

DAY OF PENTECOST – May 23, 2021 – John 14:23-31

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

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

Jesus answered him, "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. ²⁴ Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me. ²⁵ "These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. ²⁶ But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. ²⁷ Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid. ²⁸ You heard me say to you, 'I am going away, and I will come to you.' If you loved me, you would have rejoiced, because I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I. ²⁹ And now I have told you before it takes place, so that when it does take place you may believe. ³⁰ I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming. He has no claim on me, ³¹ but I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father. Rise, let us go from here.

Well, here we are – it's Pentecost Day! Fifty days ago, we celebrated the Resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Fifty days ago our emotions were riding high; we couldn't contain our glee; we told everyone that we knew that our Savior was once dead, but is now risen. But, some of the luster has faded from that happiness, hasn't it? We're through the season of Easter, and it seems that every Sunday is at least somewhat the same. We've been talking about the work of the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Trinity, for at least a few weeks now; we might be thinking that these sermons are a broken record by now, talking about a Spirit, which we cannot see, that does things that we don't

understand, serving the purposes of the Father's love, to be sure, and pointing to the actions of Jesus on the cross as the most important in all of human history. But, I wonder sometimes if we still take this for granted. Because we cannot see Him, we wonder just how much of our being obedient to God's will, and believing in His truth, comes from the Holy Spirit, and how much is our own hard work and striving? If we're honest, we don't want to admit that we're totally unable to do anything in the faith department; we'd like to think that we can take the events of Jesus' life, death and resurrection, have them impact our daily lives, and then go on and live like good little Christians forever – ON OUR OWN!

It kind of reminds me of an old adage that I often repeat, so bear with me here. Many think that they can worship God anywhere; they don't have to come to church and do it. They think that we can set aside time to read and study the Word of God at home, and reflect upon our Baptism without gathering for corporate worship. My standard answer to this question is that yes, we can do this, and yes, we are able to do this, but we won't! The sinful nature gets in the way; it puts all kinds of obstacles between us and true, child-like, refreshing trust in Jesus and what He has done on our behalf. Sunday morning can be filled quite easily with other things to do instead of gathering in this place to receive the gifts of God; many of our families and friends indeed do so. I'm not here to cast doubt on their faith, or say that they don't have an intellectual, mind-led belief in Christ and what He has done. However, we are told in the Scriptures that faith will have some evidence presented, some good works proceeding from it. If we completely turn off the Holy Spirit's urging, and think that we're just fine on our own, we're in danger! The devil's schemes are easily confused with the work of God in our lives; it doesn't take long for us to get out of the habit of attending church services, studying the Word of God, and inwardly digesting it. Once we're out of that habit, it's hard to get back into it. The cares of the world, the pursuits of this life, the things that are opposed to the Word of God, EASILY get in the way of the exercise of the faith that is placed in our hearts by God Himself in our Baptism.

So, what happened on Pentecost? The Holy Spirit moved in the hearts of thousands of people, and they were able to hear Peter's preaching in their own languages and tongues. They believed what he was preaching to them, were cut to the heart, in fact, and the Law of God convicted them of their sins and their sinful nature. Once this happened, the Holy Spirit then moved in as quick as a flash to create and sustain faith in Jesus and His accomplishments on the cross of Calvary, and sustain that faith. They lived in a tough time to be a Christian – it was an illegal religion, there was lots of persecution around, and most people believed that they were charlatans and frauds. But, the Holy Spirit works that way, both then and now – He does a miracle in the heart, causing that which was stone-cold against God to become faithful and faith-filled, by His working and impetus.

Jesus tells us a little bit more in this passage about what the Holy Spirit does, and why the promised Counselor, the Helper, is so important to come among us. We've talked a lot about this in the previous weeks, so I won't belabor these points too much, except to summarize what we've learned so far. But, there are a couple of new insights that I'd like to point out this morning, that help to round out what we know about the Holy Spirit – which is appropriate, since this Pentecost Day is not only the festival about the Spirit, but is also the birthday of the Christian Church – the day when the church had its first great mission festival of the New Testament era.

What do we know so far about the Holy Spirit, from Jesus' words in John's Gospel? He's part of the Trinity – where the Father is, there is the Son, and there is the Holy Spirit. When Thomas asked Jesus to show him the Father, Jesus responded with patience – if you've seen Me, you've seen the Father – I and the Father are one. You can't divide up the Trinity into roles so different that they are completely divorced from one another. They are completely united when it comes to their actions toward us sinful men; it's like a three-judge tribunal that never has dissenting opinions! Only when they interact with each other, in the perfection of heaven, are there distinct Persons and distinct activities. I hesitate to even mention these, because they've been so misused in recent years to separate, rather

than draw together, the Three Persons of the Trinity (recent Confirmands will testify to my reticence to use these terms; I quickly follow them with the explanation I'll give to you here and now!) The Father is primarily associated with creation, the Son is primarily associated with redemption of mankind, or justification, and the Holy Spirit is primarily associated with creating and sustaining faith in Christ, or sanctification, and making good works to proceed from us. Never forget, however, that all three Persons are united with each other, and aren't absent from one another at any time.

Do you understand this? I sure don't! We'll learn a little more about the economy of the Trinity next week on Trinity Sunday, when we read the Athanasian Creed, but even that doesn't answer a fraction of the questions we come up with. We remember this when we are praying preformulated collects – we pray to the Father, in Jesus' Name (because that is the only reason that we can approach the Father), by the leading and urging of the Holy Spirit. Not only do these types of prayers honor our Trinitarian God by speaking to Him as He has told us He is (Triune, Three in One), but they also remind us that all three Persons are necessary to our salvation.

We know that His one and only job is to point to Jesus and what He has done for us in His life, death, and Resurrection – the Spirit's job is to not steal the limelight, but to enlighten the One that has done everything for our salvation, Jesus. He speaks what He hears, and repeats it over and over in our ears (Word) and mouths (the Supper) and hearts (remembering our Baptism). When Jesus goes away (and we hear this throughout this section of John's Gospel), the Helper, the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, will not only take His place, but will do more than He was even able to do – make it personal in our hearts, what Christ has done. If Jesus didn't go away, then our salvation wouldn't happen – if He didn't give Himself as the sacrifice for our sins, then they would be with us forever. If the Holy Spirit didn't come, then we'd be left despondent, hopeless, easy takings for the evil one to come in and snatch away the faith that might have been there once, but was only for a short time. Remember Jesus' parable about the sower and his seed? The Holy Spirit makes it so that we are considered good soil, and not the

path, rocky ground, or filled with thorns and thistles. It's only the Holy Spirit that can cause such a transformation to take place – it's His miraculous work of continually pointing us to Jesus once again. It's kind of like redirecting young children – they easily get off track, and are distracted to rabbit trails. They can be intently listening to a story, and something catches their eye outside, and their attention is gone, in a flash, and it's hard to get it back. The Holy Spirit is patient, never tires of bringing us back, reminding us of who we are and Whose we are. He keeps our focus on the narrative at hand, that which will give us eternal life, the gratitude and thankfulness and peace that comes from knowing that Jesus died in our place, and rose again to give us the assurance that we, too, will rise on the Last Day

The Spirit makes it so that we are never alone – even when the devil, the world, and our sinful nature try to convince us that we are lonesome and forlorn – just as Jesus was never alone, even in the throes of His Passion. The world around us is going to make things difficult – we will be hated for the Name of Christ which we bear; in the same way that they beat Him, scorned Him, and ultimately killed Him, so they will do to us. The disciples experienced this – they didn't have easy lives – just look at the ministry of any of the apostles – it wasn't exactly a fishing trip! All of the apostles, save two, were martyred for the faith, and I wouldn't want to be one of the other two, either. John – died on the island of Patmos, banished there because he refused to stop preaching about Christ and Him crucified. Judas – no, the authorities didn't kill him – he beat them to the punch, and hanged himself. What about Paul? He gives a blow-by-blow account in his many epistles, about shipwrecks, beatings, starvations, and the like

Jesus was alone, in part, because His disciples fled from Him when the going got rough. But, don't be too hard on them – it was foretold that this would happen, so that they would go on to be His ambassadors to the known world, to preach the Gospel to the nations, to be the first pastors of the various churches. They scattered for a greater purpose, even though they themselves didn't know it at the time. They were being prepared and preserved for even greater work in God's kingdom. We, too,

will have persecution in this life. Those who try to kill us will be exalted, and even think that they are doing something pleasing to God in doing it. But, the Holy Spirit will not abandon us. He will give us the words to say, and the courage to say them, and the opportunities to speak them, to further the kingdom of God. He will guide and lead us in being measured, calm and judicious, even when it seems like the world we know is falling apart at the seams.

Our Gospel account for today tells us a couple of more details about the Holy Spirit that add into this picture we've been drawing for quite some time now. We learn in this passage that the Holy Spirit directly causes us to do good works, that all good things that we are able to accomplish have their authorship in Him, and that nothing good is birthed from within us without His guiding and leading. The Holy Spirit is the reason that Jesus says, "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me." This is in response to a question from one of the disciples (Judas, not Iscariot!), when he asked Jesus how Jesus would be manifested among them, and not to the world. The Spirit works in the hearts of those who believe, to keep them focused on Jesus, and to produce good works out of their hearts and souls and bodies. The Spirit causes us to love Jesus; consequently, the Father will love us, and we will repeat His Words in our daily lives. That's what Jesus means when He says that He and the Father (and the Holy Spirit, because we know the three cannot be separated) will come and make their home in us. We will more and more be made into the image that God wants us to have, He will come into our hearts not through our invitation, but through the Holy Spirit's redecorating!

Because the Father is at home within us, then "the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you." One of the most important things that the Holy Spirit does is reminds us of who we are, and Whose we are. We are redeemed children of God, marked with His Seal of the Cross in our Baptism, and urged and

prodded to do good works, which the Spirit has created in advance for us to do. That's why we read and study the Scriptures, and the Confessions, so much – so that the first thing in our minds is the Word of God, and the exposition of that Word. This is so that in time of trouble, we will remember these promises of God, and draw upon them for strength. Hopefully, with a great deal of familiarity with the Scriptures, we can have them be as easy to recollect as nursery rhymes when we were kids – although these have much more import! He will teach us all things – He will teach us that which we need to know about the Triune God, and what He has done for us

What, ultimately, does this working of the Holy Spirit in our hearts produce for us? Peace that is beyond our understanding – peace with God, peace in our situation in this life, peace knowing that all is taken care of for us to not be destroyed because of our sins and our sinfulness. Peace not like the world gives, but peace that is ours in Christ. It's interesting – the names of some of the newer churches out there in the LCMS. It used to be that most were named Trinity, or St. Paul's, or Immanuel, and many still are. However, I saw a church name a few weeks ago that was quite interesting – Peace with Christ Lutheran Church. It's quite a fitting name – it's because of Christ that we have peace with God; it's peace that we're actually searching for in this world, that we cannot have except for the working of the Holy Spirit to create and sustain faith in our hearts.

Peace is something that we yearn for, even if we aren't aware of it. We want peace in the world, peace within our families, peace within our churches, peace between us and our enemies. These types of peace are all well and good; however, the peace that lasts, that surpasses all understanding, as we hear at the end of every sermon, only comes from learning all things from the Counselor, the Helper, the Holy Spirit. We know about the love of God for us in Christ Jesus through the Holy Spirit. We know that all things have been set right between us and God by the Holy Spirit showing it to our hearts. We can regard others as fellow believers for whom Christ died by the peace and knowledge given to us by the Spirit.

Thanks be to God that we have learned so much about the Holy Spirit. The compilers of the lectionary, hundreds of years ago, were quite wise in spending so much time on the work of the Holy Spirit. Rather than just a couple of weeks, on Pentecost and Trinity Sunday, trying to fit all of this into one or two sermons, we've had the opportunity to delve into His nature for a few weeks now. Why is this so important? Because He is the primary mover in our day and age, taking the death and Resurrection of Christ and making it apply to our lives. He points to Christ, and all is well once again between us and God. As we launch into the Trinity season after next week, and we talk about some of the varied teachings of Jesus, His miracles, His healings, we focus more on the work of the Holy Spirit in our midst.

It's been said that the Trinity season, the "green season", is the "time of the church" during the liturgical year. Unfortunately, it's also been called the "non-festival season" as the opposite of the "festival season" that we just completed. But, in order to understand how God builds up His church, and feeds it with His Word, we need to understand the mechanism that He uses to accomplish this. The Holy Spirit is living and active, both through His Word and His Sacraments, to guide us and lead us into the Truth. Thanks be to God for revealing this much about the Spirit, and giving us the faith to trust that He has given us all that we need to know about Him. He has truly done everything for our salvation. Amen.

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

Now may the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Savior and Lord. Amen.