

The Feast of Pentecost, A✘D 2009

John 14:21-31 Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him." ²² Judas (not Iscariot) said to him, "Lord, how is it that you will manifest yourself to us, and not to the world?" ²³ Jesus answered him, "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. ²⁴ Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me. ²⁵ "These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. ²⁶ But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. ²⁷ Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid. ²⁸ You heard me say to you, 'I am going away, and I will come to you.' If you loved me, you would have rejoiced, because I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I. ²⁹ And now I have told you before it takes place, so that when it does take place you may believe. ³⁰ I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming. He has no claim on me, ³¹ but I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father. Rise, let us go from here.

In the name of the Father and of the ✘ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

1 "Come, let us make bricks and burn them thoroughly. 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 earth." It seems like a normal, healthy desire: to make a name for yourself, to be remembered after death, to create a powerful, memorable city. Why build a tall tower and use bitumen—or tar—for mortar? Because the men of Babel know their history. They're the descendants of the survivors of that great flood that ravaged the world and spared only eight people. So build it high and cover it with tar, lest we perish in a similar manner, and then we will be known as those who protected themselves from God.

2 They failed. There was no catastrophic flood as the Lord had promised to withhold such destruction from the earth until the Last Day, but their tower never reached high enough to protect them or to spread their renown beyond God's reach. No, in fact, what they feared came to be. The Triune God said, "Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language, and this is only the beginning of what they will do. And nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. ⁷ Come, let us go down and there confuse their language, so that they may not understand one another's speech." So He did. From there the Lord scattered them over all

the face of the earth. They were dispersed. Their language was confused. Their plans were confounded.

3 And still, the desire to make a name for yourself seems normal. It's an intrinsic part of the American Dream and the critical component of the so-called Protestant work ethic. Work hard so that you will make a name for yourself. Making a name for yourself has little to do with money, power, or prestige. Sure, those things may make your name great, but that's probably not how you try to make a name for yourself. Rather, supposed good works are the means for making your name, the bricks for your tower into heaven. When you help your neighbor to earn his respect, when you volunteer on a committee or a board so others will think highly of you, when you tidy up around the house so your wife will be impressed, when your works are to gain the approval, attention, or admiration of others, they're just false good works to make a name for yourself.

4 Anonymity is avoided. Good works, it seems, must be mentioned to have any effect. But the name you make for yourself, no matter how great, simply cannot do what you want it to. Sure, maybe you'll be remembered, but you'll never know. Your name, however well-remembered, cannot deliver you from death. Your name, however well-known, cannot protect you from God. Anonymity is not nearly as bad as having your name slandered, which is what God's Law does to your name.

5 But today is Pentecost. The curse of Babel is undone. The apostles were gathered together in one place, when a rushing wind filled the house where they were sitting. As tongues of fire appeared on them, they were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in the languages of all the people gathered in Jerusalem for the first harvest festival of Pentecost. At Babel, God descended to disperse, to thwart man's self-aggrandizing plans, to deter him from seeking salvation in himself. At Jerusalem, God descended to gather, to proclaim the Gospel, to point him to the sole source of salvation. Today is Pentecost, as well. Today the nations hear the Gospel proclaimed in their own tongue. Dispersed, desperate, and dying, the diverse

bodies of people are brought into the One Body of Christ, His Church. Here, the one language of the Gospel is spoken to sinners crushed by the weight of their sins.

6 The Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father sent in Jesus' name, has come. He has come in Jesus' name to bring you that very name, a new name, a name far better than any you could have given yourself. The Holy Spirit comes bringing the name of Jesus to you. Between Babel and Pentecost, the Lord descended to deliver His people from their sins. Jesus, who sent the Holy Spirit, is He who came to take away your sins, to remove the bricks of your false righteousness, and to give you His own righteousness. Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved, but no one can say Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit. So the Holy Spirit has called you by the Gospel, enlightened you with His gifts, sanctified and kept you in the true faith. In the same way, He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith.

7 You have a new name. You have the name of the Triune God placed upon you in the waters of Holy Baptism. This is no name you could make for yourself, not even any name you could claim for yourself. But this name has claimed you, given you a new identity, taken away your sin and your fear of being forgotten. No one who bears the name of the one true God is forgotten. Those He claimed He remembers. Even if death claims you before the Day of Christ's return, your Lord remembers you. Even though the memory of your name might fade from the minds of friends and family, there is no forgetting in the Body of Christ. Your Lord remembers those who belong to Him. In fact, He knows and remembers you by name. The name you could never make for yourself He has given you.

8 The gift of the Holy Spirit is not a once-and-done deal. The wind that filled the room where the disciples were gathered on Pentecost is the breath of the Christian life. To live the Christian life is to be receiving the Holy Spirit. The same voice of the Gospel that filled the mouths of the apostles on Pentecost still fills the mouths of preachers. The Holy Spirit is still active to preserve the gift of faith He delivered, where and when the Word is preached. The

same Holy Spirit breathes the breath of eternal life into you through the delivery of forgiveness in Holy Absolution. He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies you and keeps you with Jesus Christ. He does this not once, but your whole life-long. To live in the name given you at Baptism is to continue to receive the Holy Spirit.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria
Pastor Jeff Hemmer
Hope, Jerseyville, IL