The message we share, entitled “The Role of the Holy Spirit”, is written by Rev. James T. Batchelor, Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Hoopeston, IL. USA. We begin with a prayer. "Gracious God, bless now the words of my lips and the meditations of our hearts. Breath your Spirit into us and grant that we may hear, and in hearing be led in the way you want us to go. Amen.”

Pastor Jim writes … There is a great difference between a once in a lifetime event and a unique event. A "once in a lifetime" experience is by definition something that is so rare it only happens once in a lifetime. A unique event is even more rare. It does not happen once in a lifetime, but it only happens once in all of history. There is nothing like it before it happens and nothing like it will ever happen again.

The disciples in today’s Gospel were struggling with something unique. The saving work of Jesus Christ happened once in all of history. As the Holy Spirit inspired the writer to the Hebrews to write: [Hebrew 9:11-12] "When Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. Jesus Christ entered once for all into the holy places. His perfect life, His suffering, His death, and His resurrection are unique. They never happened before and they will never happen again. The unique work of Christ is the way that He and He alone rescues us from sin, death, and the power of the devil.

The unique nature of the redeeming work of Jesus Christ is one of the reasons I like to cut the disciples a little slack. When they were with Jesus, they experienced a lot of unique stuff. There was nothing in their experience, or even within the entire collected history of their culture, that prepared them for being with Jesus. In the middle of today's Gospel, the disciples simply say, "We do not know what he is talking about."

Today's Gospel comes from the upper room. Jesus was with His disciples on the evening before He died on the cross. He knew He would be dead in less than twenty-four hours. Jesus was explaining what was about to happen to Him, but the disciples were not able to absorb His explanation.

Today's reading from the Gospel has Jesus looking beyond His suffering, death, and resurrection. He was even looking beyond His ascension. At the beginning of today's Gospel, Jesus said, "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth …" Jesus was looking forward to the coming of the Holy Spirit. He promised that the Holy Spirit would resolve all the confusion. By the power of the Holy Spirit, the disciples would remember their experiences with Jesus and they would finally be able to cope with the wonder of the salvation that God worked for us in Jesus Christ.

This is very important for all who read the Bible. We would not have the New Testament if the Holy Spirit had not come and helped the disciples. Without the Holy Spirit, their thoughts would be confused and their memories would be foggy at best. With the Holy Spirit, their memories became sharp and accurate, and they understood the teachings of Jesus. Without the Holy Spirit, there is no
way that they could have written what they wrote. With the Holy Spirit, their writings are the power of God unto salvation.

Jesus then continued to describe the nature of the Holy Spirit's teachings. He said, "… for the [Spirit of Truth] will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you." With these words, Jesus told His disciples that the Holy Spirit will not tell them anything new. Instead, He will clarify and sharpen the things that Jesus already said.

These words about the Holy Spirit are also important for us. These words tell us how we can discern the true prophet from the false prophet. In today's Gospel Jesus said that the Holy Spirit will not speak on his own authority. He will take what is mine and declare it to you. He will never ever change what Jesus has already said. He will only tell us what Jesus has already said.

Jesus warned us, [Matthew 24:23-24] "If anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or 'There he is!' do not believe it. For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect." Down through the ages, there have been many false prophets who said that they had a word from the Holy Spirit. Even today, you can hear false prophets say, "I have a word for you from the Holy Spirit." In today's Gospel, Jesus tells us that the Holy Spirit will always and forever agree with the words that we already have in the Bible. If someone ever disagrees with the Bible, they are not of the Holy Spirit. They might be under the influence of a different spirit, but it is NOT the Holy Spirit. Jesus made it very clear that the Holy Spirit will not tell us anything new. Instead, He will clarify the things that Jesus already said.

Martin Luther explained it this way: In this way Christ sets bounds for the message of the Holy Spirit Himself. He is not to preach anything new or anything else than Christ and His Word. Thus we have a sure guide and touchstone for judging the false spirits. We can declare that it surely does not indicate the presence of the Holy Spirit when a person proclaims his own thoughts and notions and begins to teach in Christendom something apart from or in addition to what Christ taught. No, that betrays the presence of the loathsome spirit of lies, the devil, of whom Christ declares in John 8:44: "When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature," that is, what he himself has fabricated.

Nothing has changed since Martin Luther preached these words. Our old sinful nature still entices us to believe something is true because it feels good. Our culture tells us to let our feelings be our guide. The devil tempts us to constantly search for the next mountain top experience. The forces of evil will do anything and everything to prevent us from finding the Holy Spirit where He has promised to be … in the Holy Scriptures.

Today's Gospel account continues to remind us of the roles that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit take as they give salvation to us. We see the Father sending, the Son redeeming, and the Holy Spirit declaring. It is the Holy Spirit's role to declare the salvation that Jesus earned for us.

Jesus said, "A little while, and you will see me no longer; and again a little while, and you will see me." In a little while, Judas would betray Jesus into the hands of the enemy. The enemy would mock, torture, and crucify Him. After He died, His friends laid Him in a tomb. He left their sight. They saw Him no longer. With this suffering and death, Jesus earned salvation for all people.
Jesus also said, "... and again a little while, and you will see me." Jesus did not remain in the tomb. He rose from the dead and He lives forever more. The disciples saw Him again. The disciples witnessed Jesus as He redeemed the world to God.

The Holy Spirit came to the aid of these witnesses. He kept their memories sharp, and He helped them understand what they had witnessed. They were able to place the witness of their testimony into a written form that will be with us forever. Jesus said, [Matthew 24:35] "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away."

Jesus Christ promised to send the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit proclaims Christ's salvation whenever we hear the Word of God in its truth and purity. Through that proclamation the Holy Spirit establishes, maintains, and strengthens faith. Through that faith, the Holy Spirit delivers the gifts that Jesus Christ, our Redeemer purchased and won for us with His life, suffering, death, and resurrection. The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son to give us eternal life in the presence of the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Amen