

“When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place.” After a couple years of meeting in separate services, we gather today together in one place. We had the early service people and the late service people, but now we just have service people. It is good to see those we haven’t seen in a while, or at least not regularly.

Pentecost is a great celebration of the church year, on the same level as Christmas or Easter. It was the festival at which we reconvened after a short intermission back in 2020. With instrumental accompaniment, multilingual volunteers, and a brunch to follow, my hope is that today’s celebrations are fitting to the festive nature of the day.

Today we are going to be reflecting on the theme of gathering. AT PENTECOST THE HOLY SPIRIT GATHERS THOSE WHOM SIN SCATTERED FOR A GREAT HARVEST.

First, I. Sin scatters mankind away from community. We see this most clearly in our Old Testament reading. At the Tower of Babel, the people gathered together. **“Then they said, “Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth.”**” However, to curb their pride **“...the LORD dispersed them from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city.”** Due to that ancient people’s sin, the Lord scattered them each to their own land and each to their own language.

Throughout the Old Testament, scattering was a result of sin. After God’s people founded the nation of Israel, their sinfulness scattered them. The northern kingdom split from the south. The idolatry and wickedness of God’s people caused the Lord to allow the nations to come in and scatter and capture the people.

The Psalmist writes, **“The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away.”** Mankind in its sin is like an old dandelion that a child blows and the seeds go the direction of the four winds.

Today we also see sin scatters mankind away from community. A survey in January 2020 said that 3 out of 5 Americans are lonely—that was before the pandemic. Likely, the pandemic only made it worse. We drive to and from work and hide from our neighbors behind our garage doors. Even at home we enter a self-imposed solitary confinement as we lock ourselves into our cell phones.

Our states are hardly united as the left and the right part like a fissure in an earthquake. The division we have over hot button topics like transgenderism, marriage, abortion, gun control, and immigration are themselves a symptom of a deeper problem. We’ve become incapable of talking about these things because we’ve stopped talking to each other. We have become strangers to each other, and even strangers to ourselves. We’re a scattered and aloof people. We’re alone in a crowd.

The word “Sin” describes both the symptom and the disease itself. **“For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.”** Sin is the disease that all the world suffers from, and most specifically we are born with a disease, original sin that is inherited from our forefathers and is an inclination to do evil and wrong. From this disease flows individual sins: **“...sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these.”** Our sinful actions contribute to a world that is divided and alone.

But **“When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place.”** II. At Pentecost the Holy Spirit gathered a harvest of grain. Throughout the Jewish calendar, the Lord had various festivals that He commanded the people to observe. The Hebrew word for festival simply meant meeting. This word fits hand in glove with the word convocation. For the Jews in the Old Testament, to worship and celebrate could not be separated from gathering together.

The three great assemblies or feasts of the Jewish calendar were the Feast of Passover, the Feast of Weeks, and the Feast of Booths. They were known as the pilgrimage festivals because not only were Jews to gather in their towns, they were called to travel to Jerusalem to worship at the temple. God called upon His people to gather not only for His sake, but for their sake.

Focusing specifically on the Feast of Weeks, it was held after a week’s worth of weeks after Passover. With seven days in a week, seven weeks is forty-nine days. It later became known as Pentecost in the Greek speaking Jewish lands. Pentecost comes from the Greek word fiftieth. The Feast of Weeks marked the end of the barley harvest. The Jews planted late November and harvested in late May. If you’re scratching your head at my hymn selection for the sermon hymn, that’s why. Meanwhile in Israel, farmers are gathering grain.

That’s why there was a crowd that day filled with **“Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome,”** Their barns were full, and they came for a harvest festival. The Jews offered up two loaves of bread to their God out of thankfulness for all that He has done for them. We could compare the ancient Pentecost to modern Thanksgiving. Perhaps we could compare it to the most wholesome aspects of Oktoberfest wherein people gather for fun and camaraderie, although even the Pentecost guests accused the apostles of drunkenness.

With this historical background we look specifically at the Pentecost celebration recorded in our account from Acts. III. At Pentecost the Holy Spirit gathers a harvest of souls. As Peter was looking out into a sea of heads eager to hear his sermon, he must have been thinking of the heads of grain that dotted the

fields around Jerusalem in the time between Passover and Pentecost. Truly this was a fulfillment of Jesus' words, "**The harvest is plentiful.**" We later learn that three thousand souls were added that day.

In ancient Israel, during the Sunday of the Passover week, the first stalk of grain, called the first fruits, would be presented in the temple, that would inaugurate the harvest season. So too on the Sunday of the Passover Week Jesus Christ rose from the dead. The Bible refers to Him as the "**firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.**" He was the first stalk of grain to rise with many to follow. As the festival of Pentecost marked the end of the harvest, we look forward to Jesus Christ coming again to gather the faithful to Himself.

Christ's resurrection looks forward to a world where there is no more sin, no more isolation, no more loneliness. A world where God's people are sheltered in His presence. A city of God where there's room for you and you have good neighbors. The new earth where sin, death, and the devil will be no more and we need no longer to struggle against our sinful flesh. And so we pray "Lord, quickly come To Thy final harvest home; Gather Thou Thy people in, Free from sorrow, free from sin, There, forever purified, In Thy garner to abide: Come with all Thine angels, come, Raise the glorious harvest home."

But we're not there yet. In the meantime, we have been given the Holy Spirit as a down payment. That's why we celebrate Pentecost. The Holy Spirit knows that sin scatters, but grace gathers. That's why He gathers us together to support one another, receive the forgiveness of sins, and to witness to each other "**...in our own tongues the mighty works of God.**" Yes, there are risks: you could catch COVID here, a gunman could enter this sanctuary intent on doing harm, you could get into a car crash to or from church. However, whether it's the ancient world or the modern, the evidence points to our God being a God who says those risks are worth the benefit to gather as His people to receive an antidote to loneliness, to hopelessness, and to the guilt that comes from us sinning daily. We as humans need this opportunity for unity with fellow humans, community with other Christians, and impunity, or forgiveness, for the eternal consequences of sins.

The Holy Spirit gathers believers like farmers gather grain. We call this the Church. It was kicked off at Pentecost, and the harvest season of the Church continues until Christ comes back. The Church is more than a social club, but not less. It is a place where we can overcome the scattering isolation of sin together as we build one another up. We overcome this through Christ alone and through the peace and reconciliation His death and resurrection brings. This Pentecost "**...let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.**"