

## **The Feast of Weeks/Pentecost**

*preached by Rev. Paul Sakasov on May 20, 2018*

This morning we are turning to the fourth sermon in a seven part sermon series on the seven Old Testament feasts. The seven feasts are as follows: Passover, Unleavened Bread, Firstfruits, Pentecost, Trumpets, Day of Atonement, and Tabernacles.

Quickly reviewing what we have covered so far, in the first sermon in the series we noted the parallels between Christ's journey to the cross and the journey of the ceremonial Passover lamb from the fields of Bethlehem to the Temple in Jerusalem where it was sacrificed on Good Friday. In the second sermon in the series we looked at all the ways unleavened bread symbolizes the suffering of Christ.

In the third sermon in the series, on the Feast of Firstfruits, we were reminded of the coming harvest, not of grain, but, of souls, and how Christ was the Firstfruit offering of the harvest of mankind. And now turning to God's Word, we will be looking at the fourth Old Testament feast, the Feast of Weeks, also known as Pentecost. Our Scripture reading for this morning, is Leviticus chapter twenty three, verses fifteen through twenty two.

Leviticus 23:15-22

15 And from the day after the sabbath, from the day on which you bring the sheaf of the elevation offering, you shall count off seven weeks; they shall be complete. 16 You shall count until the day after the seventh sabbath, fifty days; then you shall present an offering of new grain to the Lord. 17 You shall bring from your settlements two loaves of bread as an elevation offering, each made of two-tenths of an ephah; they shall be of choice flour, baked with leaven, as first fruits to the Lord. 18 You shall present with the bread seven lambs a year old without blemish, one young bull, and two rams; they shall be a burnt offering to the Lord, along with their grain offering and their drink offerings, an offering by fire of pleasing odor to the Lord. 19 You shall also offer one male goat for a sin offering, and two male lambs a year old as a sacrifice of well-being. 20 The priest shall raise them with the bread of the first fruits as an elevation offering before the Lord, together with the two lambs; they shall be holy to the Lord for the priest. 21 On that same day you shall make proclamation; you shall hold a holy convocation; you shall not work at your occupations. This is a statute forever in all your settlements throughout your generations. 22 When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very edges of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest; you shall leave them for the poor and for the alien: I am the Lord your God.

In today's Scripture reading we read about the Feast of Weeks, also known as Pentecost. This feast was the last feast of the four spring feasts, which all took place in a span of eight weeks starting in March or April.

Since we just finished a sermon series on the five types of sacrifices that occur in the Old Testament, it is worth pointing out that the spring feast season began with the feasts of Passover and Unleavened Bread. Both these feasts included as part of their observance a sacrifice of reparation and purification; the first two types of sacrifices that lead us on the pathway to God.

Immediately following the feast of Unleavened Bread was the feast of Firstfruits. In this feast, the worshipers took a sheaf of barley from the section of their fields that were designated for their tithe to the Lord, and they offered it to the Lord along with a burnt offering and a grain offering. Notice how the progression of the spring feasts follows a parallel progression with the five types of sacrifices that mark the pathway to God.

In today's reading the progression is completed. For at the final feast of the spring season, the Feast of Weeks, also known as Pentecost, the worshiper offered to God their firstfruits from the wheat harvest, along with a burnt offering, a grain offering and now a peace offering. In doing so, the journey of the spring feast season came to an end with the worshiper in Jerusalem, on the mountain of the Lord, together with God's people, in the presence of God, having holy communion together, dwelling in peace.

This is what the sacrificial system was all about. And this is what the seven feasts were all about. These key components of the Jewish religion and culture were given to lead the people of Israel on the pathway to God. They were to be a deeply reinforced experiential object lesson that annually reminded the people of God, collectively; of their identity, their purpose, and how that identity and purpose were to be reflected in daily life.

Thus, the spring festivals were so much more than a celebration of the harvest season. They were a constant reminder of God's redemptive purpose in the world, and the role God's people were to play in accomplishing that vision. As we noted in the previous sermon in this series, the ultimate harvest being imagined in the Old Testament feasts was not an agricultural harvest, but, a harvest of souls.

So, as the people of God came to the Temple in Jerusalem, with the firstfruits of the wheat harvest, which was their most important crop, which became the bread that was the staple of their diet, they were reminded that the bread which gave them life was merely a sign that pointed towards a deeper spiritual truth. As Moses told the people, "Man does not live by bread alone, but, by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God."

Given this truth, it shouldn't come as a surprise that the Ten Commandments, which were the life giving words that proceeded from the mouth of God were delivered to the people on the Festival of Weeks, which we know as the day of Pentecost. Thus, the

Feast of Weeks, or Pentecost, marks not only the beginning of the wheat harvest, it also marks the giving of the Law.

Thus, in celebrating this holy feast, the people of Israel were simultaneously giving thanks for their daily bread, and for the manna from heaven, the Word of God, which was delivered to them, and which was to be used to point the nations of the world towards the Living God of heaven and earth through whom salvation came.

This meant that the Feast of Weeks, or Pentecost, was not just a feast that looked backwards, it was a feast that looked forwards. In fact, in the first century it was the custom for the prophecy of Joel that the Apostle Peter quoted to crowds in Acts chapter two to be read on the day of Pentecost. Allow me to elaborate.

In Jesus' day, the day of Pentecost was a day of anticipation. Drawing on the same spirit that led the people of that time to leave an empty chair for Elijah at the Passover meal, in anticipation that Elijah would come and bring with him the long awaited Messiah, Pentecost was hoped to be a day of signs and wonders and renewal, on par with the giving of the Law.

On this day it was hoped that the promise given by the prophet Jeremiah, where God would write His laws on the hearts of his people, would come to pass. This dream was very important for the Jewish people because they were aware that on the first day of Pentecost, God killed three thousand people on Mount Sinai.

And why did God do that? If you recall the story from Exodus, when Moses went up the mountain to receive the Law, the people of Israel turned away from God in a matter of weeks, building a golden calf. When Moses came down from the mountain, with the tablets of stone containing the Ten Commandments, he was horrified to find the people engaged in idolatry, worshiping the golden calf they had created. In rage he smashed the stones, and for their part in leading the nation astray, God killed three thousand people.

Continuing in the pattern of the first Pentecost, God's people had consistently failed to live according to the ways God had prescribed for them to live. In Jesus' day, the people could look back on fifteen hundred years of history and see the ways they had failed to live up to their calling, and the consequences of that failure. In Jesus' day, the people knew if the word of God was only written on stone, death would be the end result.

But, if the Word of God were to be written on human hearts instead of tablets of stone, if the Spirit of God were to descend on the people of God, with all the signs and wonders and fanfare that were present when God gave the Law to Moses, with fire and

thunder, oh what a day that would be! In Jesus' day, this is what the people of God were hoping would happen. Each year they would hear the words of the prophet Joel on Pentecost and they would hope that this would be the year that God would come with fire, and thunder, and miraculously bring renewal in the land, writing His laws on their hearts, bringing life and not death.

With this deeply established longing in mind, can you imagine the surprise of the God fearing people who were in Jerusalem in the days of Jesus when the day of Pentecost came, and they heard a blasting sound coming from heaven, and they saw the tongues of fire that appeared?

No wonder thousands of people gathered to see what was going on. No wonder Peter quoted the prophecy of Joel. And no wonder the people were horrified when they heard that God had sent them the living Word, Jesus Christ, and they had crucified him! After all these years, they had hoped they would not repeat the sins of their ancestors. And much to their horror, they learned that their sin lead to the smashing of God's Living Word, Jesus Christ, just as the sins of their ancestors led to the smashing of God's word written on tablets of stone. No wonder their hearts were pricked!

However, the good news that Peter gave the crowds on the day of Pentecost was that their long awaited hope and dream had indeed come true. They had witnessed the signs and wonders of God in the heavens. And the long awaited Spirit who would write God's laws on their hearts had come.

As Peter told the crowd, the gift of the Spirit would be bestowed upon all who repented and were baptized in the name of Jesus. This is what happened on the day that we know as Pentecost, the day that marks the beginning of the Christian church. And not to be missed, on that day, in contrast to the three thousand who were killed on the day God's people received the Ten Commandments, when the Spirit descended on Pentecost, following the resurrection of Jesus, three thousand people received eternal life.

This is the good news that the church celebrates each year as we remember the day the Holy Spirit was poured out on all flesh. And this is the good news that the Feast of Weeks, or Pentecost, foreshadowed in the days of Moses. Through this feast God alluded to a day when He would pour out His Spirit, and write His laws on our hearts, so that we might live by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. Through this feast God prepared His people for the day when He would pour out His Spirit upon all flesh and everyone who called upon the name of the Lord would be saved.