

Yes, Lord, I Believe!

Pentecost Sunday

May 23, 2010

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There is no mistaking it! Today is Pentecost! If the flaming red paraments don't give it away, then all of the things happening today in worship will leave no doubts. Parents and grandparents desiring to share the story of faith with their children; Baleigh coming forward – on her own free will – and declaring, "Yes, Lord, I believe!"; new members desiring to be a part of this community of faith; families making a commitment to spend 30 minutes with God every day this summer in prayer and Bible study. Yes, there's no mistaking it. Today is Pentecost!

So what is Pentecost? It is the day we celebrate the Holy Spirit. From the beginning of time, God promised to pour out his Spirit upon all creation. And on Pentecost, 50 days after Easter, God did just that. God rained down from heaven his Holy Spirit.

It was not like anything that the believers had experienced before. Some said it looked like a dove descending from heaven. Others said it looked like tongues of fire. Another said it sounded like a mighty wind. Whatever it looked like or sounded like, there was no denying it: God's Holy Spirit had arrived.

That Spirit becomes our assurance that indeed God is with us every moment of our lives. The Holy Spirit becomes our guide as we make our journey of faith with Jesus. The Holy Spirit acts like a gardener, tending to the seeds of faith that God planted in our hearts at baptism.

As we celebrate the Holy Spirit today, we realize that Pentecost wasn't just one isolated event 2000 years ago. The Holy Spirit is still alive and well in the church today. Although each of us feels the power and glory of God in our own way, there is one young lady who feels the presence of the Holy Spirit so strongly that today she will stand before God and before this congregation and say, "Yes, Lord! I believe!"

Baleigh, on the day you were baptized, God claimed you as one of his very own children. You were given the name "Child of God." God promised to love you unconditionally. God promised to watch over you and to provide for your every need. As you were anointed with the Holy Spirit, as the sign of the cross was drawn upon your forehead, God promised to surround you with his Spirit so that as you matured in years, you would also mature in faith.

Today, your confirmation day, you will stand before us and testify that indeed God has been true to his Word. You will declare, "Yes, I believe that God's Word can be trusted." You will promise to this community of faith that you will continue to be an active part in its life and ministries.

Knowing that faith is much more about the journey than it is the destination, today you will state your desire to continue to walk with Jesus, believing that God will shower his grace, love and truth upon you each and every day of your life. In thanksgiving for all God has done in your life, you will promise God that you will strive to be a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ.

St. Paul makes it clear that it is only through the power of the Holy Spirit that we can say, "Jesus is Lord." The Holy Spirit alone can give us the wisdom to comprehend how Jesus' death on the cross and his resurrection on the third day has anything to do with our lives. The Holy Spirit helps us make sense of the words, "I believe that through Jesus' death and resurrection my sins are forgiven and the promise of eternal life is mine."

The Holy Spirit also grants us the bold courage to be the hands and feet of Christ in our daily lives. As Jesus says in the Gospel today, "Anyone who believes in me will do the same works that I have done." Wherever the Holy Spirit nudges us to go, it is there that we should share Christ's love.

Confirmation is also about claiming responsibility for your own faith maturity. Baleigh, at your baptism your parents promised to raise you in a Christian environment and to teach you the basics of the Christian faith. Whether you wanted to come or not, Baleigh, your mom faithfully drove you to confirmation class. She fulfilled her parental obligations. Now God transfers that responsibility to you.

Today, you will promise God and yourself that in the coming years you will be diligent in finding ways to learn more about the Bible and the Lutheran faith. In your confirmation vows, you will promise to hear God's Word and to share in his holy supper. The only way to faithfully live that out is to attend worship regularly.

You will also promise God and yourself that you will continue to find ways to share your gifts with this church. A good number of the Children's Church teachers have bragged about how wonderful you are with the kids in Children's Church. That brought a smile to my face because I realized that you have discovered one of your God-given gifts. You are great with young kids. And as you so willingly share that gift with this congregation, God is glorified.

I encourage you to continue to find ways to work with the children of our church. The fact that you have committed to work with VBS again this year is a clear sign to me of your commitment to God and to Christ's church.

Baleigh, today is an important milestone in your faith journey, so cherish this day. Feel the presence of the Holy Spirit come upon you as we lay our hands on you and ask God's blessing upon you. Celebrate how God has claimed you as one of his very own children and promises to love you always. And trust that God has some great things in store for you – blessings beyond your wildest dreams.

My hope and prayer is that you will hear for yourself the divine “Yes” that God is speaking over your life this day. And upon sensing the power of the Holy Spirit at work in your life, may you fully claim the assignment God gave you the day you were baptized: to let your faith light brightly shine in your daily life that all people might come to know the love and grace of God.

May the words of the hymn we will now sing become your very own: Here I am, Lord. I have heard you calling... I will go, Lord, if you lead me...

God’s richest blessings be upon you this day. May it be a day that you never forget.

Let all God’s people say, “Amen.”