

SERMON
First Lutheran Church
Aitkin, Minnesota

Acts 2:1-21
Rev. Darrell J. Pedersen
May 20, 2018

ADULT MESSAGE

On that first “**Pentecost**” Sunday, when the Christian Church was born, the very first thing God’s people did was to “**speak about God’s deeds of power!**” They told all the people about **what God was doing to bring about life and salvation** for them through Jesus. People from all over the world, gathered there in that trading center, understood, each in their own language, what was being said. They heard about **God who had come in pursuit of them**. That day began, for all God’s people, the possibility of not only “**hearing**” God’s life-giving Word, but also of **experiencing it deep within, sharing it with each other** and of **answering God back**.

There is something wonderful and amazing about an awesome and almighty God, who is the source of the whole creation and all the countless billions of people, and yet who **longs to address you and me**. It is **even more amazing**, that God **longs to have you and I address God back**. Call it “**love**” – **God loves us** and will do everything in God’s power to make it possible for us to **love God back**. . .

Have you heard the stories of my **early days of dating and wild romance**? As a young buck in high school, of course I had the drive to want to “**date**” girls. I never dreamt of a **lifelong partner** since just asking for “**one date**” was so overwhelmingly hard. . . I remember the thirteen-mile drive just to get to the nearest pay phone booth where I could call and ask for a date without fear of friends or family overhearing me. I remember well my teeth chattering as I attempted to call for a date in the coldest part of the winter. . . It would take days, sometimes weeks, of agony before I could get up the courage to make a call. Once reaching the intended person, I would fumble, stutter, and almost apologize for even calling. If I received a “**no**,” I would be devastated. It hurt even if she had a pretty good excuse like, “I **think I have a relative who will be dying this Friday**. . .” Then, of course, there was the **reporting-in** to my two best friends during study hall in the library. I was their hero because they were even shyer than I was.

Despite all the pain and heartache involved in those dating days, I kept trying and somehow, I was even rewarded with a wonderful marriage partner and all the fruits of that marriage to this very day. . . And **why did I choose to marry Jennifer**, my wife of now 45 years? I have since come to the conclusion that I married her because she **“loved me back.”** Of all the other people I dated, all three of them, she was the one who seemed to **return my “love and caring” for her** with her own **“love and caring” for me.**

God loves us back! God loves us **first!** God loves us **unconditionally.** God loves us **totally!** **And, God awaits our love in return.** . . Too often, when we reflect upon our Christian life, we give the focus to **what we have done for God,** what we are trying to do to be **better people,** what **we think or feel.** We talk about **our commitment to Christ,** our attempts to **get closer to God.** . . **Yet, the Bible** turns the story around and gives the **focus to what God in Christ has done,** is **doing** and **plans to do** in **searching for us, committing to us, attempting to get close to us.**
“We love because God first loved us!”

Pentecost and the giving of the Holy Spirit to those early Christians is all about the fact that **it is God who has been busy calling our number, offering the date of a lifetime** and of **eternity.** When we show up for worship, we are literally claiming the promise that **God has something to say to us.** When we come to worship, we may well be asking, even if only subconsciously, **“Is there any word from the Lord today?”** Well, guess what, that about **scares the socks off any pastor** who even dares to think about it. **“Do you mean that I have to somehow try to be a part of bringing the Word of the Lord” to this gathering of God’s people?”** That is an overwhelming thought! I used to get **diarrhea every week** before preaching. **If the Word of the Lord comes** to us today, comes in any way through this preacher, it is only because the Holy Spirit has been and is moving to make it happen! **And, it does happen** – through the sermon, the scriptures, the songs, the sacraments of Holy Baptism and Holy Communion. . .

You have email! There’s a text for you! Someone’s on the phone for you! Can you get this? Do you have time to answer?

When I called for those dates, my biggest problem was that I **wasn't really sure about how that other person felt about me**. . . I was afraid of being rejected. . . I didn't know if they'd **like to date me** or **would never be caught dead with me**. . . We shouldn't have that problem with God. Jesus did **"get caught dead for us,"** so **God must surely love us**. . .

So, what do you say when Jesus calls? Being here today is an answer. Praying is an answer. Many people don't pray. Why not? **"I don't know what to say or which words to use.** . . ." Well, here it is, since Pentecost, we're not alone in some freezing phone booth out in the middle of nowhere trying to reach God. No, since Pentecost and the coming of the Holy Spirit, we are no longer orphans, but rather precious children of God. **If we even try to speak** with God/respond to God's call, the Holy Spirit, which every baptized person has in them, the **Holy Spirit gives us the "right words."** And even when we **can't manage to speak at all**, the Holy Spirit still advocates for us and speaks on our behalf from deep within us **"with sighs too deep for words."** The Holy Spirit helps Pastor Jordan and me to preach. The Holy Spirit helps you and I to believe. It is the Holy Spirit, constantly with us, who helps us to answer God's call and to place our own calls to God. You don't need to come up with some **"magically correct words."** **Anders Nygren** says, **"Prayer is the communion of our hearts with God."** All we need to do, all God is looking for, is for us to **pour out our hearts to God**, just as **Jesus has already poured out the heart of God for us**.

There's **no better place** to start than here. There's **no better time** to start than now. Each of us has to **start where we are**. Today may be your first call. Some of you may have worn out several cell phones speaking with God over the years. Regardless, **God will delight to receive the first call or the millionth**, and, the Holy Spirit will eagerly **help us to grow** from where we are in our relationship with this God who **loves us so much more** than we will ever be able to comprehend.

The Holy Spirit came on that first Pentecost to dwell in the hearts of all believers. The Holy Spirit is here today, blowing like the wind, in and amongst us. **Barbara Brown Taylor**, in her book, **"Bread of Angels,"** says, **"Under the power of the Holy Spirit, shy people have been known to step up onto platforms and say**

audacious things. Cautious people have become daredevils; frugal people have become philanthropists and people who used to be as sour as dill pickles have become rich with friends.” I’ve seen some of that. Have you?

How is your relationship with God? Have you been thinking about giving God a little call maybe? Have you been trying to build up the courage to open up your heart? Don’t know what to say? Guess what. **God called for you again today.** . .

There is something wonderful and amazing about an awesome and almighty God who is the **source of the whole creation** and all the **countless billions of people**, and **yet** who **longs to speak to you and me** and, even more amazing, **longs to have you and me answer.** Call it **“love”** – God loves us and will do everything in God’s power to make it **possible for us to love God back.** . .

How close do you want to be with God? Guess what. **God is ready** to be that close too, or **even closer.** . . **And God called for you again today.** . .

Guess what. God is **on the line right now**, and, the **Holy Spirit is ready and waiting to help you** to answer that call. **Go ahead!** **It’s “Good News” “for you.”** **God wants a date!**

Amen.