

**FIRST LESSON: Acts 2:1-21**  
**SECOND LESSON: Romans 8:14-17**  
**THE GOSPEL: John 14:8-17, 25-27**

**Day of Pentecost**  
**June 9, 2019**

**Pentecost Living – Child of God**  
**Sermon Preached by Rev. Lowell D. Nelson**  
**American Lutheran Church of Sun City**

Grace and peace be to you through our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, on this beautiful Pentecost day. Amen.

Pentecost is a season of life, life in the spirit. So, for the next 23 weeks, we will celebrate this life with a variety of lessons and teachings and encouragement to live life with the spirit. Next week we have Holy Trinity Sunday where I will attempt not to speak heresy about God through the Trinity, but bluntly, I can never describe it in great detail except to say this: God's relationship within God himself is an invitation for you and I to fully enjoy life with God, life with each other, life with the community. Bluntly, it's about relationship, a deep love for each other through the grace of Jesus Christ. But this week, I want to focus upon your most important title in your entire existence, which is "child of God." We are brothers and sisters by the gift brought to us through the sacrament of baptism, to allow us to claim our heritage, God's beloved. Adopted is the word that is used.

Years ago, I was invited over to a family in the church, and the parents were beside themselves. They had just adopted a small child, and the other four children were upset and letting the parents know that. They were acting out. So, as pastors do, just give us 5-10 minutes and we can solve anything, so I came over (laughter) on a Sunday afternoon and the ages of the kids were about 14, 10, 8 and 6 or something like that, with the precious little 8-month-old newly adopted child. I asked the kids, "What's your problem?" They answered, "Our parents just had us, but they picked this one; this is the favorite." (Laughter). I grew up where sometimes I saw that inverted, right? The adopted was the least favorite.

I love that idea, that there is enough love to go around. Each one of us is God's favorite. There is no competition. Each one of us is a beloved child of God by the grace of Jesus Christ. All who are led by the spirit of God, as it says in the Romans 8 text, are children of God. This intimacy as Jesus speaks of abba, or father, or, we would say, daddy. It's a beautiful term. It is an intimate term. Daddy is not just for Jesus but for all of us. This spirit of adoption allows us not to yield to a spirit of slavery or allowing someone to determine our identity. Identity theft, identity confusion, all these words that we hear now, when somebody can take our credit card or our social security, whatever, and set up a false identity. Pentecost allows us to re-anchor our true identity, which is that we are children of God. \

In our Bible studies on Tuesday, we are studying 2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy and in the first chapter it speaks of this: For God did not give us a spirit of cowardice but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline. A gift, a gift not to be afraid but a gift of God's power and love and self-discipline. This encouragement for us to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit in this unity that we have, this unity that we gather as the people of God on Saturdays and Sundays, is this unity that we need God's help to live life. This marvelous journey called life. The unity of which the Holy Spirit speaks is the term "advocate," another advocate.

God is for us. When you hear of the words of communion expressed to you, "the body of Christ given for you," certainly it is coming towards you but it is also for you. God is for you. God is absolutely delighted in your life and in your presence, perhaps not in the way you are expressing it, but certainly in your essence of the identity child of God. This idea of the Holy Spirit, the term advocate, or paracletos, paraclete, the Greek term was understood back in those days as an advocate, a legal advocate really to navigate through the court systems. The idea of this advocate was somebody who could make the right call, because they are close enough to the situation, they know you, they know the law, and when they give evidence, it stands up in court. They speak the truth. So, that would be the understanding when somebody back 2000 years ago would hear that, they would hear that someone is helping them.

Perhaps you have experienced this. Anybody navigating through the health care system, you need an advocate, don't you? To navigate through the complexity? It's the same thing that the Holy Spirit is our advocate in the complexity of life.

I love how God works, that each one of us has a way to express this Pentecost experience where people are speaking different languages and expressing the love of God and the power of God. That is the unity and doing it in all this variety of languages. We have different ways of expressing it here. We have the Minnesota way to express language, we have the Wisconsin way, and Nebraska does not have an accent, of course, (laughter) but other places.

Here is a little aside. It did not go so well last night. Is anybody here a Star Trek fan? Okay, this is a better response than I had yesterday; I think there was two of us. I just want to mention this. It is just so funny to me about all the different languages, so if you are a Star Trek fan, you know about the Klingons who are a very tough, barbaric planetary group that wants to push their agenda. The TV show actually set up this language called Klingon, and a translation has been made of John 3:16, For God so loved the world.... Now, it would be great if I could speak it to you, but I do not know Klingon. But they have it just for a crazy TV show we love.

This expression of unity is our opportunity to give it to people in our own life. Speaking the language you know with the people around you. You know your family, you know the

people in your life, you know your neighbors, and you are able to share the encouragement that the Holy Spirit gives, making the right call, close enough to the situation so that Christ is close, that we are close, and giving evidence that God's love will stand the test of time.

Each season of the church, I have been saying something to you, and it's kind of silly but I will just keep doing it. Remember how I said make it your best Lent every? Make it your best Advent ever, make it your best Epiphany. Guess what I'm going to say about this season. Make it your best Pentecost ever. How do you do that? You do that through reclaiming your identity as a child of God and allowing the advocacy of the spirit into your life. This advocacy, in my opinion, is a way of lightness. Sometimes the church and the work we do can feel heavy and that certainly makes sense since we are dealing with difficult issues, life and death issues, dealing with people in tremendous despair. There is a real depth of what we do, but there is a lightness to the Holy Spirit. Let me say it this way: If Pentecost goes wrong, we will be tired by the end of November. We will be tired because we try to do it with our own power. But the spirit's advocacy for God and for people and for our own depth of meaning and purpose allows a lightness. Let me give you an example: I'm a big fan of the women's ministry here. They do so many wonderful things here, including helping with funerals, memorial services, helping with fun activities and galas and different things like that. All the money they generate, they give out. Usually they give money out at the end of the year when they are assured of how much money they have. When the benevolence committee invited the executive director of the Navaho Mission to come down and speak to us about the needs of our Navaho brothers and sisters in northeast Arizona, their hearts were opened up and touched by the idea that \$3550 could help evaluate if deeper wells are available. As it is right now with the water table dropping, the shallow wells have arsenic and other contaminants, which is directly affecting the children; you can imagine the potential learning disabilities. The women's hearts were opened and so for, as I understand it, the first time ever, a check for \$3550 has been sent; no waiting. What I like about is that, to me, it is the Holy Spirit working. There was no consternation. It was just that there was a lightness in the Spirit allowing us to know the truth.

Another example for me is I have the great privilege of announcing to you that Pastor Judith Rainforth, who is a colleague from Nebraska, is going to be joining us in November. She is delightful. She is a force to be reckoned with. Next week I will show you a picture up here on the screen. She just exudes life. She responded to a call. She came here and worshiped with us about 3-1/2 months ago. She just came because she was a friend. She was sitting in worship and had the experience of being called and said to me, "I think God is calling me here to help you." Now, that is lightness, that is joy. So, she will join full time, and Pastor Gary and Pastor Garvey, watch out; she can hold her own.

I am absolutely delighted that next week I will be able to announce a visitation pastor that is going to join the team. Right now I just need to meet with him one more time to make sure, but Pastor Chuck had advocated for this person and I believe he will be a great addition.

So, for myself, I guess the simple way to look at Pentecost is, if I start worrying, that is being afraid. God did not give us a spirit of cowardess, but a spirit of power and love and of self-discipline. So as we look forward to this...

Oh by the way, does anyone have a house for Pastor Judith? If you do, let myself or Debbie know, because we are looking for a place for her to stay starting November 1<sup>st</sup>.

Allowing the spirit to flow through our congregation in our best Pentecost ever is this understanding: you and I have an identity that no one can take from us. Do not let anybody else fill it up. Do not let the labels of life, do not let the discouragement of life, do not let the news of life take away the Pentecost discovery that you and I are children of God. From that, we have an advocate who knows us, who knows the Lord, who knows the people we are working with. This lightness of mission and movement will not create tiredness but a momentum so that when our snowbird friends come back and after I have been seasoned up after 111 degrees or 118 degrees or 122 degrees, whatever it is, we will be seasoned because the life of Christ will be flowing through this congregation. And we will ask the returning snowbirds to catch up with us.

I would like to close with this prayer: God we give thanks for the joy of your spirit, that we are made children of God. I ask upon our congregation, our best is not competitive but our best means being deep and alive in your spirit. Come Holy Spirit, be our advocate, speak the truth to us, help us to understand and help us to express the power of your love. I ask this in Christ's name, Amen.