

The Gifts of Pentecost
John 15:26-27 & 4b-11
Trinity Lutheran – Kearney, Missouri
May 24, 2015 – The Festival of Pentecost



In the name of the Father, and of the † Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. There are myriad opinions concerning what Pentecost is all about, but I'd like to suggest that what it's really about are the gifts we receive from the Giver of every good gift, our gracious Lord and God. Hear what James wrote concerning these gifts: "Every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change." You and I would be nothing – and indeed, would do nothing – if God Himself had not first given to us. *Everything* depends upon the goodness of God. And, while there are many who realize that those things which support this body and life *do* come from God – as Luther points out in his *Small Catechism* – many of those same people are still confused when it comes to understanding the fullness of the Christian faith. There is no such thing as a self-made Christian. This ancient heresy may wear new clothes, but it's the same old heresy, nonetheless. What you are and have as a Christian has been given to you *entirely* by God – for there is no way you could ever have earned it yourself!

As we noted last week, while our Lord was preparing the eleven for His Ascension back to the Right Hand of the Father, He taught them a number of things – many of which they didn't understand, for much more than mere instruction would be necessary. What they needed was the gift of the Holy Spirit, otherwise they would never have understood what Jesus was about to accomplish by means of His suffering, death, and resurrection. So, there in the upper room, in intimate discourse with His disciples, our dear Lord gives us a glimpse into the inner workings of the Holy Trinity – how God was, and is, busily at work – and precisely how He works – for you!

It all begins with our heavenly Father sending his Son to accomplish the world's salvation – and this He does by means of His conception in the womb of the Virgin, His birth, His life, His suffering, death, and resurrection. Working together, the Father and the Son then send the Holy Spirit so that the people of God might be reminded of all that Jesus had taught them – and then be able to understand it themselves. The Apostles needed this understanding not only because it's essential that all Christians have it, but most especially because Christ would soon be ordaining these men into the Office of the Holy Ministry – where they would

need to get it straight themselves, before the world could get it straight from them.

During the Reformation – when Luther was in hiding at Wartburg Castle – he worked feverishly to translate the New Testament into the language of the people so they might be able to read the Word of God themselves. But Luther had no illusions that Bible reading by itself would necessarily lead to a saving knowledge of Christ – though that certainly does happen. Luther well knew from personal experience that Bible reading wasn't always sufficient – or that even being familiar with the Bible was enough – for a person *can* intellectually grasp the bare meaning of Scripture and yet still not understand the central message concerning Jesus Christ as the only hope of salvation for fallen sinners such as ourselves. That was why Luther wrote the *Large* and *Small Catechisms* – the *Large* to guide pastors and fathers, and the *Small* to teach the people.

Luther knew simply having the Scriptures – even though they might regularly be read and pondered – could never guarantee that a person would always be taught by the Holy Spirit! Is there anyone here who hasn't had a member of a cult knock on your door quoting the Bible extensively – but incorrectly? See how many are taken in by these cults simply because these people *seem* to know the Bible. How many people have you met who say they understand the Bible, but don't really understand it at all? Has there ever been a false teacher who hasn't claimed to use the Bible to justify what they teach? Just because someone uses Scripture then, doesn't necessarily mean they're being guided by the Holy Spirit. Indeed, if that were true, even Satan himself could claim he had the Holy Spirit! Experience rather teaches us that such persons are more likely than not to have received their instruction from the master of deceit himself – that "Old Evil Foe," the devil.

In contrast, our Lord Jesus promised the Apostles that the Holy Spirit would be their Teacher. But note this well: the Holy Spirit would not teach them anything new! He would simply enable them to properly understand the Scriptures. He would bring to their remembrance all that Jesus had previously taught them. This, of course, stands in stark contrast to those who claim that the Holy Spirit's role is to teach something new – which is the argument the Mormons use when they claim to have "another" testament of Jesus Christ in the Book of Mormon!

But look at the preaching from the Book of Acts. Virtually all of it comes from the Old Testament! God the Holy Spirit taught the Apostles how Christ could be found throughout the Scriptures – how He is the very center of Holy Writ from start to finish. By themselves the Apostles would *never* have discovered that. And the same is true for you! Without the Holy Spirit you would *never* see Christ in the Scriptures. You would simply make a mess of it – confusing not only yourself, but others, as well! So, aside from all the other gifts God showers down upon the Church, the greatest has to be the gift of the Holy Spirit. For it's the Holy Spirit who takes Christ and makes both Him and His work of redemption understandable – as He first kills you with the Law and then makes you alive through the Gospel.

Next, in addition to the Gift of the Holy Spirit, the second greatest gift our Lord gives to His Church is peace – peace not as the world gives, but that peace which only a knowledge of Jesus as Savior can bring. How many times have we prayed in the prayers of the Church that our Lord would “give to us that peace which the world cannot give?” How many sermons have you heard that ended with a reminder that “the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and your minds in that one true faith in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting?” In contrast to that peace, the peace which the world gives is focused on escape, avoidance, and a refusal to face reality.

The peace God gives reminds you that even though you might find comfort here in His Church, you didn't come here to escape the world. The monastic movement of the Middle Ages tried that and found it lacking. Yet, even today, people still seek peace by trying to withdraw from the world, not realizing that the peace they seek cannot possibly be found in retreat – but only in Christ and His gifts. Though there are times when sorrow will fill your heart, you can still take solace in our Savior's promise of peace – the Good News that He has overcome the world – and the comfort of the Holy Spirit whom He has sent to teach us all things pertaining to Christ and His work to save sinners such as ourselves.

But this peace is sometimes elusive. Where can you go to find it? Some look for it in monkery, meditation, or by taking a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. And while those things might be a some benefit, the fact is you need look no further than this Church, where God the Holy Spirit freely and generously distributes God's peace in the preaching of the Gospel and in the administration of the Sacraments. As Luther once said: “God

left His peace behind to all Christendom. Where? Nowhere else than in His Baptism, in the Sacrament, and in the Office of the Holy Ministry.”

When you avail yourself of Holy Absolution, you hear the living Word of Christ speaking to you through the mouth of His called and ordained servant. In fact, in a few short moments you'll hear the peace of Christ spoken to you as you prepare to partake of the Sacrament of the Altar. As Christ's true body and blood are held up before your eyes, you'll hear me say: “The peace of the Lord be with you always.” And then, in preparation for receiving Christ in the Sacrament, we'll sing about the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world and grants us His peace. Finally, following the Distribution, these words will be spoken into your ears: “The body and blood of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ strengthen and preserve you, body and soul, in that one true faith unto life everlasting. Depart in peace. *Your sin has been forgiven!*”

These words are much more than just a hopeful prayer for peace, but in fact, this *is* the work of God the Holy Spirit – to bring the peace of Christ to you in such a way that you never have to doubt you've received it. God wants you to know that you have peace with God *now* because you've been fed with His Word and with His Sacraments. Here – before and in you – is the whole Christ, not bits and pieces of Him. Here the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, comes to you with Christ's peace so powerfully that even though you may look into the jaws of hell itself – so long as you are clinging to Christ you may be assured that this peace is still yours.

Again, listen to Luther's paraphrase of our dear Lord's words: “Therefore when the devil and the world slap you in the face and box your ears again and again, take it. Only remain with Me, and prize above everything else My grace, mercy, and peace – My body and blood, My Baptism, Word, and Spirit which I leave you. Then My peace will be strong enough to overcome and suppress all your strife.” As today we celebrate the conclusion of the festival half of the Church year, we rejoice in all that God has done for us by sending His Son to be our Savior – and also for the work of God the Holy Spirit who brings us the Gifts of Christ to create, sustain, and keep us unto life everlasting. May it always be so for Jesus' sake. Amen.

And now that peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds in that one true faith in Christ Jesus, unto life everlasting. Amen.