

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, dear friends,

On our celebration of Pentecost today, the lesson of God's vision for Ezekiel of the dry bones showed him how the Spirit works to give life through the Words of God. In the gospel today, Jesus explained that the Holy Spirit's work is to teach us about God and remind us of those truths. And of course, we heard the dramatic account of the Holy Spirit empowering the disciples with spiritual gifts and creating faith through the Word and baptism on Pentecost. We could spend many weeks considering the Holy Spirit and his work and any one of those readings today could provide much to say about the Spirit of God, but for our celebration today, I'd like to turn your attention to a Psalm that is often used on Pentecost—Psalm 51. The words we focus on from that Psalm written by King David are these:

Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me. Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will turn back to you. Save me from bloodguilt, O God, the God who saves me, and my tongue will sing of your righteousness. O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise.

If you have been around our church for a while, you no doubt recognize the first of those verses because you have sung them as a worship song, typically after a sermon in some of our orders of service. Today, in fact, you will hear them sung after the sermon. When we're done looking closely at these words this morning, see if you understand why after the sermon is a good time to sing these words.

Pentecost is a perfect time to take a good look at this Psalm because King David speaks directly of the Holy Spirit—and his words make a fitting PRAYER FOR PENTECOST. It may even serve as a model prayer for us to use as we pour *our* hearts out to God. And it could happen that we come away thinking even more about what we're saying when we sing this prayer after a sermon.

It is enlightening to know why and when David wrote this prayer. The Bible includes this heading to the psalm: **For the director of music. A psalm of David. When the prophet Nathan came to him after David had committed adultery with Bathsheba.**

Well, that explains the tone, doesn't it! Even if you don't know the story, that scenario sounds like a tough one, right? David was confronted about his sin of adultery by God's representative, Nathan, who was there to serve as David's pastor. If you have been in the position of a fellow Christian calling you on your sin—maybe even a pastor doing so—you have an idea of how David felt. And we all know what it is like to feel the oppressive guilt over something we've done wrong. It's awful when we know we've done something wrong that affects others, but more importantly, when we realize that we have offended the holy God. That's where David was at as he wrote these words.

1. Seeking Forgiveness (10)

If you're ever looking to buy a new computer or TV or appliances, a really good idea is to go to a store like Best Buy and ask if there are any "open box" items. Some of you know that you can save a bunch of money by purchasing something that someone else has brought back. Sometimes they aren't "perfect". A note on them will tell you that a user's manual is missing or the remote is gone. But most often there's nothing wrong other than that they are without the original packaging or they've simply been opened up already. That alone makes them not perfect and not worthy of full value.

King David knew that he was not perfect or pure before God. Not only was he not worthy of full value, his sin robbed him of ANY value before the Holy God! He was not the equivalent of an open box pair of Beats™ headphones returned because the person didn't like the color! No, he was REALLY imperfect! He's the headphones that the dog got a hold of and chewed beyond recognition. Best Buy can't put those back on the shelf and ask any money for them.

So it was with David. Adultery, murder, lying—and those were just the things involved with his adulterous situation with Bathsheba! Earlier in this psalm, David admitted that he was sinful, imperfect, even before he was born. So he definitely understood both his sinful nature and his particular sins. But he also knew that God had blotted out all his iniquity. David was sure that even though his sin was horrible, God had forgiven him and given him full value, even though he hadn't earned it!

When David prayed, **Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me**, he was admitting an impure heart. He recognized his sin. But his prayer showed that he knew where to go. He understood that only God could take what was corrupt and make it pure. Only the merciful God could take the flawed and make it flawless. Only the powerful and gracious God could take a shaken and guilt-ridden conscience and restore it to unshakeable faith and trust in the Lord.

Our prayers should imitate David's—a recognition of and a grieving over our sins against God and other people, a desire to not sin anymore, and a trust in God to forgive and make us pure and faithful. That's really the definition of repentance, isn't it? Read the verses prior to this and you'll see even more of this repentant prayer, which can serve as a model for us to follow—not simply praying this way because the format pleases God, but because we truly feel this way about *our* sins too.

2. Desiring the Holy Spirit (11-12)

David was praying for a miraculous act that only God could do. He knew that only the Holy Spirit could give him faith and work repentance in his corrupt heart and inspire him to put away sin and willingly live a life of thanksgiving to God. Only the Holy Spirit, working in him could create a clean heart and a clear conscience. David was under no delusion that he could make things right with God or that God owed him. You can hear the humility in his voice as he prays to God: **Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me**. David deserved both, didn't he?! He deserved to be tossed to the curb by God so that the spiritual garbage collector, Satan, could haul him

away to the trash heap of hell! Because of his sin, the Holy Spirit should have disappeared from David's life. But God is rich in mercy and love! He answered David's prayer by remaining with him.

You realize, don't you, that our sin puts us in the same position David was in before the holy God? In all humility, we ought to come before him with the attitude of David: **Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me.** This prayer is us expressing our desire to remain with God and to be guided by the Holy Spirit. A person who has no intention of changing the sinful things in their life can't really pray this prayer, can they? It would just be a hypocritical prayer if there was no intention of turning from sin. No, with this kind of prayer a person is asking for the Holy Spirit to stay with them, to live inside them (as the Bible says he does), to guide them away from sin and onto God's path. If that is what we truly desire, then this is a good thing for us to ask of God in prayer!

David wanted that close connection to God and the joy that comes from knowing that that close relationship would be intact even after death. David wanted the confidence of eternal life with God so he asks to be brought close again after sin had distanced him from the Lord: **Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.** Only the Holy Spirit could bless David with that kind of assurance and joy. Only the Holy Spirit could bless him with a "willing spirit," the desire to follow God.

Wouldn't it be a relief to be so strong in your spirit that you didn't fall back into your same old sins? Maybe you have been at war with your sinful urges to the point of actually asking God to change your heart and mind, to cause you to not want that sinful thing anymore, to take the lure of sin away. If so, then you know the sustaining, willing spirit that David prayed for. If that's never been a prayer of yours, perhaps you can pattern your own "Pentecost Prayer" after David's as you ask the Holy Spirit to work that way in your heart.

And though we know that in this world we will struggle with temptation and a sinful nature that wants to run wild, we must remember that the repentant heart finds release from guilt and punishment for sin in Jesus, our Savior. The same Holy Spirit who gifted David with faith in the Savior-to-come and who filled the disciples in great measure on Pentecost a thousand years later is at work in us today, two-thousand years after those Pentecost miracles! He has given us faith in Jesus—faith that looks to the Son of God who never had to pray to his heavenly Father, **"Create in me a pure heart, O God,"** because his heart was pure.

Jesus was not born sinful like we are. He never sinned sexually as David did—or lied or murdered as he did. Jesus never committed those sins of yours that are running through your head this morning as we consider this prayer. That's what made his sacrifice for us worthy before the Father. The One who had no sin took on ours. Our sin was nailed to the cross with our Savior and it stayed there even after Jesus was taken down. Our sins are gone! The assurance of that is in God's Word and in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

The Holy Spirit has given us faith to believe in Jesus and all he did for us. We didn't deserve his love any more than David did, but thank God he gave it to us! He has created pure hearts within us. Our spirits have been revived by God's Spirit. Through Word and Sacrament, the Holy Spirit regularly refreshes us so that our hearts remain clean before our God and our spirits are strong and eager to live for the Lord.

3. Anticipating a Joyful Response (13-15)

David's prayer is a meaningful and useful one for us not just on Pentecost, but anytime. We should also pray it *the way* David did too—with confidence that God will do all that we ask and anticipating what our joyful response will be to the Holy Spirit's blessing us. David continued: **Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will turn back to you. Save me from bloodguilt, O God, the God who saves me, and my tongue will sing of your righteousness. O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise.**

"I will..." David said to God. David was anticipating his joyful response! He knew the Spirit would help him—and so he planned to share the good news about God. He would teach other sinners so that they (like he did) would turn to God and find forgiveness and the joy of salvation. David vowed to sing of God's righteousness and praise the Lord with the words of his mouth. This is what it sounds like when the Holy Spirit lives in a person and works on their heart. They cannot help but tell other people about God's forgiveness and love and to give praise to God. Their joy is simply too great to keep quiet!

What an appropriate thing for a "Pentecost Prayer!" What David promised to do in response to God's forgiveness and strengthening, the disciples did on Pentecost. They declared the wonders of God so that people from many nations could hear about salvation in Christ. We heard how Peter, in particular, preached a law and gospel sermon that drove people to repent and then to see Jesus as their Savior—3,000 of them in fact!

You and I ought to pray a prayer like this too! We ought to ask the Lord to give us opportunities to explain the comfort, the peace, the joy that we have in God's forgiveness and the certainty of eternal life through faith in Jesus.

It's worth remembering King David's prayer in Psalm 51 and returning to it every now and then so that we might offer similar prayers. May the Holy Spirit, whom we celebrate today and whom King David relied upon, continue to work in our hearts so that we seek God's forgiveness for our sins, treasure the Spirit's work in us, and that he move us to joyfully tell others about the love of God. Amen.