

Joel 2:28-29 *“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. 29Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days.*

Dear friends in Christ our Savior,

This time of year we normally hear of hundreds if not thousands of graduation speeches at colleges and high schools across our country. This year is obviously a little different than normal and we may not hear the volume of speeches that we have heard in the past. But if we were to hear them, they would be full of encouragement for the graduates as they prepare to go out into the world and into their next adventure, whether that be a higher level of education or into the work force or military. Those encouragements might sound something like: “Go with courage!” “Go out and be bold in your endeavors!” “Go confidently in the direction of your dreams and live the life you’ve imagined.” “Wherever you go, go with all your heart!” “Go where there is no path and leave a trail.” “This is the beginning of anything you want. Go get it!” Your familiar with these kinds of sayings. They are commonplace as people bring their current education to an end and move on to something different.

I think these are fitting thoughts as we gather today both on Pentecost and Christian Education Sunday. These two emphases are not mutually exclusive. In fact, they fit rather nicely together. They help us to see what makes our Northdale Lutheran Academy and Northdale Lutheran Church different. They remind us what sets us apart from other educational institutions. They help us to remember what education matters the most—the education that not only prepares us for this life but for eternity. They bring before our eyes the work of the Holy Spirit through God’s Word as it is shared with us and gives us a reason to celebrate his working in our heart. What I have to say to our graduates this morning I can say to every one of you as you leave God’s house this morning to go out into the world—**Go with the Spirit!**

Originally Pentecost was the Jewish Spring Harvest Festival celebrated 50 days after Passover. It was the day on which the Israelites were to give thanks for the completion of the early harvest. It was adapted by early Christians to commemorate the first great harvest of believers. We heard in our second lesson for today the account of the first Pentecost. It was Peter who boldly and courageously stood up to preach the sermon that day in the Temple courts while the other disciples translated his sermon into the many different languages that were present so that everyone could understand what Peter was preaching. What an astounding thing this was considering what we know of the disciples up to this point. These were the men hiding in the upper room on Easter night and the week after because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders. These were the men who 10 days earlier as Jesus ascended into heaven asked him if he was going to restore the kingdom to Israel and make them a great nation. This was the same Peter who had boldly pledged his undying allegiance to Jesus within the safety of the small group of disciples yet in the courtyard of the Sanhedrin denied three times even knowing Him. Where had all of the courage suddenly come from to not only stand up and speak about Jesus but accuse the people of putting God to death? Where had all of this knowledge come from to suddenly put together everything that happened and preach Jesus as the name on which people must call for salvation?

This is the work of the Holy Spirit. All of this came from the miracles which happened that day. God first sent what sounded like the blowing of a violent wind. He didn’t send a violent wind, rather he sent what sounded like a violent wind. It was an audible sign that something special was happening. Then, what seemed to be tongues of fire came to rest on their heads. This was a visible sign that God was about to do something marvelous. Then Luke tells us, “*All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.*” This was the biggest miracle. Jesus’ promise was coming true. At his ascension, he told the disciples to wait in Jerusalem until he sent to them the Counselor, the Holy Spirit. Jesus had told them what the Holy Spirit would do: He would “*convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment.*” He would “*guide them into all truth.*” He would “*bring glory to me (Jesus) by taking from what is mine and making it known to you.*” This is the heart and core of Pentecost: God filling the believers in Christ with the gift of the Holy Spirit to equip and empower and enable them to carry out their role as witnesses. With the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on this day, he empowered them to be able and bold witnesses for their Lord. He enabled them to see for themselves the full salvation brought through Jesus and to be powerful witnesses for their Lord. They not only saw the salvation which Jesus brought to them, they were helping others to see the same for themselves. God brought great blessings to their work that day. Through the preaching of Peter and the translating of other disciples, more than 3,000 people came to see Jesus as their Savior, were baptized, and received the salvation that was theirs through Him alone.

We were watching through the sit-com, *The Goldbergs*, this past week. The main character Adam had failed the math portion of his PSAT miserably and in talking with his mother about it said something like, “I don’t get math. To divide fractions you have to multiple. It doesn’t make sense!” Maybe you feel the same way about math. The reason that Pentecost is such a big deal for us is that we would have the same thoughts about God were it not for the work of the Holy Spirit. Peter quoted our text from the prophet Joel in his sermon on Pentecost. So, we know that Pentecost was the fulfillment of this prophecy. Note what Joel prophesied: “*And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people.*” In Joel’s time, that was a big deal. In the Old Testament, God revealed himself in dreams and visions, but only to some people—not everyone. He communicated with only select people through these dreams and visions. When God wanted Joseph to know that he was going to rule over his brothers and even his father, he used dreams to communicate this. When God wanted Jacob to not fear as he traveled to his uncle Laban’s house, he gave him a vision of a stairway to heaven. But as

he prophesied, Joel looked ahead to the time when the Lord would put his Spirit on all of God's people—boys and girls, men and women, young and old, and even the lowliest of slaves and servants. Now a Pentecost, God was fulfilling that prophecy by pouring out the Holy Spirit on all people. To Gentiles and Jews, the unlearned and the highly educated, to the rich and the poor, to the young and the old, the Lord granted his precious gift of the Holy Spirit. Through the Holy Spirit, God was enabling his people to see the marvelous visions and pictures of heaven through Jesus their Savior.

Pentecost was not an isolated act of God's grace, initiated and carried to completion on that one day long ago. It is a continual act of giving on God's part that will go on to the end of time. Since that first Pentecost Day, God has been graciously pouring out the Holy Spirit on all believers in every period of the church's history. What we celebrate today on Pentecost is God pouring out his Holy Spirit on us and creating faith in our hearts by giving us a knowledge of the forgiveness of our sins and vision of eternal life. What we celebrate on Christian Education Sunday is the means through which God pours out the Holy Spirit and thereby gives us that faith. We need the Holy Spirit. Without the Holy Spirit, we could not know who Jesus is or understand what he has done for us. We would be blind in our unbelief and unable to see the path to eternal life. We would not be able to call on the name of Jesus as our Savior and have the salvation which he won for us. Without the Holy Spirit, everything about Jesus would make as much sense to us as multiplying to divide fractions. What a blessing that God, through his Word and Sacrament poured out the Holy Spirit on us to give us a clear vision and understanding of who God is. He is a God who demands the punishment of hell for our sins, but who is also a loving God who does not want to see anyone perish but to turn from their sin and live. Through our Christian Education, whether that is for the children in our Academy or Catechism class or our Bible Studies and Sunday School or Bible Information Class, through whatever avenue of Christian Education in which we are or have been engaged, the Holy Spirit has been poured out into us to see that God loves his people so much that sent his Son, Jesus, into the world to face the punishment of hell that we deserve for our sin and crushed the devil's head as he promised. He came to people who were desolate and in despair and he brought hope and life. We need these Christian Education opportunities because the Holy Spirit does not come to us apart from the Means of Grace—the good news of God's love shared in His Word and through the Sacrament. In the past, God worked through dreams and visions. Today works by means of His Word.

When you leave God's house today, when you leave Northdale Lutheran Academy, you Go with the Spirit. You go, knowing the Holy Spirit has been working in your hearts through the Word of God. He has washed you clean and made you pure, fresh and sinless in Jesus' eyes. He has enabled you to know and believe in the forgiveness that is yours in Jesus and of the certainty of eternal life which he won for you. We not only celebrate our graduates today. We celebrate the work of the Holy Spirit. This is what makes us different. Sometimes as a small church and school, we and others might be tempted to think that we are so small, we don't really have much to offer. We as a church can't offer many of the things that an Idlewild or Grace Family Church can offer. As a small school, we can't offer many of the extra-curriculars the way other bigger schools can. Sometimes we are tempted to be a little apologetic that "all we have to offer" is the Word. But let me answer that by simply asking, "What does the world need more than the Word that brings salvation?" We may not offer the social activities, recreational facilities and cultural events that other churches are able to offer. But we do offer the one thing that everyone needs most: the love of Jesus our Savior! Those who leave our school, those who leave worship every single week, those come through any of our Christian education opportunities will go with the Spirit because we have shared with them what they need most: the love of Jesus our Savior.

The Holy Spirit's work did not stop at simply bringing understanding to God's people. Joel prophesied that God's people would continue to prophesy. In this context, to prophesy simply means to proclaim or teach God's truth. God has poured his Holy Spirit out on his people not only so they can understand his call to faith and the salvation that Jesus brings, but so that they can extend this Gospel call to others. God not only brought us to faith to bring us to heaven one day, but to boldly and courageously stand as Peter and the disciples and proclaim his Word to a dying world who so desperately needs to hear about his love. Pentecost defines who we are and what we are doing in this world: We are God's people, intent on aggressively spreading the good news of Jesus so that through our proclamation God can pour out his Spirit on more people so that they too can call on the name of Jesus and be saved. We see God's awesome power not only at work in our lives as he strengthens our faith, but also in the lives of others as he uses us to pour out his Spirit on them.

When we go with the Spirit to carry out this work, we do so with the confidence that he will be the power working through us in the hearts of others. God used Peter—weak, impetuous, scared Peter...and God can use us too. The excuses we make to not carry out this work come only from selfishness and reliance on our own power and strength. We don't have the power to convince anyone on our own. But we've got the Spirit working through our message and therefore the power of God himself working through us.

Today, you go with the Spirit certain that God will keep his promise to continue pouring out the Holy Spirit on you in generous proportion to strengthen your faith and lead you to share that faith. Graduates, though you leave here with a great education that will leave you more than prepared for the next level of your education, you go from here today with the Holy Spirit working in you and through you! And so do the rest of you. As you leave God's house today, **Go with the Spirit.** Amen.