

Sermon for Easter 5 – John 16:5-15

In the Name of the Father and of the Son ✠ and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

In these next couple weeks we take up the topics of Christ's Ascension into heaven and His sending of the Holy Spirit. Why did Christ ascend into heaven? Just who is the Holy Spirit? What does the Holy Spirit do?

When Christ was present in His flesh and blood human body with His disciples they often times sought only the physical things of a kingdom. This is seen from the Gospel accounts. Do you remember when conversations of God's kingdom came up and the disciples would immediately argue who will be the greatest? Or James and John's mother argued for her sons to sit at Christ's right hand? Do you remember when the crowd of 5,000 thought that God's kingdom was little more than bread? Didn't the disciples on the road to Emmaus also consider Christ's kingdom a failure, even after He rose from the dead? It seems that the disciples could only view Christ's kingdom as a kingdom of this world while he was present in this way in the world.

But this is why it is good that Christ goes away. This is good that Christ sends the Holy Spirit. Christ's kingdom is not of this world and is revealed by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit gives us the means by which to believe the saving work of Jesus Christ – God's true kingdom. All relies on the fact that Christ saves sinners and that we believe it. No matter how good our words or works or ways or life are, without Christ, we wither like grass.

We need the Holy Spirit to do His work. Which is what? What is the work of the Holy Spirit? The Gospel tells us to "convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgement." And this the Spirit does. He cuts to our heart, which is the source and well-spring from which the chief sin of unbelief flows along with everything that comes from it: disobedience, idolatry, and contempt for God and His ways. For unbelief is not merely the root of all sin, it is the original sin passed down to us from Adam and Eve. Were it not for unbelief in God, there would be no murder, no adultery, and no theft.

The world complains of the fact that humanity is evil, and yet they have no idea how this happens. They see the foul river flowing and the noxious tree sprouting, but as to where the source is and the roots are buried, they don't have a clue. So they invent new laws and regulations which fix nothing. They forget that the righteousness and innocence of Adam was lost in the fall to sin. In other words, before Adam our father sinned, we were all righteous and innocent. But when he broke God's commandment, he and us, all his descendants, became unrighteous through unbelief.

Mankind's heart is evil. And we can prove this. In today's epistle, St. James tells us that the anger of man does not produce the righteousness that God requires. Our anger starts in here, but it can and does spill out into sinful words and actions. The Law works in an "if... then" relationship with us. If my sinful and angry heart causes me to speak or act out in a sinful way in school, at work, or at home, then I will often have to face the consequences of that sin. When the teacher, boss, or father/mother or some other authority is present, we're more likely to keep the rules. This doesn't necessarily make us better people, for we still want to do what our sinful hearts tell us to do, even though we're curbed from acting on it. Our sinful nature is still the heart of the matter.

So how do we regain righteousness? How do we get back our innocence? Only by the Christ giving up His life when He atoned, suffered, died, and rose again are we restored to righteousness. This is the righteousness by which the Spirit convicts the world.

And that's why we need the Holy Spirit. Because there's the problem that's every person's problem: I, a guilty sinner must believe in the forgiveness of my sins. We must believe the verdict of the judge, or as it's said in today's gospel: the conviction by the Holy Spirit. What good does it do a prisoner to receive a pardon if he does not accept it and instead chooses to live behind bars? Why would someone choose to carry their prison with them wherever they go?

To continue the court analogy to understand the Holy Trinity, the Father is the judge, though a loving and merciful judge. The Son, Christ Jesus, is the means by which the debt is repaid and takes on our guilty sentence. In the Scriptures, the Holy Spirit is described as images of wind, fire, or a dove. But how does He fit into this picture?

The Spirit is active in the world to make known the innocent verdict for all sinners. He makes God's law and gospel known. By Him, I am led to believe that Christ died for my sins. Without the Holy Spirit, we are left to grasp at forgiveness through our own efforts. But it's not about doing, but believing – and this believing itself is a gift from God the Holy Spirit.

The Spirit makes the redemptive act of God in Christ real in our lives. Luther said it most clearly: "I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to Him, but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, and sanctified and kept me in the true faith."

The Holy Spirit convicts the world concerning judgement. The prince of this world is judged and condemned by Christ. While God rules the world, we're told that He give the devil a little while on this earth. That's why sometimes the Scriptures refer to the devil as the prince of this world. He will have nothing after this world. His verdict has already been pronounced. In fact, nothing more remains than to broadcast this verdict on the Last Day, and to throw Satan and all his members into the flames of hell. Have not the devil, death, sin, hell, and all their ways already been overcome, judged, and condemned in Christ? Indeed, the devil is overcome. Death is slain. And hell is destroyed.

And the Holy Spirit guides us into all truth. All truth is the true doctrine, the true teaching that we have for ourselves and for our children: The Ten Commandments, the Articles of the Apostle's Creed, the daily prayers and the Our Father, our true Christian ceremonies of Holy Baptism, Holy Absolution, and the Sacrament of Christ's Body and Blood. In the Table of Duties we're given the encouragement to exercise and improve ourselves daily. God be praised that in these true teachings, the Holy Spirit strengthens us in the faith, sustains us in all struggles, and grants us eternal life in His name. Amen.

The Peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. ✠BJF✠