

Sermon for Pentecost, May 20, 2018

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

"When the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all the truth."

- John 16:13

Amidst the dramatic signs- the violent wind, tongues of fire, uneducated men speaking fluently in foreign languages, and the baptism of thousands - it's easy to be distracted by the drama of Pentecost. It's easy to be caught up in the story and wish that God would do the same things today. If only God worked through such dramatic signs we too would be successful like the apostles. Yet by focusing on the drama we miss the greater thing that is going on.

Yes, the signs are fantastic, the conversions are astounding (3000!), but the signs - and even the conversions - simply point us to the greatest event of all on Pentecost: The fulfillment of Jesus' promise to send the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is far more important, far more valuable than all the signs and wonders and mass conversions we could dream of. For through the Holy Spirit we are brought to faith in Jesus, through the Holy Spirit we are called to be Christians and gathered into Christ's Church, and it's the Holy Spirit who points us again and again to Jesus for the assurance of our salvation.

Amidst the drama of Acts, it's good for us to go to the Gospel to hear from Jesus what the work of the Holy Spirit is and how it's fulfilled in our lives as Christians. Our Gospel is taken from Jesus' Farewell Discourse at the last Supper. Jesus promises to send the Holy Spirit. He knows that He is about to be crucified, die, and be buried. He also knows that after the resurrection He will be ascending to the Father until the Day of Judgment. He wants the disciples to know that even with His death and His ascension He is not abandoning them. In fact these two things, His death and His ascension, are good things for them, and for us. How?

Well, His death is obvious. Without His death we are still in our sins, we have no forgiveness, and there can be no resurrection of the dead. The Ascension, however, is also good. It's good because it means we can be given the Holy Spirit.

Jesus calls the Holy Spirit the Advocate. That's the Holy Spirit's job, to be your advocate: to be the one who intercedes on your behalf, the one who protects you, who cares for you, and who helps you. That's what an advocate does. What it's interesting is how Jesus says the Holy Spirit fulfills that role. In John 15:26, Jesus says the Holy Spirit will be your advocate because, *"He will testify on my behalf."* What makes that interesting is that Jesus leaves this vague. He doesn't actually specify to whom the Spirit is testifying. There are only two possibilities: God and man. The Spirit testifies about Jesus to both. The Spirit bears witness to you of what Jesus has done for you so that you may believe; the Spirit bears witness to the Father of what Jesus has done for you so that the Father can count it as righteousness. In so doing the Spirit fulfills His role as Advocate because He helps you even as He intercedes on your behalf.

Yet the Holy Spirit does even more according to Jesus. Jesus says, in 16:8-11,

"when he comes, he will prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: about sin, because they do not believe in me; about righteousness, because I am going to the Father and you will see me no longer; about judgment, because the ruler of this world has been condemned."

We need to stop and unpack these, because this isn't really how we're trained to think of the Holy Spirit in American Christianity. If we think about the Holy Spirit at all, we usually think of the Holy Spirit as at best some force that moves our feelings, and causes emotions and desires, and every so often gives someone a prophetic dream; at worst we just equate the Holy Spirit with our feelings, emotions, and desires, and dreams.

What Jesus says the Spirit does is prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment. Which should raise for us the question, how is the world, how are we, how am I wrong about sin, righteousness, and judgment?

Jesus says the world is wrong *"About sin because they do not believe in me."* Our natural way of thinking about sin is that sin is just things we do wrong; that sin is more like mistakes than anything else. Which is why our old Adam, our old Eve always wants to us to believe that sin isn't such a big deal, and that if God really loved us He would just overlook the mistakes we make.

Jesus says the Spirit comes to challenge us on that idea. At it's root, Jesus says, sin is not bad deeds that we do. Sin is unbelief. Not just unbelief regarding God, but unbelief towards Jesus. Jesus' entire ministry and message are directed to the cross, where Jesus shows Himself to be the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

Our old Adam, our old Eve, our fallen hearts, minds, bodies, and souls want to believe that sin is a matter of what we do. The reason being, if sin is a matter of what you and I do, then you and I can be in charge of the process of overcoming sin. Salvation lies in our hands. The answer to sin according to our old Adam and old Eve is simple: Stop doing sinful things. Couple that with, surely God will give us points for effort, for at least trying, and what were left with is something rather attractive. Sin isn't such a big deal, and it's mostly within my power to overcome it. I just have to make the right choices, train my willpower, and think positive thoughts that lead me to do positive things.

To all of that, though, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit, say, No. No, sin is such a big deal that the only answer to it is God becoming flesh, dwelling among you, and suffering and dying for you on the cross, being buried in the grave, and rising from the dead. The answer to sin is not you and me, it's Jesus Christ, crucified. That's good news, but it's also challenging news. It means that everything we believe about sin (and ourselves) is wrong.

If sin is only solved through the crucifixion of the Son of God, then it cannot be solved by me and my efforts. If sin is only solved through the cross, then God can't overlook my sin, He can't reward me for effort. If sin is only solved this way then overcoming sin in myself requires faith - trust - that the cross is actually effective, that He is crucified for me, and not believing leaves me in sin.

And that faith can't come from within me. It's not native to me to believe that I don't have to do anything other than trust Jesus. That faith comes only through the Holy Spirit. It's the Holy Spirit who gives me faith to trust that Jesus died for me. It's the Holy Spirit who gives me this faith; this faith that reaches out and grabs ahold of Jesus, crucified, and says, "This is for me. Here is my salvation from sin!"

Jesus then says the Holy Spirit will prove us wrong about righteousness *"because I am going to the Father and you will see me no longer."* Again, our fallen selves think that righteousness (being right with God) rests upon what we do, how we live, how we grow spiritually. We know that in order to enter God's presence we have to be right with Him. We know that the Law tells us what God commands us to do, and how we ought to live. So it becomes clear to us that if we follow the Law we make ourselves righteous. Of course we know full well from the Scriptures and from life that we cannot do that.

In the search for righteousness Jesus says the Spirit comes to point us to Him. You can't make yourself righteous. You can't go to the Father, but Jesus has gone to the Father. The Spirit proves us wrong about righteousness by turning our focus from ourselves to Jesus. Jesus is your righteousness before the Father. Jesus has kept the Law for you. Jesus, alone, is righteous before God through His own merits, and for Jesus sake' the Father reckons you righteous through faith in Jesus.

Jesus then says the Spirit will prove us wrong *"about judgment, because the ruler of this world has been condemned."* The Devil would have us believe that it's only through our efforts that sin is overcome, that it's only through our efforts that we

can become righteous before God. He reminds us day and night what the Law requires of us, and He reminds us that those who do not do what the Law requires will be judged and condemned. And he's not wrong. At the same time like always he only tells part of the truth. The truth is, sin is unbelief, unbelief that God has and would send His Son to save us from sin; that God has and would send His Son to be our righteousness. The incarnation, crucifixion, death, and resurrection of Jesus are a judgment against the Devil, and in favor of you who believe in Jesus.

The Devil comes and tempts you to despair, tempts to look at your sin, your failures, even your doubts and disbelief. The Spirit comes and points you to Jesus. The Spirit points you to Jesus and says, "No, because of Jesus, you are forgiven, because of Jesus you are right before God." The Spirit points us to Jesus and gives us faith, faith to believe, faith that grabs ahold of Jesus, faith to hear the good news that the one who is condemned is not you, but the Devil who refuses to believe.

See the Spirit's work when all is said and done is nothing less than to point you always to Jesus and give you faith in Jesus. That's what Jesus means when He says, "*When the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all the truth.*" The truth is Jesus. As John writes, "*Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.*" As Jesus says, "*I am the way, the truth, and the life.*" "*All the truth*" is Jesus, for it's Jesus who shows us the truth of sin on the cross. It's Jesus who shows us true righteousness by being our righteousness. It's Jesus who shows us the truth of the judgment by condemning the Devil who would drive us to despair.

And that is what we see happening at Pentecost. Amidst all the signs and wonders, the Spirit puts the good news of Jesus Christ crucified for sinners, for you, on the lips of the Apostles. He points the Apostles to Jesus in their preaching, so that He can point their hearers to Jesus for forgiveness, eternal life, and salvation. He gives those who hear the Apostles faith to trust that all that Jesus has done He has done for them.

That's what the Spirit does in our lives as Christians. The Spirit points us to Jesus and gives us faith trust Him. It is the Spirit who leads us to the Word so we can hear the Gospel of our salvation. It is the Spirit who leads us to Baptism so that we may be united to Jesus and share in His life, death, and resurrection and be made righteous through Him. It is the Spirit who leads us to the Altar so that we may receive Jesus in body and blood, so that we may have everything that belongs to Jesus, everything that Jesus is.

This is what the Spirit does. This is what the Spirit does for you. All so that you may have the assurance of your salvation, all so that you may have Jesus, crucified and risen for you. Amen.