, and wherever we go in the world.

Here is an old hymn I never heard of but found it in a story of hymns. It's called "Pentecostal Power." It goes, "Lord, as of old at Pentecost Thou didst thy power display, with cleansing, purifying flame descends on us today. For mighty works for thee prepare, and strengthen every heart, come, take possession of thine own, and nevermore depart… Speak Lord! Before thy throne we wait, thy promise

we believe, and will not let thee go until the blessing we receive." Now listen to the chorus. "Lord, send the old-time power, the Pentecostal power! Thy flood-gates of blessing on us through open wide! Lord, send the old-time power, the Pentecostal power, that sinners be converted and thy name glorified."

One of our newer songs would be, "Fill my cup Lord; I lift it up, Lord. Come and quench this thirsting of my soul. Bread of Heaven feed me till I want no more, fill my cup, fill it up and make me whole." And then this one "Breathe on me breath of God, fill me with life anew, that I may love what thou dost love, and do what thou wouldst do."

You know they say when things get tough to stop, take a deep breath, breath in, breath out…breath in, breath out, and in many cases, that anxiety will be lessened. Today we need to breath in the Holy Spirit, and breath out the old life…breath in the new life Jesus offers and breathe out the old sinful nature.

You know maybe it's a God thing that Pentecost and graduation Sunday is the same this year. You see, graduates, especially college and high schoolers need that direction, that power as they either look for work, start a new career, look for a college and all that. You see, God has prepared you to be his witnesses. The question might be, what kind of witness will you be? That's why you need to unleash the power of the Holy Spirit in order to survive. So may it be today with our graduates and with this church. My prayer would be, "Lord do it again.

Unleash your power on those who have graduated already from college and those who are graduating from high school this year. Breathe into them your power and wisdom and May you lead the way.

Holy Spirit fall afresh on your church that we may be mighty witnesses of your power and love and mercy and grace. Fill us anew, and prepare us for a journey with you to go where you lead, to witness with our mouths and our lives so that many will find truth and salvation and be filled with your power. Come Holy Spirit breathe new life in us today….so may it be, amen." Remember this gift is for you. It's a gift from God. May the wind come….may the tongues of fire rest upon each head…may the Holy Spirit breathe new life in all of us this day. Let us rejoice and celebrate not only with the graduates, but with the church, for it's the churches birthday…..Happy Birthday church…and congratulations to all our graduates!