

PENTECOST - CONFIRMATION

June 10, 1973

Sermon by Pastor Peter Martyn

Nativity Lutheran Church

Wauwatosa, Wisconsin

"IN HARMONY"

"Anyone who loves me will be true to my word, and my Father will love him; we will come to him and make our dwelling place with him. He who does not love me does not keep my words. Yet the word you hear is not mine; it comes from the Father who sent me. This much have I told you while I was still with you; the Paraclete, the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in my name, will instruct you in everything, and remind you of all that I told you. 'Peace' is my farewell to you, my peace is my gift to you; . . . " John 14:23-27a

We are told it was a day of STRANGE HAPPENINGS, a day of GREAT amazement and confusion. We are told that tongues of fire appeared coming to rest on the people -- obviously, not something that happens everyday to most Christians.

We almost get the picture of a tornado driving through the house. And amidst all this chaos, these simple Galileans were chatting on in a multitude of languages -- some of which they'd maybe not even heard before. This just was not a regular-type gathering like they had had before.

You know, I wonder if there were a few people in that group who said, "Well, this is it. I'm just not going to worship with this group any-more with all this carrying on. God sure doesn't approve of all this noise, and fire, and incessant talking!" LITTLE DID THEY KNOW THAT GOD WAS BEHIND THE WHOLE THING.

Yes, it must have been a really moving experience. Probably UPSETTING for some. Probably REALLY EXCITING for others. Maybe FEARFUL

for still others. AND YES, for some maybe just outright boring and dull -- for there are those who just don't get excited about anything.

But for most, A REALLY MOVING EXPERIENCE -- people were moved by the Holy Spirit -- moved into a new harmony with God and each other.

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For better or worse, we've sought today to recreate a thin slice of that Pentecost day. We're wearing colorful vestments, we've combined the choirs, special festal music and banners have been employed, confirmation will be celebrated, mission flags, ballons and other special props ANNOUNCE THAT THIS IS A SPECIAL DAY!

Yes, we'd all like today to be a REALLY MOVING EXPERIENCE. We'd all like to feel the LIVING, PULSATING PRESENCE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. We'd like today to be an UN-DULL day -- a day of excitement - of joy - of celebration - maybe even a day spiced with a little chaos and confusion -- FOR ALL THESE WERE VERY MUCH PRESENT ON THAT FIRST PENTECOST!

Yes, today we should be very much AWARE of our total worship environment. It should be a day of sponging up SOUNDS, and SIGHTS, and SYLLABLES, and SYMBOLS, and SURROUNDINGS. But let us not get lost in any of these. For as great as they all are, they can distort the real meaning of the day.

I'll never forget my days at seminary -- how some of the seminarians GOT LOST IN THE TRAPPINGS OF WORSHIP. Some guys felt that if we didn't use the common cup, the Communion was invalid. Others felt we had to use the language of the street in order to communicate to modern man. Still others felt if you didn't do the right prancing at the altar, you were depreciating worship of the Lord.

Yes, the meaning of worship CAN GET LOST IN THE TRAPPINGS. We must thank God that he did not allow the people to plan the first Pentecost-- for who knows what they might have done if they had had control of the tongues of fire.

Jesus had promised his disciples that after his departure from earth God would offer them a special gift. He did not tell them when or where the gift would be given. But he did tell them that the Father's gift would fill them with his power of love - that they would receive a gift, offering them new HARMONY with God, each other, and all whom they touched.

And that STILL remains the intention of our coming together as Christians NOW. As we gather as Christ's Church, whether on Pentecost Sunday or any other time (regardless of the size of the group), THE PURPOSE OF OUR GATHERING IS TO SEEK A MORE HARMONIOUS RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD AND EACH OTHER. As our Gospel text states, we come here with the hope that God will make a dwelling place within us. And as he does so, we share his powerful presence of love KNOWN AS THE HOLY SPIRIT.

That does not mean that we are UNIFORM, GINGERBREAD CHRISTIANS. The fantastic facet of the Pentecost was THAT GOD TOOK A MASS OF VERY UNLIKE PEOPLE AND MADE THEM FEEL IN COMPLETE HARMONY WITH HIM AND EACH OTHER. That is the power of God, the Holy Spirit.

He can take you - a young blossoming Christian-- and if you let his love soak into your whole being -- he can take you and make you feel accepting, forgiving, and loving of a person completely different from you. He can create a harmony between you and someone you disagree with. That doesn't mean that you MAY EVER AGREE with that other person, BUT IT DOES MEAN THAT YOU WILL LOVE, FORGIVE AND ACCEPT THAT OTHER PERSON.

That is the power of Pentecost - the power of the Holy Spirit. The power of putting you and me in harmony with each other -- willing to love, to forgive, to help one another even when we may be totally different in background, sex, nationality, color, or viewpoint.

My young friends, that power of harmony is badly needed today. Each of you as you commit yourselves to this Christian lifestyle ARE SAYING that you have the will and desire to SPREAD this power of harmony. You know and I know that this power is needed in our homes, our schools, places where we work, and in our nation and other nations.

So, you and I have come here in search of a moment of harmony with God and each other. Let's assume that we'll all REALLY EXPERIENCE IT today the way the people did on that first Pentecost. Is this ONE moment going to carry us on forever in harmony with God and each other?

Some groups today seem to be preaching this message - Believe me kids, some people are going to tell you that once you've made a commitment to Christ as your personal Lord and Savior that you'll never have any more conflicts, or pain, or doubts, or temptations or troubles.

Well you tell them that they don't know the Scripture very well. Because after the Pentecost experience everything wasn't all smooth and peachy. The Book of Acts makes it clear that Peter and Paul had disputes about policy. Paul had such a bitter disagreement with Barnabas that they parted never to work together again. We need only remember our dear friend Martin Luther to know that everything wasn't peace and calmness after his Spirit experiences.

No, your commitment today is not going to give you an escape from struggle, or pain, or even doubts. But confirming your belief in Christ WILL GIVE YOU A WAY OF HANDLING YOUR struggles and conflicts in life.

As you confirm your faith this day, you are saying that you know that God in his love KNOWS YOUR LIMITATIONS AND IMPERFECTIONS. Therefore, you know that when you fall out of harmony with him or your fellow Christian, you know how to GET BACK INTO HARMONY. You freely confess your fault and you have the confidence of knowing that YOU WILL BE FORGIVEN. AND THAT MEANS A NEW HARMONY - in other words, Pentecost is celebrated by us EVERYDAY.

You have made this collage. You have said that these pictures of booze, and violence, and guns & war, and test tube babies, and materialism represent your visions of evil. I will shortly ask you: Do you renounce the devil and all his works and ways? And you will say: I renounce them. In other words, you will renounce the ABUSE AND MISUSE of the things in those pictures.

But you know, and I know you will be tempted to misuse those things EVEN WHEN YOU RENOUNCE THEM TODAY. It is at that moment that you will again have to confirm your faith -- you will confess your misuse so that you can again be in harmony with God and with us (who might be the ones who are hurt thru your misuse).

As individuals and as the church, we are not without faults, In fact, we loaded with them. But as individuals and as the church, we have a vision that was tested and proven **FAULT PROOF** on Pentecost. It was a vision first made known to us and fulfilled for us by a man. By a regular guy - a carpenter. A God-given man from Nazareth, a little insignificant town -- a man whose example of love showed DIVERSE peoples how they could retain their differences and still love and forgive each other.

We continue to look to the example of that man. You today through confirmation say: He's the one I will follow. All of us pray that you will remain DEEPLY COMMITTED to that man, Jesus Christ. Because we believe that his example of love from the Father WILL INSURE OUR HARMONY

with him and each other -- and will enable us
to love and forgive our friends, families.
and even foes when THEY ARE VERY UNLIKE US.

Being able to love and forgive others EVEN
WHEN THEY BUG US is the power of the Holy Spirit.

May God bless and keep you in the spiritual
presence of his harmonious fellowship, the church.

Amen.

THE DAY OF PENTECOST

Redeemer Lutheran Church
Milwaukee, Wisconsin
June 2, 1974
(Final Sermon at Redeemer)

"THE COUNSELOR IS ALWAYS HERE"

(Jesus said to his disciples,) "But when the Counselor comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness to me; and you also are witnesses, because you have been with me from the beginning."

John 15:26-27

How did you like your last visit with the counselor? Sounds like an inappropriate question for some of you, doesn't it? Yet I would venture to bet that each of us visited with at least a dozen counselors in the past week.

The biblical term "Counselor" means "helper" or "advocate" - one who appears on another's behalf as a mediator or intercessor. With that understanding, you and I can see that we've all visited many counselors during the week.

For many of us, our chief counselor is a husband or wife - that special advocate who's always there to help us through our anxieties and frustrations. Yet, for others - our chief counselor could be a mom or dad -- or brother or sister - maybe its the friend down the street or the latest steady -- maybe it was the guy or gal we went to the prom with last night. Or maybe the counselor is really by that very name - a pastor, psychologist, or psychiatrist.

Whoever that counselor is - it is a person whom we turn to for help - for reassurance - one whom we can trust and confide in - one whom we admire -- maybe even one who sends shivers up and down our spine.

Yes, we've all had occasions to be with counse-

lors of this variety -- maybe your counselor is sitting next to you right now. I can assure you that many of my counselors are seated throughout this sanctuary. How grateful I am for the helping hands, hearts, and minds of those of you who have been mediators for me.

And yet, you and I know our limitations as helpers. We'd like to often think that we're capable of solving all ills in life - yet experience has taught us differently. Each day we face anxieties and other barriers of life that go well beyond human solution. We've all known times when a helping power greater than the best specialist or psycholanalyst is needed. In fact, we all know that the presence of this power is a constant need. . . technology has not modified or replaced our need for this greater power. In fact, technology has often increased our need for this source of help.

In John's gospel, Jesus promises the disciples the presence of this Counselor. Jesus promises all who follow him the presence of this helper. And he promises these same followers that they will be able to share the power of this advocate. Yes, he has promised the Holy Spirit - and God has delivered. We gather today to celebrate and give thanks for the gift of God's power which breaks down all barriers of life.

The Counselor - the Holy Spirit - the power of God given as a gift and made manifest to all who act out Christ's life. The power of God in each of us making itself known in a variety of ways. But a power in God's people which especially is manifested in one gift. The greatest gift of all. The one gift that Christians are encouraged to covet. The one activity that we are encouraged to function with a competitive spirit - NAMELY - the gift of love.
and activity

That's the power of God - that's the power of Pentecost - That's the over-arching gift of the

Holy Spirit. Any other gifts offered to us, for all their value, when valued more than the gift of love, prove to be divisive.

It is evident in the story of the first Pentecost that the power of the Spirit is a ~~Love~~ **LOVE** that CUTS THROUGH all the usual barriers that separate human beings from each other. Barriers of sex, barriers of age, barriers of social status; for the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of unity.

The Holy Spirit, God's Counselor, is the Spirit that makes it possible for young as well as old, for rich as well as poor to speak of that Lord who has become their Lord. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of energy which through the creation of the church - the Body of Christ - can bring wholeness to that which has been divided - can bring RE-union to those who have been separated by the barriers of sin, arrogance, indifference, dishonesty -- and the host of other walls that we build between ourselves and between God.

The Counselor - the Holy Spirit - the Spirit of truth is God's energy in the church seeking to unify that which is divided. . . seeking to bring together the multitude of diversity in creation through the love of God.

My Christian friends, this may have the ring of much pious talk. I have been known for my share of that around here. But the Counselor - the Holy Spirit - through each of you has made the unifying energy of God's love MORE THAN PIOUS TALK for me in these three years.

And so I want to conclude this sermon by sharing my letter of thanks to the Counselor - my **Epistle** of thanks to the Holy Spirit who has worked through each of you. May His Spirit of unifying love SPECIFICALLY shine through

these words.

Dear Counselor,

I am writing in behalf of your church here gathered at 19th and Wisconsin, Milwaukee, Wis. and known as "the Redeemer." You have blessed and called me to a most rewarding witness of your presence. I take this opportunity to thank you. I would like to share with you just a sampling of the fruits of your unifying love that I have experienced here through your servants of Redeemer.

First, you have made known to me through the meaning "of being a brother in the faith." You have given me the Youth for Christ club - and you have enabled me to be their brother-pastor, not their herr-pastor. Yes, Counselor, through these young people you have taught me that I need not have to worry about my title - that I need not have to play the big-daddy pastor's role -- that they will respect me as their brother-pastor even while they call me "Peter."

Yes, Counselor, you have taught me that your unifying love really works when we become brothers and sisters - when we no longer hide behind our titles, our cluttered desks, and our masks of business.

Counselor - I thank you for your unifying Spirit in these young people. I pray that you will increase in all of us a greater desire to become EQUAL brothers and sisters in your love.

Then, Lord, I thank you for Charles -- here again you underscore the gift of being a brother in love. Yes, Counselor, you have shown me that we GROW most in your love when we relate as brothers -- when we drop our pastoral titles and just let your love hang out.

Counselor, I thank you for the unifying Spirit that you have allowed between Chuck and me. Yes, Holy Spirit, we know we've left some unfinished business - some incomplete conversations. But we part as brothers in your Spirit - not just working associates. I pray, Lord, that you will give all of us -- especially those called to lead in your church-- A GREATER WILL to first be brothers in love before we try to lead anyone, anywhere.

Then, Holy Spirit, I thank you for your unifying spirit in allowing me to accept being mothered and fathered by young and old here. Oh, I must admit, Counselor, sometimes I was up tight about being the pastoral son who was to be present but not yet considered knowledgeable enough to speak with authority. Yes, with those persons I wanted to say: "Enough of this condescension." But thank you, Counselor, for helping me to hold my tongue from flapping rudely - and forgive me for the times that I did let it flap.

Yes, Counselor, I thank you for enabling me to be a pastoral son & grandson to so many of your people here. I pray, Lord, that we might all learn to be LESS POSSESSIVE children and parents-- to learn that we are not called "to lord it over" anyone. We are first, foremost, and forever your SONS and DAUGHTERS. Help us to love and live as children in your image - for we know there is no greater unifying love than the example of your son, Jesus Christ.

Then, Divine Mediator, I thank you for your unifying presence which has made us ONE FAMILY. You have not allowed us to build up barriers of generations and status WHICH DIVIDE. I have been told, Counselor, that your Redeemer church here once considered itself an EXCLUSIVE congregation.

I thank you, Counselor, that you have broken down that barrier of exclusiveness. For you have taught us, sometimes the hard way, that exclusiveness divides and destroys - it does not allow for wholeness with all your people.

I pray, Holy Spirit, that we may remain ever one family with your whole church - regardless

of the denomination - regardless of whether ~~our~~ locale is Troy or Milwaukee.

Finally, Counselor, I thank you for the banquet set before us. You have invited us to share your unifying presence in Christ as we gather around this table. I thank you that you have enabled your people here to see the EVER-PRESENT need to share your love in this way. For this is one table where there is no exclusiveness - where we all receive the same nourishment - where your promise of love and forgiveness becomes a reality - where we gather as EQUAL and UNIFIED witnesses of your power in our lives.

So, now gather - unify - and enlighten us forever in your forgiving love -- UNTIL WE MEET AGAIN AT YOUR HEAVENLY TABLE.

AMEN

The DAY OF PENTECOST
Lutheran Church of the Master - Troy
(Rite of Confirmation)

May 18, 1975 "THE GREATEST GIFT"

"Then afterward I will pour out my spirit upon all mankind. Your sons and daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions; Even upon the servants and the housemaids, in those days, I will pour out my spirit. Joel 2:28-29

The day has again arrived. Pentecost. One of the three major festivals of the church year. Yet so often a minor footnote in comparison to Christmas and Easter.

How many of us would think of saying "Happy Pentecost" to one another this morning? We say "Merrry Christmas" and "Happy Easter," but so often forget that Pentecost carries the same festive spririt.

Today is the church's birthday - a day for a festive celebration. It is the day the Church received the GREATEST BIRTHDAY GIFT it could ever have - NAMELY, GOD'S POWER, the Holy Spirit.

God energized his believers on Pentecost. His spiritual energy expressed tangibly and visibly In Christ WAS INFUSED into the minds and hearts of people open to him. Pentecost ANNOUNCED God's presence to all people - And ever since, God's presence IS THE GIFT he has offered his Church - to lead, counsel, comfort, and strengthen his people.

What greater gift could we be given THAN THE POWER OF GOD - the power to lead, counsel, comfort, and strengthen through his love. Yes, Pentecost is a great day. For had there been no Pentecost - hristmas and Easter would have become lost in the archives - there would be no New Testament - no church - no preaching of the Good News of forgiveness. Without Pentecost, we would NOT BE GATHERED right now.

Pentecost - that dramatic moment when God called - gathered - enlightened - sanctified - and preserved the faith of his people -- that moment that his power was confirmed UPON THE CHURCH -- a gift of spiritual energy known through history as the Holy Spirit.

So - what should our response be in 1975 to this YET PRESENT gift of spiritual energy -- especially - confirmands -- honored members of this day -- what should your response be??

Your answer - and mine - is given in the second chapter of Acts. Let's recall how God's people responded to the pouring out of his power within them.

First - we're told that they responded ecstaticly. Now what does that mean? Quite simply, they were wildly emotional -filled with great joy.

So - our first response to God's greatest gift - his power - was wild, ecstatic behavior.

Today's your day to be wildly emotional -- because God's power is being dramatically confirmed in you. And that applies to all of us-- esp the Lutheran tradition. Too often we're not free enough to get a little ecstatic about our faith.

But you'll note in the book of Acts - that ecstasy alone was not enough. For the 11th verse concludes: "Amazed and confused they all kept asking each other, 'What does this mean?'"

Yes - our response to God's power needs to be an emotional one -- but not EMOTIONALISM only.

It was at that point that Peter stood up and preached the first sermon ever given in the Christian Church. So you see - our response must be more than feeling goose bumps and speaking in tongues. For - we must make sense of what God has given us - we must share the good news by explaining it.

And so it is - that God's power causes you to feel ecstatic -- but it also cause you and me to want to share his message of forgiveness with others.

In giving us the power of his love - (his Holy Spirit) - God has given each of us the gift of sharing that Good News. We may not all have the same eloquence - but we all have the gift of being able to tell others of God's love.

As confirmed members - it's my hope that you'll now be serious about telling others about your relationship to God and his church. Each of you has the knowledge and ability -- God has enlightened you so that you can tell His story.

That's a second phenomena of the power of Pentecost. These are relatively easy responses. It's easy to be ecstatic - and not too difficult to tell others about your belief in the love of God.

But the disciples response went further -- and so does ours. At the end of this chapter of Acts, Luke tells us: All the believers continued together in close fellowship and shared their belongings with one another. They would sell their property and possessions and distribute the money among all, according to what each one needed. Every day they continued to meet as a group in the temple . . ." And as we read on in the 5th chapter, we begin to hear how they were persecuted for their beliefs.

So, you and I can see that the gift of the Holy Spirit enables us TO DO MORE THAN SIMPLY YELL PRAISES TO GOD OR TELL OTHERS ABOUT HIS LOVE. Because God has confirmed his power to us, our third level response is one of sacrificial sharing.

As confirmed members of the church, your love for God goes beyond the level of a MUTUAL ADMIRATION SOCIETY. That might be o.k. for membership in a service club - but God's power

pushes
us to go even further. Because of his UN-ENDING FORGIVENESS, we respond accordingly as members of his church. In practical terms, that means that we share our gifts AND DO SO WILLINGLY with the rejects of society. And we do this with the hope THAT THEY MIGHT see a glimpse of the Holy Spirit within us -- the power of God working through us.

And so my young friends - receive today the dramatic confirmation of God's power -- be ecstatic about that gift -- tell others about that gift -- but above all, make it your sacrificial gift to others.

For you know, like all the rest of us, that God's power of love given to the church on Pentecost, is the GREATEST GIFT we can possibly receive and give.

Amen

PENTECOST

Luth Church of the Master

June 6, 1976

"GETTING INTO THE SPIRIT OF THING

"And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to talk in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them power of utterance. Acts 2:4

Recently I read of vandals breaking into a church on a Saturday evening and damaging the sanctuary. To add insult to injury, they sprayed graffiti on the chancel wall - the statement: "GOD IS NOWHERE."

The next morning was a gloomy one for the parishoners. The people just could not get into the spirit of things. Their eyes kept turning to the inscription on the wall: "GOD IS NOWHERE."

Among the congregation was a little girl who had just learned to read. She had not yet gotten beyond 1-syllable words. And she was really unaware of the reading that everybody else saw in those words. She just sat there during the service trying to figure out what that red paint said.

Then almost triumphantly during the service she nudged her mother and blurted out: "I know what it says, mommee - it says -"GOD IS NOW HERE!"

In her one syllable way, she had found God's spirit even in what was intended to be the opposite. And she proclaimed: God is *Now here*.

And that's what Pentecost is all about - GOD IS *NOW HERE*. Even though he has always been here-- it was the wild happenings of that one Pentecost that confirmed that God was really present -- present for those disciples and all people.

It took that great cosmic disturbance to confirm for the disciples that God's power was still with them -- even though Jesus had ascended to heaven.

Likewise, it took a little girl's disturbance to confirm for an aggravated congregation that God's power was still present -- even though the graffiti was there.

The congregation had been tempted into a spirit of depression and despair - maybe even vindictiveness due to the vandalism. They were in an evil spirit of things - especially for Christian worship. God simply used a little girl to disturb ~~the rest of the people~~ back into the right spirit of things. 5

And so God takes this moment also -- to see if we are still in his spirit of things -- but especially for you confirmands today -- God has chosen this moment to confirm the spirit he has already given you.

Your presence here says that you have gotten into his spirit of things. It says that you now desire to AFFIRM the Holy Spirit's presence-- to affirm God's power in your lives.

What will this mean for your future? Does it mean that after you're confirmed that God's power will spare you from any troubles or hassles or frustrations? Is that ~~what~~ this confirmation and Pentecost is all about?

We both know - that's not the Christian spirit of things. We need only look at the disciples. They had an ecstatic happening with God's power on Pentecost -- but that ~~downpouring~~ of God's power hardly spared them future frustrations. In fact, because they were so confirmed in their beliefs -- they were laughed at, spit upon, run out of towns, and even beheaded.

Yes - being confirmed - affirming the Holy Spirit and your faith hardly frees you or me from future temptations or hassles. There will be times when you will be tempted to "chuck" this Christian spirit of things.

That same temptation comes to all of us. Even as I think about yesterday - with all of its intrusions and complaints from the neighbors -- how tempted I was to reflect a spirit quite different from Jesus Christ's.

And you know and I know you'll have the same temptations. Temptations to be blasphemous and use God's name in vain - temptations to worship false gods -- temptations not to remember the Sabbath day -- temptations to lie and covet. You may know these 10 Commandments -- but knowing them does not prevent us from violating them.

Well then - where's the hope -- what's the point of Pentecost and confirmation?? There are many reasons - but I'd like to conclude by merely suggesting three.

First - confirmation is a moment which gets you ready to be set apart -- meaning gets you set to do God's task. These last two years and the ones before them might be called the ship building years. Today might be called launching day -- a day set apart to see how well the ship will float.

Your task is to keep God's love afloat -- to keep his spirit of things afloat no matter how stormy life gets. You've received his power -- his Holy Spirit -- a power transmitted through the communion of saints. Now - your task is to keep that forgiving love afloat.

A second way your getting into the spirit of things today is that you are now saying that your ready to reach out beyond yourself. The power of Pentecost is God moving us outside our selfish circle of things. To believe is to desire to give.

Getting into this spirit of things will never be easy -- but being a confirmed Christian was never meant to be easy.

Finally, being confirmed in the Holy Spirit means your NOW ready to do the unlikely. God's spirit - his power - enables us to do what others might not expect from human beings.

The devil tempted Jesus. He expected Jesus to give in. Instead, Jesus did the unlikely -- he overcame temptation. Martin Luther was an uncultured monk without position or wealth. How unlikely that he should reform a gigantic

-4-
Yet God gave him

institution that had gone corrupt. *and* gives us the power to do the unlikely.

Abe Lincoln - a crude, uneducated, melancholic lawyer - yet in 2½ minutes he surely did the unlikely - he summed up the form and spirit of our American government and led the nation toward God's spirit of love for all humanity.

Yes - getting into the Christian spirit of things leads us to do the unlikely. Yes - especially to love and forgive, when we would by nature be tempted to disaffection or destruction.

That's getting into a CONFIRMED Christian spirit of things. AND that's the commitment your making today. Like Pentecost centuries ago, this is your special moment to have God's spirit confirmed in your lives.

Your special moment to confess with all the rest of us -- and believers everywhere -- that GOD IS NOW HERE - and will always be present in your life. *So - let's get on with his spirit of things.*

AMEN

PENTECOST

Luth Church of the Master, Troy

June 3, 1979

"WHERE'S THE FIRE?"

(The believers) were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to talk in other languages, as the Spirit enabled them to speak. ... Amazed and confused, (the Jews of Jerusalem) kept asking each other: 'What does this mean?' Acts 2:4;12

I hope you've all had a chance to complete the Pentecost quiz. Obviously - the correct answer is #5 -- none of the above.

For the most part - much of our society is hardly aware of Pentecost. Unlike Christmas, Easter, and Memorial Day -- there are no colorful cultural myths clustered around Pentecost. In fact, many local churches even ignore it. And many preachers make no mention of it. Pentecost often goes unobserved.

But it wasn't that way in the New Testament community. Pentecost was one of only two annual feasts. In fact, for the first two hundred years, Christians had only one major season of celebration beginning with the festival of the cross & resurrection - and culminating fifty days later with Pentecost. Those were the only holy days of the early church.

In those days - Pentecost was a day of fire - a time of great excitement and joy. A day to express amazement at the grace of God. A day to embrace a New Spirit of God -- one that gave new vitality to their worship - and living - and preaching. A day in which the whole community IMMEDIATELY began to witness and share. A day in which preaching and witnessing had a new spirit and content.

Friends in Christ - Pentecost is a day of fire-- a day in which the church is on fire -- day in which God's people are turned on IN A NEW WAY!!

But is that really the case for you and for me. What does this day mean for you and me?? Is it just another boring day in the life of the church and our faith? Does it only have significance for these two confirmands before me? Are you asking yourself, "Where is the fire in this place?"

Like Trinity Lutheran Church in Clawson, does an arsonist have to torch the church before the people will really get on fire for the Lord?? Yes - in talking to Pastor Bowker this week - he said that the church fire has really sparked a new enthusiasm among the people. They are really turned on -- really showing a new faithfulness amidst their tragedy.

How sad that a church has to burn before people unite behind their Lord. It reminds me of the story of the church that was burning in the east. The town folks were running to see the church on fire. And there among them was a person who had been an inactive, lackadazickle Christian for years. As he ran, a church council member spotted him and said: "This is the first time I've ever seen you run to church." And the luke-warm Christian responded: "This is the first time the church has even been on fire!"

And on this day of confirmation, this story of reminds me of the young confirmand who was trying to quote the famous scripture: "Many are called but few are chosen." Obviously - it was a nervous moment. But finally the scripture verse came out: "Many are cold - and a few are frozen." I really wonder if this is what the confirmand had intended to say all along.

Because in many church places - the fire has long gone out. Thanks be to God that this has not been the case of the Master. She has had some days where her embers were dying. And she still has some among her whose wicks are easily snuffed out. But by and large she has not let the clouds of life put out her fire in Christ! Her faith has

not grown cold and dim even amidst her many disappointments.

But that was not the case for the early disciples. At that first Pentecost - they had gathered for prayer and to conduct business as usual. They were not expecting the Pentecost happening - they were not expecting any surprises from God. They simply had come for serious prayer - and for the business of electing a new disciple to replace Judas.

But this early church was living under a cloud of darkness. It was not on fire! It was not really alive! It was still in some ways feeling sorry for itself after Jesus' Ascension. It was feeling that it would never stand a chance against the Jewish religious establishment.

But true to his character - God surprised this early church! He literally showered them with wind and fire! He literally breathed a new spirit - a new conviction within them. And to this very day - no one has been able to rationally make sense out of that first Pentecost.

God likes to surprise us -- because we regularly need to be jilted from our idolatry -- and from taking him for granted. And so he really did a wild thing at that worship service that day -- the Jews even accused the disciples of being drunk. Needless to say - it was not just another boring worship service.

So - what does all that have to do with us? What does it mean for you and me. Well - hopefully it means more than the tongues - and the fire - and all the other external signs of ecstasy. These externals WERE NOT THE REAL MESSAGE OF PENTECOST -- they were only the window dressing. People who manipulate other people today just to get this kind of window dressing out of religion HAVE MISSED THE WHOLE MESSAGE! Charismatic religion is often just as phony as charismatic politics! It's people showing off to other people!

True charisma - the true fire of God - is a gift! The word in greek means, "gift of the Spirit." And the true fire of God is that gift which comes into our lives as a surprise. Charisma is the pure grace of God -- the undeserved love of Christ -- the indescribable power of the Holy Spirit! The goal of all of these gifts from God IS NOT TO SPEAK IN TONGUES -- but to respond to other people with acts of love.

Christians who do that HAVE TRULY RECEIVED THE GIFT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT! And at that first Pentecost - God came into the lives of those early followers like fire! His power became very personal - very intimate - very immediate - and very gripping! That's why we describe Pentecost as the Baptism of Fire -- because God breathed his power into the lives of those followers!!

That's what Pentecost means in the first place -- to be personally and intimately gripped by God's power. To be fired up with an unquenchable desire to perpetuate God's mission of love in the world.

But secondly - it means that our lives are lighted anew -- from a new source of things. Fire not only warms us -- but it gives off light so that we need not walk blindly. Pentecost confirmed that Christianity was no longer just another way -- no longer just another religion of the world. Through Pentecost - Jesus Christ was confirmed as the way - the truth - and the life for all peoples!

Finally - Pentecost empowered the disciples to tell the story of God's love with boldness THAT THEY HAD NEVER KNOW BEFORE! The breath of God blew them into all corners of the earth. Their hearts were on fire with Christ's love and forgiveness.

Pentecost never was - and never will be just another day in the life of the church. It is that

day in which we are reminded that God has put his fire within us. And because he has so fired us, we are burning from within to share his good news.

James's notes

And the proof of that pudding is best illustrated by ~~one of~~ our confirmands today. As with many areas of life - some people always dwell upon the negative. Such was obviously the case at this confirmands school. People were putting down the school -- demanding it to be more perfect than it was.

So it was that this confirmand wrote an article for the newspaper that goes throughout the metro area. And I quote the article: I've moved four times in the last six years and I'm about to move again. With all my experience in other schools, I've never found one as caring as this. This isn't just a school - it's a way of life. Unlike other schools, this one has a feeling of vitality. It has "Christ-togetherness" and it has caused me to take a step closer to my personal Savior, Jesus Christ."

That's the fire of Pentecost. A power that causes you NOT ONLY to witness on Pentecost -- but every day of the year! A fire which turns others on to the power of a loving & forgiving God! *accord. to the will of God*

Where's the fire? It's been given to you and me to share. It's the power of Jesus Christ within us - between us - and from his *eternal* Word. ** Sacraments.*

AMEN

PENTECOST

Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo
May 30, 1982

"COME ALIVE!"

Thus says the Lord God to these bones: "Behold, I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. And I will lay sinews upon you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the Lord."

Ezekiel 37:5-6

"Out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water." John 7:38

of Pentecost

Some time ago I read that vandals had broken into a church sanctuary on ~~the~~ Saturday eve and gone on a damaging rampage. To add insult to injury, they signed their destructiveness by spraying in large red letters across the front chancel wall: "GOD IS NOWHERE!"

The next morning was a despairing one for the parishoners. The people just couldn't "come alive." They felt doomed, depressed, and vindictively angry. During worship their eyes kept focusing upon the graffiti inscription: GOD IS NOWHERE.

Among those members that day was a little girl who was just learning to read. She had not gotten beyond single-syllable words. During the service she kept struggling to understand the words on the front wall. She had no idea that the expression was a hateful one,

Then almost triumphantly during the pastor's sermon she nudged her mother and blurted out loud: "Mommee, I know what it says -- it says, "GOD IS NOW HERE!"

In her one syllable way, she had found God's spirit in that place. In one simple expression she had turned despair into joy -- she had found a reason to rejoice over that graffiti: And so she proclaimed: God Is Now Here! She had helped that congregation to COME ALIVE again!

And that's what Pentecost is all about -- proclaiming that God Is Now Here ... that his power is in our midst ... that he has made us the temples of his power in the world.

Obviously, God's power had always been in that congregation, but the graffiti had caused the people to lose sight of God. Likewise for early followers of Jesus. Jesus had left them; he had ascended to be with the Father. That had left his early followers somewhat unsure of themselves. They knew God was with them, but they needed to COME ALIVE to that reality.

And so God presented them with a cosmic disturbance ... he brought in some wind and fire and other disrupting realities. He used these elements of disruption to confirm for the disciples that his power was still with them!

Likewise, a little girl took the disrupting reality of graffiti and turned it into a confirmation of God's power in that place.

Such is the message of Pentecost: God brings new life into situations of despair and defeat. Pentecost announces that it is God's will to breathe new life into dry bones. Pentecost proclaims the vision of hope and renewal for God's people -- God will not allow his followers to cling to the despair of the past; God empowers us with a new vision for tomorrow; he will not allow us to sulk in the valley of dry bones.

For the prophet Ezekiel the dry bones were literally the remains of the soldiers of Babylon and Israel. Their confrontation had yielded death, destruction, and despair. So God empowers Ezekiel to offer the people of Israel a new vision: one which turns the bones of death into new life through God's Word. God's Word brings an end to hatred and violence and destruction; God's Word seeks to renew, restore, and give new harmony to humanity.

As we celebrate this Memorial weekend, we are reminded of the many dry bones of our countrymen lost in battle. We are reminded that war is too often a necessary evil. And like Ezekiel, the results of war ^{are} ~~is~~ always the dismal picture of a valley of dry bones.

God's Spirit came on that first Pentecost ... and still comes today to give us a different vision of life. Life has not been

destructive

created to be vandalized or violated in a [^] way. God has created life as his most precious expression. Our lungs breathe the same air as the chimpanzee, but God has created us with another breath -- he himself has breathed into us, not just the breath of life, but the breath of HIS life. God has given us more than just air -- he has given us His Spirit, the will to love and forgive

And God desires that his church shall reflect His Spirit, not just the lukewarm air of the world. So it was that God created a cosmic disturbance for those early disciples: they had become a timid band of followers. They were afraid to tell the world that they stood for God's kind of life ... a forgiving, serving, compassionate kind of life. So through wind and fire, God breathed some new life into those disciples... and on that day some 3000 new followers ^{to} Came the Church of Jesus Christ.

God is seeking to do the same for his church today. He wants more than a church of dry bones. He wants more than a church of brittle laws and intricate systems of rules. He wants his church to COME ALIVE -- to manifest his Spirit of concern for the least and the lost and the lonely.

Is it any wonder that the Reformation occurred?? The church had become a valley of dry bones. It was made up of wealthy leaders who were only out to serve themselves. Martin Luther brought new life into the dry bones of the church -- he proclaimed God's Word, and lo and behold, there was new life in the church *even though it caused much disruption,*

Yes - new life always disrupts the spirit of indifference. The lazy and the lethargic had to be given a jolt of God's Spirit. And Luther became the activator of God's Spirit for that day. He enabled the church to COME ALIVE again.

That same prophetic voice of Ezekiel and Luther is still needed in the church today. For many in the church have become like a valley of dry bones: they have become dead to the message of God. Like the early disciples -- they need a little cosmic disturbance so that they might "Come Alive" to God.

And yet today we must truly thank God for those who continue TO REMAIN ALIVE to His Spirit in the world. Obviously -- we are among those ... and we should feel good about that. For it is no easy task to maintain that Spirit of commitment to God in a society which has grown apathetic and indifferent to Jesus Christ.

Every one of us in this room faces the daily temptation to join the valley of dry bones ... each day we are tempted to give up on God's Spirit. It is so easy to allow despair and depression and anger to become the ruling powers of our lives.

We all run the daily risk of joining the valley of dry bones. Esp as clergy, when we see no response from some people week after week, we can easily become despairly angry. I myself had been strongly tempted toward that anger in the past two weeks. Thankfully - a congregational leader was nearby to "breathe a new breath of God's Spirit into me." It is a moment like that which underscores that we are the priesthood of all believers. I thank God that he helped me harness my humanness.

God

Of course, we can all say, "I am only human," But God calls us to reach beyond mere humanness toward true discipleship. God offers us more than our human spirit -- he offers us His Spirit -- a power which enables us to deal with one another with patience, self-control, and forgiving love.

God calls upon us to manifest His Spirit -- to show one another that GOD IS NOW HERE ... not off in the clouds somewhere. God calls us to COME ALIVE with his Spirit. That was truly exemplified by an American scientist recently who was invited to have his pedigree published in "Who's Who." A major question asked of him was: Please list your chief titles & honors." That list came back as follows:

- I am a ① Child of the Creator
- ② Temple of the Holy Spirit
- ③ Image of God
- ④ Redeemed Disciple of Christ
- ⑤ Working Member of His Body
- ⑥ Member of the Fellowship of Saints
- ⑦ Candidate for Eternal life.

That scientist had "Come Alive" to God's Spirit. As we eat and drink and thereby breathe in the forgiveness of sins... let us "Come Alive" to the fact that GOD IS NOW HERE within us.

AMEN



PENTECOST

Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo
June 10, 1984 (Confirmation)
Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

"A GIFT ... TO GIVE AWAY!"

"And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days."

Joel 2:28-29

The day has again arrived. Pentecost! "Pente", fifty... fifty days after Easter. Pentecost - one of the three major festivals of the church year! And yet it is often such a minor footnote in comparison to Christmas and Easter. If it weren't for confirmation today -- we would have nothing to boast about relative to attendance.

I'm wondering -- how many of you greeted one another this morning by saying "Happy Pentecost??" Amazing isn't it-- that just doesn't seem to feel right! We have no problems with "Merry Christmas" or "Happy Easter," but only wierd pastors would say "Happy Pentecost!"

And yet today is the church's birthday -- a day for a festive celebration ... a day to pull out all the stops! It's the day the church received the GREATEST BIRTHDAY GIFT OF ALL-- it was given the gift of God's Power, better known to all of us as the Holy Spirit!

This was the day of a great outpouring of energy upon the people of God. God's energy was tangible and visibly INFUSED into the hearts and minds of people WHO WERE OPEN TO THAT POWER. Pentecost announced that God's presence WAS FOR ALL PEOPLE! It was God's gift to all people ... given in many different tongues so that EVERYONE MIGHT RECEIVE IT! And ever since that first Pentecost -- God continues to give this gift to his church ... the gift to lead, the gift to counsel, the gift to comfort, the gift to strengthen his people!!

What greater gift could we be given than the power of the Holy Spirit -- the power to lead, to counsel, to comfort, and to strengthen one another through the love of Christ. No greater power can be given!! This is truly a great day! For

had there been NO PENTECOST, then Christmas and Easter would have become lost in the archives of history! There would be no church ... no preaching ... no teaching ... no baptisms ... no Good News of forgiveness WITHOUT PENTECOST! Without Pentecost, we would not be gathered here right now!!

Pentecost -- that dramatic moment when God called gathered enlightened ... sanctified and preserved the faith of his people. Pentecost is that moment when God's power was given and confirmed upon his church! We recall today God's gift of spiritual energy grafted in our hearts and known to us as the Holy Spirit!

So what should our response in 1984 be this YET PRESENT gift of spiritual energy? /Especially confirmands -- what should be expected from such budding spiritualists as you all are?/

First, we should GET GOOSE BUMPS!! Or said more formally, there should be some feeling of grateful ecstasy! We're told that those first Pentecost Christians were bewildered and amazed! Put into the vernacular -- they were having a high! They had never experienced such an outpouring of God's power! They were really experiencing GOOSE BUMPS!!

When was the last time that you experienced GOOSE BUMPS IN church?!? Maybe you've never experienced GOOSE BUMPS in church. Isn't that tragic?!? No goose bumps for all this loving power of God! God heaves upons us the power to lead... to comfort ... to counsel others ... the power to strengthen and forgive! WHAT TREMENDOUS POWER ... and we respond to it with kind of a ho-hum feeling.

What's the matter with us?!? Have we become so caught up in worldly pleasures THAT WE NO LONGER SEE OR FEEL REAL POWER WHEN IT'S GIVEN TO US?!?! God gives us the real gift ... the real power ... the real thing: THE POWER OF HIS GRACE ... the power to lead...to heal...to counsel...to comfort ... to love and forgive! What a tremendous gift of power! And what should it do for us??? Well, hopefully IT SHOULD GIVE US A FEW GOOSE BUMPS OF GRATITUDE!! That's the least, at least!!

But we all know -- the gift of the Spirit gives more than goose bumps! Goose Bumps are Good -- but emotionalism alone is not enough! We again look at Acts and see that there was much more than bewilderment and emtionalism.

Peter stood up and offered an eloquent message on the meaning of salvation through Christ! The gift of the Spirit not only gives GOOSE BUMPS ... it also GUARENTEES GOOD NEWS!! Not only does God give us goose bumps ... he gives us never-ending mercy and forgiveness.

The power of Pentecost assures us that we will never be alone. We are assured that God will forever be our ever-present Counselor ... always with us to assure us that we are forever loved and accepted by Him! That's Good News... good news that every one of us needs to carry with us every minute of the day! God breathes his forgiving love into us continually!

Every one of us every day lives with hundreds of elements of imperfection and guilt, with rejection and separation, with wanting to do what is right but often choosing to do what is wrong! There's not one of us in this room who doesn't need a Counselor ... a Comforter ... namely, God the Holy Spirit. We all need to be assured that even in spite of our imperfection -- that God still cares ... that he still loves us ... that he still cares for us and accepts us! It is the gift of the Holy Spirit ... God the Counselor and Comforter... that assures us that we are still His ... still one with him and Christ forever ... still loved and forgiven!! Through the power of Pentecost -- we have been GUARENTEED GOOD NEWS forever!

Well - that gives us GOOSE BUMPS ... and GUARENTEES US GOOD NEWS! If we stopped here, our faith would be purely self-centered ... a mere ego trip! It's the third element of Pentecost that really makes a difference in this world. GOD CALLS US TO GIVE HIS GOODS AWAY!!

That's the real dimension of faith -- and that's the real essence of being confirmed in the faith!! It's not only a matter of getting the goose bumps or getting the good news -- the real test is GIVEN THEM AWAY!! That's the gift of confirmation! That it is no longer a matter of merely GETTING THE GIFTS FROM GOD ... IT IS NOW A MATTER OF GIVING THEM AWAY!

In confirmation -- we are not only called to give away the goose bumps and the good news -- we are called to GIVE AWAY EVERYTHING THAT GOD HAS GIVEN US ... WE ARE CALLED TO LIVE A LIFE OF SACRIFICE FOR THE GLORY OF GOD!! WE ARE CALLED NOT TO BE SERVED, BUT TO SERVE OTHERS!!

Today fifteen (15) young members of Hope (I hope) will feel many goose bumps because of the ecstasy of God's confirming power on this Pentecost! Today those same 15 confirmands will hopefully hear very clearly THAT GOD IS FOREVER PRESENT AS THEIR COUNSELOR -- always with them to love and encourage, forgive and assure them of the Good News of his acceptance!

But above all today -- these 15 young people take upon themselves a new responsibility -- THEY COME BEFORE US IN THEIR GLEAMING WHITE ROBES TO SAY THAT THEY WILL NOW GIVE AWAY THE GIFTS THAT GOD HAS GIVEN THEM!! That through the Holy Catholic Church -- they will make a concerted effort to share everything that God has given them!

That is the real power of God -- when he not only moves us with goose bumps ... when he not only gives us the assurance of us love ... but when he MOVES US TO GIVE IT AWAY TO OTHERS! That is the assurance that God's power is within us and through us! That is the assurance that God is more than a mere intellectual idea -- that rather he is a living and empowering force in our lives!

That is what both Joel and St. Peter were talking about when they said: "Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams; I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below." God shows his wonders and signs THROUGH US!!

On this Pentecost Sunday ... and every other day ... God breathes his Spirit within us! It is a power that gives us Goose Bumps and the assurance of Good News! It is a power that enables us to lead others ... to comfort others ... to counsel and listen to others ... to strengthen others with the love and forgiveness that we have received! It is a power that God has given us ... in order that we might GIVE IT AWAY!!

Let us celebrate the birthday of the church BY NOT ONLY accepting the gift of God's love ... but by continually GIVING IT AWAY THROUGH ALL THE GOODS THAT HE HAS GIVEN US!!

AMEN

PENTECOST SUNDAY
Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo
May 26, 1985 - Confirmation Sunday
Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

"PEPSI, COKE, OR CHRIST?"

"If a man is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. 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."

John 7:38-39a

Today is Pentecost - the third major festival of the church year. It is the day of wind and fire, of sound and water. It is the day of the beginning of the church. It has therefore become the traditional day to bring the new faithful into the church -- confirmation day. It is a day of new beginnings, new awakenings, new happenings -- a day to remove the doldrums from our church life ... a day for renewal, refreshment, aliveness, power to be celebrated.

Today, the specific imagery of the Gospel is upon water and thirst. We have all been thirsty at one time or another. We know the feeling. It was even a greater reality in Ancient Israel. But unlike Jesus' culture, our technology and industrial complex has given us more than MERE WATER to quench our thirst. We have PEPSI AND COKE. In fact, Pepsi even claims a whole modern generation -- our youth are called the Pepsi generation. I'm told that Pepsi has so challenged the Coca Cola industry that Coke has had to develop a totally new product. To be American is to know Pepsi and Coke -- they are life's thirst-quenchers. Of course, if you're like me, then it has to be Diet Coke. In fact, I doubt that anyone drinks more of this stuff than me.

Yes, Pepsi and Coke represent the thirst-quenchers of our world. But they are symbolic of more than pop. Let's take Pepsi and Coke one step further. In many ways, they represent THE THIRSTS OF THE WORLD. These two drinks symbolize the tangible thirsts of our world -- the thirst for material things, for wealth, for physical stuff, for the so-called real things ... for the things that we can control and seize and maintain with our own greedy hands.

Life then, for the Christian, is a constant struggle of thirsts. A struggle between the tangible thirsts of life -- the Pepsi/Coke syndrome ... and the intangible thirsts -- the spirit of Christ. Possibly no better way can I illustrate this on Confirmation Sunday than with my own "call" to the ministry. Confirmands have often asked: "How and why did you become a pastor? (Their parents usually say, "Why did you become a pastor?") Well I can certainly say "my call" was not a direct encounter or conversation with God.

In many ways, my call was not so much different from what you (the confirmands) are going through today -- the ongoing process of affirming my faith. God has given us the LIVING WATER in our baptism -- faith is an ongoing process of affirming it. But having that LIVING WATER is sometimes misleading. Sometimes we think once we've affirmed God's call ... then life is going to be totally different from then on. We think - once we've said "yes" to God -- then he's going to take care of all of our thirsts forever. No more struggles. No more cares. No more suffering. No more disappointments. God will quench all our needs and desires.

I remember well when I was a freshman in college. That's when I really made my first "real" decision to enter the ministry. I had thought about it many times as a teenager, but finally as a freshman I enrolled at Luther-Northwestern Seminary in St. Paul. At last, I was now covered. God would now keep me secure in his living water -- no more struggles, no more disappointments, no more let downs. From here on - it was easy street ... after all, I was committing my life to God.

Well, that lasted less than a year. At the beginning of my sophomore year, my struggle began. Her name was Virginia. She represented the Pepsi/Coke reality of my life at that time. Yes, you guessed it -- she really satisfied my thirst!! She was cute; she was sexy; she was full of life; she was affectionate and fun! What more could a 19-yr-old guy ask for? She was truly my life's thirst-quencher!!

Oops -- there is only one thing I forgot: SHE DIDN'T WANT ANY PART OF A PASTOR'S LIFE! She certainly didn't want to be a pastor's wife (I'm sure there are times Sue would now agree with her). All of a sudden it was a struggle between Virginia and Christ ... between Coke and Christ ... between my physical thirst for life and the spiritual thirst of life. Well, that struggle lasted for three years. And as you might have guessed -- Virginia won for those three years. But then she dumped me. That's always the reality of this world's thirst-quenchers -- they never last forever! In fact, if she hadn't dumped me I'd probably be married to her and never have entered the ministry. Needless to say, physical thirsts often get in the way of our spiritual goals.

But thanks be to God -- in baptism he pours his living water deeply within us. He generously offers us his power and his presence as a priority. Needless to say - I finally got over the struggle of Virginia. And for a while I taught high school. But then I was afflicted with a serious illness in my second year of teaching. Again, God's living water was not protecting me from illness. But interestingly, God's Spirit can use those moments of trauma to reawaken and fortify OUR THIRST FOR HIM. That's what God did for me. My

illness became a time for re-evaluation -- a time to again affirm God's presence and power in my life. That's what illness and tragedy can often do for our lives. It was again time for me to head for seminary. Certainly, now God would not let me have any more bad experiences like Virginia. I had paid my penance with her and my illness. From now on -- I said to God -- you take good care of me ... no more hassles, no more disappointments -- just quench my every desire!!

Well, it was my third year in seminary. I was about to begin my hospital chaplaincy. And as many of you know, I became the patient instead of the chaplain. The diagnosis was possible Hotchkins disease -- a great way to begin my ministry. About that time I was saying to God: "Hey, God, I've given my life to you and your work -- I'm not supposed to suffer like this. What's going on??" And God answered me: "You have received my power of eternal life ... it is within you ... you have my living water. You need not fear, even if you die." That wasn't a real easy answer to hear at age 27.

Well, since I'm standing before you in the flesh, I obviously made it through that crisis. And it was soon seminary graduation. And then my first parish in Milwaukee. God's quenching spirit was alive for me in that congregation through a diversity of youth and elderly ministries. But there were also struggles -- struggles of a team ministry, struggles of an inner-city congregation trying to stay alive, struggles of self-identity. I came to again learn in Milwaukee that God never said it would be easy once we have his living water. In fact, sometimes it even becomes more difficult. To witness, to confess, to sacrifice, to surrender to His will rather than merely live by the ways of the world -- this was no picnic!!

And then it was on to Troy, Michigan -- a totally new situation: a suburban congregation. Here was a very small congregation ... barely surviving -- and yet a congregation that really knew the meaning of caring and sharing and giving and loving. But this congregation was afraid to grow ... afraid to reach out to new people and new missions. The Spirit of God said: "Let my people multiply and grow to the ends of the earth!" But the people of the Master said: "No way God! We like it the way it is -- small, close-knit, comfortable, friendly, no new people to get to know, it's so much easier this way -- we don't want growth!"

But God's Spirit -- God's living water is not satisfied with stagnancy. God's Spirit is symbolized by wind and fire, by sound and water. These are symbols of renewal, reformation, revitalization, NEVER THE STATUS QUO. God wanted that people ... and all his church ... to bust at the seams. So he challenged those people to grow, to stretch,

to give of themselves sacrificially. And they responded! And Church of the Master grew -- in fact, in my 5 years there, the congregation tripled in size. Wow - things were really going great! It was really feeling good! Those people loved me; and I loved them dearly. I was really beginning to like God's living water in Troy.

But then God said: "It's getting too good for you, Peter. Too easy! Too comfortable! You're starting to get a big head! And then one day God said: "Enough of Troy for you; it's now time for Toledo!" And I said, "TOLEDO!!" Come on God, you can do better than Toledo for me! What good can come from Toledo??"

And God said: "Much good can come from Toledo!" And look how absolutely right he was -- 20 young Christians who today affirm their faith ... who today renew the power of the living water within them ... who today proclaim that Christ, not Pepsi or Coke, that Christ is the greatest thirst-quencher of their lives. That's your confession today! Today, you choose Christ above all others!! And we all say, "Thanks be to God ... that he has put his Spirit within them!"

But just like me, making that choice today (just as I made that choice almost 20 years ago) -- that does not mean that Christ will remain your highest priority tomorrow ... or the next week, or next year. Because you and I - we live among a stiff-necked people --- people who put the thirst-quenchers of this world far above Jesus Christ. Just like Jesus ... just like me, you will be challenged, you will be mocked, you may even be ridiculed for your faith.

Just like me, there will be some days in Toledo, Ohio when you will say to yourself: "Why am I a Christian? Why am I doing this for Christ? Nobody seems to care anyway! The people around here are far more interested in Pepsi and Coke -- in the material, the tangible things of this world. Why should I give my life to Christ? Nobody else seems to make him a high priority! In fact, I feel like I'm the only one -- I'm feeling like a wierdo, like an odd ball, like a strange one.

That's what the world wants you and me to believe -- that the living water of Christ IS NOT THE REAL THING. They want us to believe that Coke is the Real Thing. They want us to believe that Pepsi is for the now generation. They want us to believe that our investments in stocks and bonds are far more valuable than our faith in Jesus Christ.

But the world is wrong -- dead wrong!! Because God has said so through his Spirit. And who is his Spirit on earth? It is you. It is me. Not alone, but together as the holy

Christian church. His forgiveness and resurrection says so. His Spirit calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies us. We call that gathering the Holy Catholic church. Some people call it the organized church. And they say that since it is made up of sinful, imperfect people -- it is therefore worthless. But remember - the organized church is far better than the disorganized church ... no church at all! It's the only option God has given us. You and I cannot do without it ... even though there are times we can hardly LIVE WITH IT.

But it is still the place where we receive God's living water -- through Baptism, Communion, preaching, teaching, and the healing power of forgiveness. And Pepsi and Coke don't stand a prayer against these powers. These are the powers you affirm today. The wind of God's Good News - the gospel! The fire of God's forgiveness! The eternal bread and wine of God's banquet table! The living water of God's baptism! These are God's signs of living water flowing into us, from us, and within us. Pepsi and Coke are good for a temporary thirst. But only Christ can satisfy our thirst for eternal love.

You have made the right choice today. It will not make life any easier for you. In fact, sometimes it may make life's choices more difficult. But Christ will always lift you up and strengthen you, because that's his loving nature, that's his forgiveness. So continue to choose the living water. It's the real thing! It's for every generation! In fact, it's for eternity!

AMEN.

PENTECOST SUNDAY
Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo
June 3, 1990
Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

"POWER TO THE PEOPLE!"

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly a sound came from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues of fire, distributed and resting on each of them. And they were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance." Acts 2:1ff

It was almost a decade ago, but I have not found a better OPENER for Pentecost. It was the story of a church on the eve of Pentecost Sunday. Vandals had broken into the sanctuary and totally rampaged and ransacked the chancel. To add insult to injury, they signed their destructiveness by spraying in large red letters across the front chancel wall: "GOD IS NOWHERE!"

The next morning, a despairing and dejected congregation gathered for worship. But it wasn't a spirited assembly. The people just couldn't feel "that God's power was with the in that place." During worship their eyes kept focusing upon the graffiti inscription: GOD IS NOWHERE.

Among the members was a little 1st grade girl who was just learning to read. She had not gotten beyond single syllable words. During the service she kept struggling to understand the graffiti. She had no idea the expression was a hate-filled one. Then almost triumphantly during the pastor's sermon, she nudged her mother and blurted out: "Mommie, I got it ... it says, "GOD IS NOW HERE!"

In her one syllable way, she found what had been lost in that place. In one simple expression, she transformed despair into joy. Through her simple, childish cry, she had brought God's power back to his people again!

That's what Pentecost is all about -- proclaiming that GOD IS NOW HERE ... that he has given his POWER TO HIS PEOPLE again ... that his presence and power is wherever two or three of his people are gathered in his Name ... that he has made his people the temples of his power in this world.

Obviously, God's power had always been with those people in that congregation. But the graffiti had caused the people to lose sight of the power God had given them. Too often that's the story of the church - we attribute God's power to buildings and things that we have erected. And when these things are damaged or defaced, we act as if God's power has been limited. But God has poured his spirit into people, not concrete. So goes the story of those first disciples. Jesus had just ascended to be with the Father. God's power was still present in Jesus' followers, but they needed tangibility and touchability to overcome their insecurity and grief. They needed a renewed CONFIRMATION that God's power was still with them.

And so God gave them what he had promised -- a cosmic disturbance of great proportions. He offered a freight train sized wind, tongues of fire dancing on heads of disciples, a United-Nations style language summit, cries of amazement mingled with yelps of mockery, and a powerful sermon by Peter that resulted in 3000 baptisms on the spot. In short, he used elements of disruption in order to confirm that his power was still present with his people!

Likewise, God used a little girl, hardly capable of reading, to disrupt the reality of graffiti and turn it into a re-confirmation of his power in that place.

God continues to use Pentecost as a disrupting day ... a day to disrupt OUR ROUTINE WORSHIP and remind us that he is not only the God of creation in nature ... not only the God of redemption in Jesus ... but also the God of TRANSFORMATION PRESENT WITHIN US ... HERE AND NOW. He has given POWER TO HIS PEOPLE. But the question facing us not only on Pentecost but every day - how does he confirm the presence of his power? How do we really know that HE IS HERE ... WITHIN US ... AMONG US ... BETWEEN US?!?!

Quite simply - he offers us three sources of his power - his VOICE, his FELLOWSHIP, AND his ANSWER TO PRAYER. First he gives us his VOICE. There is no greater power of God given to people than the ability to speak and understand his Word. No other living creature is given this gift - the VOICE OF GOD. On that first Pentecost, we're told that there were devout men from every nation under heaven in Jerusalem. Yet each person heard God's Word in his own language. The voice of the gospel is not a one-size-fits-all message. It is always articulated with regional, ethnic, cultural, and racial accents and overtones so that it can be fully appreciated and comprehended by each person. So it is that for some it is moving spirituals while others like lilting plainsong ... for others its gospel rock or possibly chanted liturgy ... still others its metrical psalms or maybe even the Salvation Army brass. To each is given a manifestation of the Spirit for his or her own unique, denominational enlightenment; but it is the same Spirit given to all for the upbuilding of the common good.

But let us not diminish God's voice to gifts of preaching, teaching or singing - important as they are. If God's voice were only the province of clergy, choirs, and Sunday School teachers ... there would be a great shortage of divine energy in this world. Pentecost made clear that God's voice is powerfully present in all his people -- it is heard when you give comfort to the sick or bereaved, when you offer truth and guidance to your children who are still searching, when you announce healing in places of racial tension, when you pray for and visit those imprisoned or homebound, when you confront corporate exploitation that pollutes or makes profits at unfair human cost, when you offer grace and forgiveness to those seeking release from guilt or silence.

So Pentecost confirms that God's VOICE is a gift to all his people ... and there is great power in any place and every place when people speak with his Voice. But Pentecost also confirms that God's power is not found in isolation, but through the FELLOWSHIP OF BELIEVERS. God's speech is heard and power is felt when people are in community ... in relationship to other people. It is through the gathering of the body of Christ ... through his caring fellowship, that you and are are renewed and uplifted by his power.

General Wm. Westmoreland was once reviewing a platoon of paratroopers in Vietnam. As he went down the line, he asked each of them the same question: "Son, how do you like jumping? The first answered, "Love it, sir!" Again, "how do you like jumping?" And the next answered, "The greatest experience of my life, sir!" He came to the third, "How do you like jumping?" "I hate it, sir!" Westmoreland quickly responded, "Then, why do you do it?" "Well sir," he said, "I just really enjoy being around guys who love to jump!"

There may be many reasons why we've joined the church, but I hope the main one is that we just love to be around people who love Jesus Christ. I don't always like all the things that you do and say, but I love being around you when you're sharing the gospel of Christ. And I'm certain that you don't always like all the things that I do and say, but I hope that you love being around me when I'm sharing the gospel of our Lord. That's the power of this fellowship: WE MAY SOMETIMES EVEN RESIST BEING HERE, BUT WE JUST LOVE BEING AROUND ONE ANOTHER WHEN THE LOVE OF CHRIST IS BEING SHARED IN WORD AND SACRAMENT.

Obviously, this is not a perfect fellowship of Jesus Christ. But it is the only body of people in this world who gather for one expressed purpose: TO SHARE THE GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT - namely - love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Against these there is no law. There is no greater power that renews and uplifts this world than A FELLOWSHIP WHICH IS COMMITTED TO SHARING THESE GIFTS.

So, Pentecost confirms that God's VOICE and FELLOWSHIP IS OURS - but it also confirms that God's power is present through the PRAYERS OF HIS PEOPLE. Many of you have heard that some of the fastest growing churches in the world are in South Korea. Richard Wilke in his study of churches tried to question a Korean pastor about the marvelous growth of the Christian Church in Korea. He asked about class meetings, bible studies, committee work, and other strategies used for fledging congregations. In frustration the Korean pastor threw up his hands and said: "You American all alike - you want to know about our programs, but you never ask about our prayers." Prayer is the resource of the church that causes us to take heart of the issues for which we pray.

Pastor Eric Ritz noted that some of the greatest moments of history occurred when Christians prayed so intently that God was able to use them as answers to their own prayers. That's always the intent of PRAYER - we pray so that we might be an answer to our own petitions. Too often too many people pray for God or someone else to give them all the answers. We pray so that we might link our spirits with God's and thereby be moved to become God's power for our prayers.

Or to be specific: Albert Schweitzer prayed for God to save the natives of Africa and God said to Albert: "I want you to help me." Mother Teresa prayed for God to redeem the needy of India and God said to her: "Mother Teresa, I cannot do it without your help." Martin Luther King Jr. prayed for God to free his people in America and God answered: "Martin, it will not be done without your help!" Every time Christians pray, God looks for someone from that fellowship to be the answer to that prayer. Maybe that is why so many of us are really reluctant to pray; real prayer engages us to fulfill the will and purpose of God. Prayer is God's power because it strengthens us to act and to do the will of God as his holy people. Any other kind of prayer is just mouthing religious words to sound holy and pious.

Early in this century, there was a remarkable Methodist bishop named Arthur J. Moore. Moore pastored some of the largest Methodist churches in the South before he became a bishop. Over a period of several years, at least one person genuinely converted to Christianity every Sunday in his church.

One of Moore's friends was visiting one Sunday and was astounded by that kind of power. He asked, "How do you do it?" Moore said, "Come downstairs with me." He took the visitor to the basement, where seventy men were fervently praying before the worship service. When they finished this 15-minute prayer service, the 70 men quietly walked upstairs into the service. Moore took his friend upstairs and said, "Notice where they sit." His friend looked out and said, "What do you mean? They're scattered all over the congregation!!" Moore replied, "Thanks be to God - that's the power of prayer in practice. Where each one of them sits down, he will be the center of warmth for God's power. And if anyone has come here frozen in sin or guilt or fear, that person will leave thawed by the power of grace and forgiveness." Arthur Moore knew that the church gets its power "of being God's presence" by praying for it.

Today, Pentecost, 1990 - God again disrupts our mundance lives by sending a blast of his breath into this place. He has but one purpose for doing this - TO REMIND US THAT HE IS HERE WITHIN US ... THROUGH THE POWER OF HIS WORD FROM OUR VOICES, FROM OUR FELLOWSHIP, AND FROM OUR PRAYERS. So let us now act according to our prayers - by serving as the voices and fellowship of our Lord.

AMEN.

PENTECOST - 1993
Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo
May 30, 1993
Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

"CHEERS OF CHURCH?"

When the day of Pentecost had come, the believers were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like a rush of violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared and rested on each of them. (And) all of them were filled with the Holy Spirit ..." Acts 2:1-2

CHEERS has come and gone. We're told that millions of Americans tuned into the final episode; it was rated 20th best TV show of all time; and the watchers either cheered or lamented the final outcome for those characters who had visited our living rooms for 11 yrs. But for me, the big question was: WHY ALL THE HYPE AND HYSTERIA OVER CHEERS? There have been many good sit coms that have come and gone without even a word of their demise. (you want some good sit coms - travel with confirmands for 250 miles) But rarely have we seen the kind of attention given to any other final episode. And the more I thought about it - the more I thought it must have had something to do with the basic human need for a community -- a place where as the song says ... YOU WANNA GO BECAUSE PEOPLE ARE ALL THE SAME ... AND EVERYBODY KNOWS YOUR NAME. For better or worse, the Cheers saloon was a little oasis of community in a segregated world of isolation. Going to the cheers bar was the antidote for social epidemics of isolation and loneliness so prevalent in American culture. Cheers at least represented a place of relationship and identity and humor and friendliness WHERE PEOPLE WERE ALL THE SAME ... AND EVERYBODY KNOWS YOUR NAME.

Isn't that what we're all looking for ... A PLACE WHERE WE FEEL ONENESS WITH OTHERS ... AND EVERYBODY KNOWS OUR NAME. That's the missing dimension of life in so many places today. In fact, Suzanne Gordon in her book, Lonely in America, says that because "of the fast track of life today in America, loneliness has become the main fallout. What was once a problem only spoken of by poets and prophets has now become an almost permanent condition for millions of Americans -- not only for the old and divorced but also for men & women filling singles bars and encounter groups, for adolescents running away from home, for corpore transients who move every two or three years, for people calling suicide crisis lines in search of someone to talk to. Knowing no limits of class, race or age - loneliness has become the great leveler -- the new American tradition.

Gordon goes on to say that 40 million Americans change their residence every year -- and that on the average, most of us will move 14 times in our lifetimes. She says this fantastic mobility has caused us great reluctance to even "get to know our neighbors." She says, "It's not like it used to be - where people lived in one place for years and years ... and when a new neighbor moved in, you brought them a homemade pie or casserole. Today, the attitude is,

'why make any effort to welcome a new neighbor -- they'll be gone next year anyway!'"

Louise Bernikow uplifts the same theme in her book, Alone in America. She says that loneliness has become such an epidemic, that merchandizers readily exploit it to sell their products. Is it any wonder that AT&T says, "reach out and touch someone?" And the beer ads always have a fun loving group drinking and carrying on. Bernikow concludes: "Sellers of goods are increasingly aware of our vulnerability; so loneliness becomes the button to push to make us buy more."

Bernikow continues that "life has become too privatized -- we're too wrapped up in ourselves and our pursuits of material stuff. We no longer encourage people to value other people. The TV, the computer, the instant bank-teller allow us to do without people what we used to have to do with them. She says that even VCR's have caused many of us "to become isolated in our apartments" rather than out and about interacting at the movies. All this leads her to conclude: "What's really needed to fill the "loneliness" gap today is not necessarily a boyfriend or a girlfriend, but the creation of a community -- a place where people can have membership in something bigger than themselves."

SO, WHERE SHOULD WE ANCHOR OUR MOST IMPORTANT LIFE MEMBERSHIPS? Where is that place where membership is bigger than the self? That's not only a question for the confirmands today, but for all of us. Woi we give our loyalty to memberships in communities like CHEERS, OR LIKE THE CHURCH?

Well, both of these communities offer SOMTHING BIGGER THAN THEMSELVES - both offer relationships; both offer support; both are places where we can eat and drink; both provide programs and fellowship; and both help us feel less isolated and alone. So, does it make any difference whether we gather here on Sunday morning ... or in the basement of Cheers on Monday thru Saturday night? (confirmands have some pretty strong feelings about THE BASEMENT OF Due's pizzeria!)

Pentecost (and confirmation) tells us that there is a difference between the Cheers community and the Church community. Cheers is like so many other human institutions and social groups. It has the power to warm you up with a few beers, a few hot numbers, & a few logs in the fireplace; but it only gives you a short-term buzz. Like Diane & Sam, one day you're the hottest number around; the next day you're a used-up nobody who may soon be suffering from AIDS. One day you think the whole world is in love with you; the next day when the hangover is over, you find out that the whole world has left you all alone again for the umpteenth time.

As one author has stated, that's not the kind of warmth you get in the church. It is not enough to have a little heart-throb or goosebumps for God in church; we come to

to be set on fire with a message and a mission: TO DECLARE LOVING WORKS THERE ARE MARVELOUS, MIRACULOUS, MIND-BOGGLING! Unlike the many one-night stands of Cheers, God does not cozy up to us on Sunday morning and then forget about us the rest of the week. God says, I will pour out my spirit upon you and you will be confirmed forever to do my will. You will see new visions and dream new dreams for your life. You will never be alone again once you have been fired up by my spirit; there will always be somebody nearby for whom to pray, to care, to share, to serve, to uplift, to be brought home.

The big question is the same on Pentecost or confirmation day or any other day of our Christian lives: WHAT AM I FULL OF??? Am I just filled with myself ... always looking for attention, always needing to be touched & loved, always demanding all the credit for every good deed, always wanting others to see how much I shine? Regretably, that's what attracts many people to places like Cheers. They are seeking only to fill up themselves -- with beer, with boasting, and usually with a fair amount of FLUBBER! They are looking for a life only for themselves. Their motto for living is - "more, more, more for me, me, me!"

Obviously, that is not the mission or the message of the church. Here the question is: Am I FILLED SUFFICIENTLY WITH GOD'S SPIRIT? That's why young people make a decision to be confirmed: BECAUSE THEY HAVE LEARNED THAT LIFE IS MORE THAN JUST BEING FULL OF YOURSELF. There is a greater power than self to be filled with. It is the Spirit of God! In Galatians, Paul said the fruits of that Spirit are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Now which one of us does not want to be filled with these dimensions of the spirit?

Is it any wonder that after three grueling levels of catechism, young people choose THE CHURCH rather than CHEERS? They do this because they WANT TO BE filled with the fruits of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness ... they WANT TO BE filled with the Spirit of God -- THEY WANT TO NEVER WORRY ABOUT BEING ALONE AGAIN. People who are filled with God's spirit never have any trouble finding a community of caring and giving people. And it's always a community that has a mission and message that is bigger than all of the people combined in it. In fact, that's why we're here in CHURCH today rather than in the CHEERS bar. Because we have been filled with more than mere alcoholic spirits -- we have had God's spirit breathed into us.

And what is that spirit really like? Well, when the disciples gathered in that room that Easter evening, they were full of fear and all alone. They had betrayed and denied and deserted the very Lord that had given his life for them. And what did that Lord offer to them when he entered that room for the first time after his resurrection? Had it been you or me -- we would have probably chewed out those friends for deserting and denying us in our greatest hour of

need. We would have offered the spirit of retribution! But Jesus breathed on them and called them each by name saying: "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, so I send you. Receive the Holy Spirit: now, go and forgive as you have been forgiven!" That is the spirit of Pentecost; that is the spirit of Confirmation; that is the spirit of the Church! It is a spirit which gives new life and new breath and new vitality to that which has become dead and full of fear! It is a spirit of bonding and togetherness (like in Chicago these last 3 days); that spirit was graphically shared by a paratrooper as Gen. Wm. Westmoreland was reviewing a platoon about to jump in Viet Nam.

As he went down the line, he asked each paratrooper the same question: "Son, how do you like jumping?" The first answered: "Love it, Sir!" Again, "Son, how do you like jumping?" And the second answered: "The greatest experience of my life, sir!" And to the third: "Son, how do you like jumping?" "I hate it, Sir!" Westmoreland quickly responded: "Then, why do you do it?!" "Well, sir, I just really enjoy being around guys who love to jump!" (I'm sure if I asked each confirmed today: HOW DO YOU LIKE CHURCH? they might say: "I hate it, Pastor! They why are you here? Because I love to be around people who love to love like Christ!")

There are many reasons to confirm your faith in God -- but the main reason to become a confirmed member of the church is that there is NO ONE greater to be around than A LORD WHO BREATHES ON US AND CALLS US EACH BY NAME ... A LORD WHO DOESN'T HAVE BAD BREATH, OR DOESN'T GET TANKED UP AT A BAR LIKE CHEERS;... BUT A LORD WHO BREATHES HIS POWER INTO OUR LIVES ... AND CALLS US EACH BY NAME AND SAYS: JOSH, PEACE BE WITH YOU; CHELSEA, PEACE BE WITH YOU; LIZ, PEACE BE WITH YOU; ANDREW, PEACE BE WITH YOU; JULIE, PEACE BE WITH YOU; JILL, PEACE BE WITH YOU; JEFF, PEACE BE WITH YOU; CHAD, PEACE BE WITH YOU; JOHN, PEACE BE WITH YOU; JEFF, PEACE BE WITH YOU; KARL, PEACE BE WITH YOU; GRETCHEN, PEACE BE WITH YOU; MIKE, PEACE BE WITH YOU; MOLLY, PEACE BE WITH YOU; LAURA, PEACE BE WITH YOU; BRITTANY, PEACE BE WITH YOU! A LORD WHO SAYS: "STICK WITH ME AND THE CHURCH ... and you will never be alone again!!"

AMEN.

PENTECOST (CONFIRMATION)

Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo

June 4, 1995

Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

THIS
"GET  LIFE!"

As I come ever closer to 53, aging has not altered "in the least" one of my most favorite involvements of ministry: **retreating & celebrating with our teens.** Going to Chicago w/16 confirmands last weekend still rates **as one of the most exhilarating activities of my pastoral ministry.** Even Larry, who isn't a teen idol, felt some appreciation for the exuberance of our teens, esp. at Ed Debevis. Yet for me, catechism teens still reflect one of the traits long buried by most of us adults: **THEY ARE GRAPHICALLY & SOMETIMES PAINFULLY HONEST!**

That was certainly the case last weekend in Chicago. The real significance of any trip with teens is not the planned activities (even Cubs games get boring). *The real significance is what happens between the "planned activities" --the time at the pool, the walking down Michigan Ave, the waiting to see "Dumb & Dumber on the Movie channel, the time traveling in the vans.* Those are the times that teens will often "speak the whole truth, and nothing but the truth." During one of those times last weekend, Debbie and I were doing our normal thing - **listening and relating.** In addition to telling us some painful challenges with parents and school demands for perfection -- we were discussing how some people just never seem "to be connected." Some people are always "on the fringe" -- "wanting to be separate; apart from others." At that point, one of the kids said to us: **"Those kind of people need to GET A LIFE!"** I don't think she was aware of how profound she had been theologically. Because "getting a life" is the whole mission of the Christian Church. Or more specifically, "getting a life in the Spirit" is the whole purpose of becoming a Christian. That was the meaning and essence of Pentecost: **believers were given "the Life" -- "a life filled with the Holy Spirit."**

But what does it mean to "GET A LIFE?" - "a life with the Spirit?" Well, the book of Acts says that it's **a life "under the influence."** That's right - the first Christians were accused of "being drunk" because they **"got this life."** Obviously, they were not "drunk." But they were "under the influence" of a different spirit. C.S. Lewis explains it this way:

Good things as well as bad things are caught by a kind of infection. If you want to get warm, you stand near the fire; if you want to get wet, you get near the water. If you want joy, power, peace, forgiveness, then you must get close to or "even into" what causes them. God does not hand out these prizes willy-nilly. They are a great fountain of energy and beauty spurting out of his center of reality. If you are close to His spray, it will wet you; if you are not, you will remain dry!

Today, you "get this life" - you get into the "spray again." Because that's the rite of Confirmation -- like Baptism, a day to get God's spray of power. And there will be other moments when you will **"get this life" -- when God will**

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spray you with His Spirit. Your day of marriage; your day of having children; your day of graduation or a new career; even your day of resigning and going to a new field -- these are always days of "being under the influence" -- being "in the spray!" BUT ONE IMPORTANT THING GOD SAYS ON PENTECOST: **remain under the influence of my spirit! "STAY CLOSE TO THE SPRAY!"**

Secondly, "to Get This Life" - to be "Under the Influence," means that once you are sprayed, you "Watch Your Language!" Teens have been told from the time they were tiny to: "Watch Your Language!" But what do we know about language? It has the power to divide or the power to unite! We can use language to destroy or to build up. When someone says, "God Damn You!" that not only destroys - it associates God with a language that is not His. God doesn't "damn," he "loves & forgives!"

Just look what happened in today's OT lesson. God confused the people's language! Why?? Because the Israelites said their whole purpose in life "was to make a name for themselves!" We call that "the spirit of Babel!" "Building for only oneself" is called "babeling - it's "egotistical pride." (Do you know any Babylonians in your schools?; their kids only out for themselves!) And what happens to people who are only talking about themselves?? **They build walls between them and others!** Egotistical pride says "take care of me" and forget about "my neighbor." And what does that lead to??? A Breakdown between Neighbors; we call it a "communication breakdown"? Do we have any of those in the world? We have those breakdowns within families, between churches, within cities, between nations, between races, even today between genders. Wherever there is war, bigotry, or alienation between people, there is a "babel problem" -- a communication problem called egotistical pride!

But not so when you "**get this life!**" God says when you "stay in His spray," then you use His language. And what is God's language? It's called the speech of the Spirit: namely, a language of patience, kindness, gentleness, joy, peace, forgiveness, & understanding. When you and I are "**under the influence of this life, we use language that builds up rather than egotistical pride which tears down.**"

So, in the future, you will always know if you are "under his influence" of God's Spirit: if what we say builds someone up and makes them feel connected and loved - that's "GETTING THE LIFE." If what we say causes hurt or division or bad feelings between people, then we have chosen the other Spirit - the Satanic Spirit. And that spirit always tears down! It is death, not life!

So, in review, "**getting the life**" is 1) staying close to the spray, and 2) watching our language making certain that it builds up rather than tears down. Well, there's only one more trait for "**getting this life:**" **reaching out and touching others with the spray!** Just a few verses beyond Peter's sermon in this

2nd chapter of Acts, we're told that 3000 people became Christians that day. That sounds like a pretty exuberant happening (-- even better than Ed Debevis!)

At the end of WWII, Robert Woodruff was the CEO of Coca Cola. At a Board meeting, he announced: *"During my lifetime I want to see that everyone in the world tastes Coca Cola."* His vision was that Coke should reach out and touch everyone! Today, Coca Cola is sold from the deserts of Africa to the interior of communist China. And Why? Because just one man had a vision for the world! Bob Woodruff reached out with what he believed was "the real thing for the whole world!" Do we believe that "Coke is the **real thing** for the whole world?"

Obvioulsy, Woodruff was wrong! The "Real Thing" is Jesus Christ! And long before Woodruff, Jesus said, *"Go to every nation and baptize everyone in the name of the Father, Son & Holy Spirit, teaching them what I have commanded you, and lo I will be with you always!"* The Spirit of Christ is the REAL THING! As confirmed Christians, today you confess what Woodruff said about Coke 50 years ago: **that the whole world needs a taste of Jesus Christ!** One man took Coke to the whole world; God asks each of us to reach out and give everyone a "taste of Jesus Christ!"

For when you and I come to the end of our lives, there is an old legend about entering Heaven. The legend says that everyone must address two questions: First: **"Are you alone?"** And if we answer that question positively, then there will be a second: **"How could you come alone?"**

God doesn't want any of us to enter heaven alone! That's why he instituted the Church on Pentecost: he "gave us his life" not only on the cross, but through His Advocate, His Holy Spirit - namely, thru parents and pastors and anyone in the world who speaks his language. He confirmed on Pentecost that he would never leave us alone. And it's pretty obvious today, he has not left one of us alone ... without His Spirit. So, "GET THIS LIFE" today ... and it will be yours forever!!

AMEN.

Pentecost
Glenwood Lutheran Church, Toledo
May 18, 1997 - Confirmation
Peter R. Martyn, Interim Pastor

“STAND BE ME!”

Jesus said, “When the Advocate (Counselor) comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father, he will testify on my behalf. You are also to testify because you have been with me from the beginning. John 15:26-27

Happy Pentecost!! That doesn't sound quite as jubilant as Merry Christmas or Happy Easter, does it?!? Happy Pentecost seems strange in many mainline traditions. As I was growing up in Oshkosh, about the only thing that I associated with Pentecost were what we called “the Holy Rollers”; the Pentecostals of my youthful days. My youthful education emphasized the greatness of God the Father, Creator of all! Likewise, there was no doubt about Jesus Christ as the Son of God & Savior of the World. But when it came to the Holy Spirit -- not much was said other than a word or two in the liturgy about the “Holy Ghost.” And this “ghost” notion was and still is difficult for anyone to get excited about!!

Thankfully - we've come a long way since the 50's & “holy ghosts.” Pentecost most simply is a day to celebrate God's power present in his people. Or said another way -- Pentecost is the day that God gets very personal!! At Christmas, we talk about God being born in human flesh! At Easter, we talk about God being reborn or resurrected in heavenly flesh! At Pentecost, we talk about God in Christ being born & resurrected in your flesh and mine! Pentecost is no longer religion at a distance! Pentecost is a celebration of God's power within us, around us, through us, and to us!!

Is it any wonder that Pentecost doesn't get the press of Christmas and Easter?!? It's easy to get lost in the traditional trappings of Christmas! It's even easier to make Easter into bunnies, eggs & bonnets! But on Pentecost, God says: “It's time to get personal! It's time to make you and me accountable! It's time to invite God into our hearts and souls!” Pentecost says: “No longer will it be acceptable to be close to God only at baptisms, marriages or funerals-- or on Christmas & Easter!” Now God says: “Take my Spirit of Truth and make it present, personal and powerful every day of your lives!” For lots of folks that's just too personal, too relevant, too reflective of real Godliness and real religious life!!

And yet -- isn't that what we're all yearning for?? Don't we want a more personal & powerful experience of God?? Well, look at the words that the Greek writers used for the Holy Spirit -- “Advocate” “Helper” & “Counselor.” Translated, these words mean “the one who stands alongside each of us!” So, the Holy Spirit, the Counselor, the Advocate is wherever God (or someone who represents God) is standing alongside us, uplifting us, supporting us. Thus, the Holy Spirit is the One who STANDS BY ME (AND STANDS BY YOU!)

So, what does God the Holy Spirit say when He Stands By Me or Stands By You?? First and foremost, he says: "You can't make it alone!" That's the first Spirit of Truth of Pentecost: "you are headed for defeat in this life if you try to make it without God ... if you try to make it alone!" You and I need a Counselor, *an Advocate, a Spirit which stands by us in times of trouble and tells us "we're gonna be o.k. -- God is with us!"*

Confirmands, parents, everyone here today: **STAND ON THE TRUTH OF PENTECOST -- God is always standing as close to you as another caring Christian in his body. Never desert His body ... because you can't make it alone in this world!!** The Spirit of Truth is that God always seeks to STAND BY ME and STAND BY YOU!! Young people -- I hope you hear that as Good News! There is no better news for your life than the news from your God: *He will always stand by you as your counselor!*

But the Spirit of Truth on Pentecost says something else very important: **STAND BY HIM AS HIS WITNESSES OF THE TRUTH!!** The gifts of the Spirit don't come automatically at birth! If we want to possess God's gifts of Truth -- then we need to constantly expose ourselves to him as our Guidance Counselor. That's what these young people have started to do in catechism. *You have started to expose yourselves to God's Spirit of Truth -- namely, to his joy, his peace, his gentleness, his goodness, faithfulness, meekness and tolerance.* But it takes a whole lifetime to become great witnesses of those truths! Today -- you make a profession to do just that: **THAT YOU WILL BE LIFETIME WITNESSES TO HIS TRUTH ... that you will stand by God for the rest of your lives!!** There is no greater stand to take in life: God promises to **STAND BY YOU;** you promise to **STAND BY HIM!!**

That only leaves one more dimension of the Spirit of Truth: when God stands by me & I stand by Him: then he promises his greatest power of truth: **WE WILL TRANSFORM THE WORLD!!** Jesus had to leave his disciples ... because if he had stayed, they would have expected him to do all the work of transformation in the world. Instead, he promised that he would **STAND BY THEM** through His Counselor, the Holy Spirit. That's the way he still stands by us -- through his many counselors ... parents, pastors, mentors, choirs, worship services, bible studies, youth groups, etc. Whenever we gather in His name -- He **STANDS BY US** through His Spirit, the Guidance Counselor! . And the whole purpose of being together **IN HIS SPIRIT** is to transform the world!

So, what does it mean to **TRANSFORM THE WORLD?** Well, whatever needs to be changed is what the Spirit seeks to transform. (??) One of the greatest problems of the world is a condition called **DISUNITY ... or SEGREGATION.** The same problem existed in Jesus' day. And notice what the power of the Spirit did: *we're told that after the day of Pentecost, Jews, Galileans, Samaritans came together as One to break bread; they held everything in common; they sold their things and gave to the needy; and every day they came together to praise God!* That's transformation! Instead of merely making a name for themselves, they were glorifying God & his people -- they were making the world a Godly place.

That's the mission of every confirmed Christian -- to make this world a more Godly place. That's the commitment you make today: **TO TAKE GOD'S POWER AND TRANSFORM THE WORLD.** It's like the famous story of the king about to leave on a long journey, who before leaving, blessed each of his four daughters with a grain of rice ... then left without telling them what to do with it. The oldest daughter wrapped a golden thread around it and put it in a crystal box. And each day she admired it. The second daughter put it in a wooden box under her bed. The third daughter looked at it, was totally perplexed by it, and just blew it off her hand & forgot about it. The fourth daughter, being the youngest, knew there was something special about this grain of rice -- but reflected and prayed about what her father might do with it. Then she did what she thought her father would do.

Years passed. The king returned and asked the eldest daughter what she had done with her grain of rice. She told him she kept it safely in a crystal box. He said, "Well done, daughter, thank you!" The second daughter told of her wooden box under the bed; again he said, "Well done, daughter, thank you!" The third daughter, embarrassed ran to the kitchen and got another grain of rice. Smiling, her father said, "thank you, daughter." And the youngest said, "Father, I no longer have your grain of rice." And he said, "What have you done with it?" Then she said, "After a few days I think I discovered what you intended. Come - look through the back window." And there as far as the eye could see were fields and fields of rice -- enough to feed the whole nation of this king!

The king looked at his youngest daughter and said: "You have received the crown of my kingdom ... for you have transformed my gift into enough to serve our whole kingdom. You have glorified your father by seeking NOT ONLY YOUR OWN GOOD, but the GOOD OF THE WHOLE WORLD!"

Dear Christian friends -- that's what happens when God STANDS BY US ... AND WE STAND BY HIM! He gives us a multitude of gifts ... with the hope that we will use them to transform the world. Even when dark days come and we wonder whether we'll make it -- God is forever **STANDING BY YOU AND BY ME.** And he simply says -- stay close ... let me guide you with my truth, grace & love ... and then through you, I will transform the world!

On this confirmation-Pentecost -- the sermon concludes with those lyrics from that great movie where several 12-year old boys **STOOD TOGETHER ...** and their final song was from my pt of view a ballad to God ...

*When the night has come ... and the land is dark
And the moon is the only light we see,
No, I won't be afraid ... I won't be afraid ...
Just as long as you **STAND BY ME.***

*If the sky that we look upon ... should tumble and fall
Or the mountains should crumble into the sea ...
I won't cry ... no, I won't shed a tear*

*Just as long as you **STAND BY ME!***

AMEN.

*Pentecost Sunday
First English Lutheran Church, Toledo
June 3, 2001
Peter R. Martyn, Preacher*

“GET A LIFE UNDER THE INFLUENCE!”

“Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves ...” Gen. 11:4a “But Peter said, ‘Indeed, these are not drunk.’” Acts 2:15a “You know (the Spirit), because he abides with you, and he will be in you.” John 14:17b

A few years ago at a Confirmation retreat I was talking with several teens about their struggles with school, with parents & with peers. Their greatest frustrations were the many demands “to be perfect.” But equally repulsive were other peers who always sought to be “different & disconnected” – the ones who always wanted to be “separate, never a part of the group, always set apart.” One of the girls tried to sum up her feelings about these disconnected peers saying: “Those kind of people need to GET A LIFE.” She had made a profound theological statement. Because God never intended in creation that life was to be an experience of isolation, aloneness or separation.

God’s whole purpose in creation for each of us is this: GET A LIFE within a supportive community. In fact nothing is more repulsive to God than to see a child or anyone without a supportive community. And today – Pentecost – the 3rd major festival of our church – we celebrate God coming to each of us as a supportive presence of mercy and love. That’s the kind of LIFE Pentecost celebrates – not only LIFE in community, but GETTING A LIFE UNDER THE INFLUENCE of what we call a SPIRIT-~~FOCUSED~~ COMMUNITY.

Centered

The book of Acts graphically tells us that the disciples GOT A LIFE “under the influence.” And as Peter stated, it was not the influence of “the spirits,” but the influence of the Spirit – the manifestation of God’s power among the faithful on earth. So the question for this Pentecost is no different than the one for the first Pentecost: How do we get this life under the influence of the Spirit? Or as today’s gospel states, “How do we know when the Spirit is abiding with us and in us?”

C. S. Lewis gives us a first clue about “getting a life under the influence of the Spirit.” He writes, *Good things as well as bad things are caught by a kind of infection. If you want to get warm, you stand near the fire; if you want to get wet, you go into the water. If you want joy, peace, power, forgiveness, etc – then you must stay close to what causes them.* Pentecost celebrates a “STAYING CLOSE SPIRIT” - both a God who wants to stay close to us and a people who respond by staying close to his power. That’s why each of us is here today – and I commend you for being here. Because this is the place where we teach and tell and talk about the Spirit of truth. And that’s also why First English is in this community – to be that place that proclaims that there is no greater goal in life than STAYING CLOSE TO GOD!”

But where is everyone else? If God has chosen to stay close to us – and this is the place that he has chosen -- then why are hundreds missing? And please don't get me wrong – I'm not pointing a finger at First English – I'm pointing a finger at every Christian church. There can be no doubt – God is seeking to stay close, but Christians often choose to be influenced by something other than God's Spirit. And what are some of those influences???

Many Christians are more often influenced by the color or era or liturgy of a worship book than by the glory of God. Other Christians are more influenced by the beauty of a building than the benevolence of God. Still others Christians are only influenced if “that's the way we've always done it.” In short, God wants to stay close, but we make other influences higher priorities of our lives.

Pentecost gives a graphic reminder of what God's power does when it becomes THE influential priority of our lives. It changed down-trodden disciples into the greatest care-givers & forgiving saints that the world has ever known. That's what it did to a group of disciples who were in a holy place like this – it made faith in God a conviction of their inner beings – a way to live out love & mercy every day, not merely an external weekly routine of religion.

And when that happens (as it did for 1st disciples) – there is another influence of that same spirit: there is a transformation of our language. The opposite of that transformation was illustrated by the Israelites in today's OT lesson. The Israelites were going to build a tower into the heavens so they “could make a name for themselves.” In other words their whole view of God's mission was for “self-importance, self-aggrandizement, self-flagellation. Is it any wonder that God confused their language and caused them to scatter?

The Israelites were possessed by a spirit of Babel rather than the Spirit of Yahweh. They were building a kingdom only unto themselves. Their venture was not to glorify God but was merely for egotistical pride. And we all know what happens when people are concerned only about themselves. They build walls between themselves and others. They take care of themselves and forget about their neighbors. They suffer “communication breakdowns.” The language of such a people becomes a language of arrogance, slander, envy, bigotry, selfishness, & sometimes rage. The Israelites and many others suffered from this “Babel problem.” And that problem – whether then or now – leads to wars, family breakdowns, neighborhood shootings, church conflicts and all kinds of other alienation between God's children.

Pentecost celebrates the influence of a Spirit that does just the opposite. To “get a life” under the influence of the Spirit is to use a language of transformation and reconciliation. Namely, a language that reflects the gifts of the spirit: patience, peace, kindness, gentleness, joy, forgiveness and understanding. And a language that uses these gifts seeks to build up rather than tear down relationships. That's what God urges for Pentecost and every other day – TO GET A LIFE UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF HIS LANGUAGE. And we always know when we are speaking his language – because his language unites

rather than divides. That's why the people on that first Pentecost were so amazingly "in sinc" – because above and beyond their ethnic differences, there was a language of patience and kindness, of peace and gentleness, of mercy and understanding. God was seeking to build up the body of Christ – whether in the 1st century or at 1st English Lutheran. And regardless of its disagreements or differences, it would remain vital & united because it was possessed by the gifts of His spirit.

So, once we get that life with God's language of transformation we are ready for the third and most challenging influence of the Spirit: the ability to reach out and touch anyone who is yearning for God's gifts. I ask you – do you think there is anyone outside of these walls today who is yearning for the gifts of the Spirit?? Just a few verses beyond Peter's sermon in today's lesson from Acts we are told that 3000 people became Christians. At once, they affirmed God's spirit – they said, "We need God's language!" Could you imagine yourselves with 3000 more members next week? Well imagine the thousands in Toledo who are trying to GET A LIFE in a spirit of forgiveness & mercy, in a spirit of gentleness, kindness & peace!! All these thousands of people simply need a disciple who will make a witness: someone who will invite them to LIVE under the influence of the gifts of the Spirit.

At the end of WWII, Robert Woodruff was CEO of Coca Cola. At a Board meeting, he announced: *During my lifetime, I want to see that everyone in the world tastes Coca Cola.* His vision was that Coke would reach out and touch everyone. Today, Coca Cola is sold from the deserts of Africa to the interior of communist China. All because one man had a vision for the world. Bob Woodruff reached out with what he believed was "the real thing" for the whole world. Now -- is there anyone here today who believes that Coke is the "real thing" for the whole world?

Jesus said, *"Go to every nation and baptize everyone in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them what I have commanded you, and lo I am with you always!"* That spirit of Christ – the spirit of peace, forgiveness, mercy, kindness & gentleness – that is THE REAL THING. And every week we confess together that the whole world needs to taste Jesus Christ.

In a few moments, you and I will receive this taste: THE REAL THING. The elements of bread and wine will not satisfy us physically – but they will fully give us a life under the influence of the spirit. Because in those simple elements of the earth – we are miraculously offered the peace & patience ... the kindness & gentleness ... the mercy, forgiveness and understanding of our God. There is no greater gift that we can receive in this place or any other place. And there is no greater gift that we can give beyond this place. Let us not only "take and receive" today – let us reach out and give this life to anyone in need. For under the influence of Christ, we not only GET A LIFE ... we also GIVE A LIFE!

AMEN.

"THE WAY OF THE SPIRIT"

And they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower with its top to the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves; ... Genesis 11:4a When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. ... [And} all of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages ... Acts 2:1,4

Play Sinatra's "My Way" [] Now tell me there's someone here who doesn't like that crooning?!? Frank Sinatra's recent death was a loss not only to the music industry -- but to many of us who have admired his courage & charisma as an entertainer. But for all of his greatness -- his recording of "My Way" is possibly his most egoistic & idolatrous performance. Listen again to the last cadence just played.

*What is a Man? What has he got?? If not himself, then he has not!!
To say the things he truly feels ... And not the words of one who kneels,
The record shows ... I took the blows
And did it My Way!*

According to Sinatra -- the only thing a "man really has is HIMSELF ... and he had better NEVER get down on his knees and admit that he has any weaknesses or shortcomings." That certainly has become the Macho Mentality of many in our world. Just "DO IT YOUR WAY ... no matter what the cost to others. And then we wonder why so many use guns and violence to settle their personal problems!!

I'd like to share a parallel story told by a pastor friend of mine. A mother in his congregation had a son who was forever being rejected by girls. The young man simply couldn't retain relationships. He was a sincere young boy -- but forever was jilted by the girls.

In desperation - his mother called my pastor friend saying "she could no longer bear it." Then she opened up - telling my friend that as a young, attractive & popular girl in high school -- her whole ambition was "TO MAKE A NAME FOR HERSELF!" To be the most popular - she calculated every move. So she would "drop one guy if a more popular guy was after her." In fact -- at her senior prom -- she dropped a date at the last minute ... and went with a more popular guy ... only to end up marrying him ... and then having a very unhappy and dissolving marriage. Now she felt she was paying the price.

She went on to say that what was happening to her son was making her deeply aware of what she had done as a young co-ed. And to make things worse, she had totally over-protected her son "because she didn't want to lose him." She felt he was the only person who ever "genuinely loved her." And now her overprotection had made him irresponsible and unable to commit to others.

me. Tell him everything. Be totally honest! Tell him you're sorry you smothered him. Tell him you used him and have used other men all your life ... "JUST TO MAKE A NAME FOR YOURSELF." Tell him you want to be forgiven ... and want to start all over again."

Three weeks later - she called my friend to tell him she had never seen her son so happy. He was no longer depressed ... and they were both ready to start life over again. Because at last -- instead of merely "doing it her way ... instead of merely making a name for herself" -- she had finally sought to love someone out of mutual concern & compassion. It had taken her 45 years, a broken marriage, and a disturbed child -- to move from a life of "babel & confusion" to a life of understanding and mutual respect.

I hope you see the connection between these stories and the Genesis 11 account of the Tower of Babel. This story is a crude legend in which a biblical writer attempts to explain why God had to confuse the language of an arrogant and self-serving people. The only goal these people had was "to make a name for themselves ... to live their lives their way, and the hell with everyone else." As the New Testament clearly states - "he who exalteth himself will be humbled."

So goes the experience of the Babylonians. From earliest times - they were far more scientifically advanced than their contemporaries. Their hanging gardens were one of the wonders of the ancient world; their libraries were endowed with volumes of knowledge. They were deeply dedicated to progress; but they were very unconsecrated to God! And they showed this great conceit by planning to erect a huge tower. Their aim was to become the heavenly exaltation of humanity on earth. They figured they could reach heaven all by themselves; instead, God showed they they had created their way to hell -- that place which lacks God's presence of mercy and God's power of compassion.

The lesson of Babel was simple but profound: self-serving exaltation is the road to a heavenly curse and an earthly defeat. Yet has anyone on earth really learned the lesson. A major message ^{given by} for young people today is: MAKE A NAME FOR YOURSELF ... DON'T WORRY ABOUT THE OTHER GUY - DO IT YOUR OWN WAY! That has become the whole fabric and structure of many advocates in our professional & educational circles: market yourself for what you can get out of it ... and don't be concerned about anyone else.

Well, God poured out a very different Spirit on the day of Pentecost. He gave us another WAY! It is called THE WAY OF THE SPIRIT. It is a goal ... a mission ... a mentality ... a purpose ... a ministry which does not merely seek to make a name for ourselves ... but instead seeks to build a community of mutual care and concern for others. Instead of merely thinking ~~only~~ "My Way" -- this Spirit seeks to understand the ways and the weaknesses of others. And if there are any barriers between My Way and Their Way -- this Spirit seeks to discover a Way to build bridges between these barriers ... this Way seeks to heal the

This Spirit seeks above all to heal all separation ... and to bring peace even to those relationships that have already seen pain and dissolution. This is the Spirit that was given to many who were gathered at the Pentecost harvest some 2000 years ago in Jerusalem. And from that moment on -- the Church was born as a community of people who sought above all to bring God's healing power to any situation of human brokenness in this world. From that day onward -- never again would the true church seek its own glory. From that day onward -- the church would glorify THE WAY OF THE SPIRIT!

That's why these six young people are sitting before us today. They have already seen the results of DOING IT MY WAY! The killings last week in Oregon were a classic example of teenagers seeking to DO IT MY WAY. They have seen what happens to people who are afraid to "get down on their knees and confess that they have problems." They have seen the results of people who only have an interest in building ~~higher~~ taller towers of "heavenly arrogance!" Like the famous Humpty Dumpty -- they all come tumbling down!" These young people want to be a part of a world that confesses its need for another way -- THE WAY OF THE SPIRIT.

GOD HAS GIVEN US THE CHOICE!!
So -- ~~what do we want our world filled with??~~ Do we want a world filled with people who are only concerned about their own self-importance? Or do we want a world filled with the Spirit of love, joy, gentleness, peace, patience, self-control, kindness and faithfulness?? Today -- these six young people have chosen to be consecrated to a world filled with the gifts of God's Spirit. The only way that they will keep choosing THAT WAY is through our commitment as a total community to keep sharing it with them. If we make confirmation just a one-day ceremony -- it will be back to Babel tomorrow. So -- let's all make the right choice -- let's help them make a Name for God's Spirit rather than only a name for themselves.

AMEN.