

“What Was That?”

Acts 2:1-21

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

What your ears cause you to hear can often be very deceiving. Think about sitting outside on a dark and quiet night. Every little sound makes your mind run wild with what it could possibly be, and your first reaction is most always a gasp, followed by, “What was that?” Was that a stick breaking from the weight of a serial killer’s footsteps, or just a rabbit running through the underbrush? Are those the growls of a wolf prowling around the fence, or just your stomach because you haven’t eaten anything all day? Your minds have a great capability to run wild with the things that you hear, and that goes for the sounds that go bump in the night just as much as it does the things that you hear in the Word. Your mind makes your ears hear what it wants to hear, instead of hearing it for exactly what it is.

In our text this morning, the people gathered in Jerusalem for the Feast of Weeks (otherwise known as Pentecost) are utterly perplexed by what they have just heard from the Twelve Apostles of Christ. Hearing the Gospel of Jesus for the first time, they ask, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language?” You have to imagine the absolute confusion that was on their faces, that these men of Galilee who couldn’t possibly know their languages were suddenly able to speak to them. So, their explanation for it, much like turning a growling stomach into a prowling wolf, is that “they are filled with new wine.” They conclude that these twelve men chosen by God Himself as His messengers must be drunk out of their minds at nine in the morning! Their minds have convinced them that what they are hearing cannot possibly be what it is. And that is because the Holy Spirit, now resting upon the disciples, has not yet worked the knowledge of the truth in their hearts.

How often do you find yourself in the same scenario? You read a passage of Scripture and it’s difficult to understand, and your first reaction is often, “What was that?” You might even think, just like the people in Jerusalem, that the Apostle, Prophet, or Evangelist who wrote it must have been drunk. Your sinful nature is a cunning and deceitful voice in your ears, and it will work in every way possible to make you hear what it wants you to hear. Your logic and reason are used as its tools to get you to turn from the truth that is contained within the Lord’s divinely inspired Word—a Word which by the Holy Spirit, you know by faith. But that faith which knows the Spirit is not invincible. It is not an impenetrable fortress that has no enemies. It requires sustenance

and protection, and the Old Adam that dwells within you wants to tear down those walls and expose you to the power of your mind.

The battle of every Christian is no different from another's. The sinful flesh, which everyone in this world bears, seeks to rip you away from the One who created you; and, all too often, as you see throughout the world and even in many of your own families, the flesh wins. That's what the devil desires. The evil one is always at work to turn you inward to the self, to let your mind determine right and wrong instead of God's Holy and perfect Word. Paul teaches us in Romans 8:5-6, that those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, and that to set the mind on the flesh is death. That's the whole rub in all of it. Satan's desire is your eternal death. His desire is to pull you down to the depths of hell by making you believe that your flesh is the superior entity in your life. You control it. It's your power that will save you. God plays no part.

That condemning mindset is not what is contained within the words of Scripture as revealed to you by the Holy Spirit. No matter how hard your nature works against you to convince you of your supremacy, you have none. The Law brings you down to nothing, cuts you to the core and forces you to realize your sinfulness before God your Heavenly Father. As John says in 1 John 1:8, "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us," and again in verse 10, "If we say we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His Word is not in us." You have heard the accusing word of the Law to bring you to repentance. You have heard the Word of the Lord which makes you despair so much of your sin that you don't hear the deception of your sinful flesh any longer. That is the work of the Law. It shows you your true worth within yourself as one who has sinned against God and deserves nothing but death and condemnation. And if you let the whispers of your sinful nature entering your ears deceive you otherwise, that is not the fault of your faith, but your own willingness to submit to the evil one's temptations.

But it is also the work of the devil to make you believe there is nothing but the Law to accuse you. God is a vengeful God who seeks the condemnation of those who sin against Him and there is nothing else for you to know. Oh, what despair there would be indeed if that was all He had revealed to you. You would be perplexed like those in our text, saying, "What does this mean?" Comprehending the Law standing on its own can't be done, because it would lead one to believe that God created something simply for the purpose of condemning the world. But the Law comes as a herald of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, just as John the Baptist heralded the coming of the Messiah by proclaiming, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand (Matt. 3:2)." You are not a lost and

condemned sinner, because you are not lost. You do not stand alone in the darkness of this world, facing the attacks of the evil one without a hope of salvation.

The Gospel of Jesus Christ stands as your hope, for through His work of salvation your sins have been washed away. In the verses immediately following our text, the first thing Peter does after convincing the people gathered around at Pentecost by the words of the prophet Joel that the Apostles were not drunk, as they presumed, is cut them down with the Law by reminding them of their sin of crucifying the Lord Jesus. But he immediately follows that with the truth that Jesus rose from the dead and loosed the pangs of death, because it was not possible for it to hold Him. And there is the joy of every sinner in this world. The Law condemns, but Jesus has fulfilled the Law on your behalf. He has gone to the cross where He bore the punishment of your sin and ransomed you from the power of sin, death, and the devil. That joyous truth is proclaimed to you by the revelation of the Holy Spirit in His Holy Word.

Your sin does not condemn you because of what Jesus Christ, your Lord and Savior, has done for you. You don't have to worry about the Old Adam constantly accusing you, because in the water of your baptism he was killed and buried with Christ, and the new man rose with Him from the icy straits of death. You have experienced death and resurrection already in your life. Your sinful nature, though still a thorn in your flesh, has been crucified with Christ, and so we preach the truth that Christ has been crucified for you. He has gone to the cross to shed His blood and give up His spirit that the Holy Spirit would be sent out into the world to bring that good news to all people. All of this He does out of His divine love and mercy, because He loves you with a love beyond all knowing. And in that love He continues to shower His gifts of grace upon you in Word and Sacraments.

As I just said, in baptism you were crucified with Christ, buried with Him, and rose again with Him as one who has been regenerated in your soul. Your sinful flesh does not rule over you, but the Spirit rules within your heart. As Paul says from the same Romans passage that I mentioned earlier, you no longer walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit, thus setting your minds on the things of the Spirit, and the Spirit is life because of the righteousness of Christ. That is what He gives you as a gift in those blessed waters. He imputes His righteousness to you by faith. That is what He gives to you in the forgiveness of sins you come to receive at His table. His righteousness flows from this meal of His very body and blood, and it flows for you to bring you everlasting life. By His death He has destroyed death, and by His body and blood He assures you that you will not suffer the pangs of death. Just as it could not hold Him, it shall not hold you. Indeed, it cannot!

When you hear the Word of the Lord and receive His gifts in His Holy Supper, your sinful flesh wants nothing more than to cry out in fear, “What was that?” By the Holy Spirit who now dwells in you by virtue of your baptism into Christ’s death and resurrection, your soul exclaims with assurance that what you have heard is nothing more than your redemption—your salvation by Jesus’ blood. The gift of forgiveness which He has won by His death upon the cross of Calvary is yours, and no matter the effort of your Old Adam to convince you that it doesn’t belong to you, the victory is won. Jesus died that you might live, that you might live a life filled with the Spirit whom He has breathed upon you, and ultimately live with Him in life everlasting.

The heavenly promise which His Spirit imparts to you by faith will indeed be fulfilled, for the Lord is faithful to His Word that you have heard. Even when you doubt, He never waivers. As Paul says in 2 Timothy 2:13, “If we are faithless, He remains faithful—for He cannot deny Himself.” And Peter in his 2nd letter, chapter 3, “The Lord is not slow to fulfill His promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish.” Everlasting life in His eternal presence is His promise to you. That is the promise which the Holy Spirit brings to you, and the promise that He will see fulfilled by your being sustained in the one true faith. On this Pentecost Sunday, rejoice in the truth that the Spirit dwells within you, and look forward to the fulfillment of that truth when you will stand before your Heavenly Father and your Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, to live in the presence of His glory forevermore. Amen.