

Sermon for May 27, 2012 - Pentecost

John 14:25-27

Theme: The Holy Spirit was sent . . .

- 1) *To remind you of Christ's teachings*
- 2) *To give you peace from Christ's Work*

²⁵ "All this I have spoken while still with you. ²⁶ But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. ²⁷ Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

I once met a man in Milwaukee who asked me: "Is your church a Spirit-filled church? I don't want to attend a church that's not filled with the Spirit." Before I tell you how I answered his question, how would you have answered it?

The answer to his question depends on how you define "Spirit-filled." Is Immanuel a Holy Spirit filled church? According to the Biblical definition of "Spirit-filled," most definitely. If Immanuel were not Spirit-filled, we would not be a Christian Church because only the Holy Spirit can create and strengthen faith. St Paul says: *No one can say, "Jesus is Lord" except by the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:3).*

But the problem I had in answering this man's question is that he defined "Spirit-filled" differently. For him, Spirit-filled meant swaying, emotional, speaking in tongues, and getting prophecy from God apart from the Bible. Are we that kind of church? Definitely not!

This man's question reflects a problem many so called "charismatic" Christians have: they define the gift of the Holy Spirit differently than Scripture does. They think it's the Spirit's job to zap them with joy and understanding apart from God's Word! (I actually remember meeting a man who told me that he does not need to read his Bible because the Holy Spirit teaches him directly.) They see faith as an emotional response and not a God-given confidence in God's Gospel promises. And so they build their faith, not on God, but on the false spirit that moves them; a spirit that masquerades as an angel of light, but is in truth the devil.¹

Why am I talking about the problem of "charismatic Christians"? For two reasons: First of all most of cable Christian television promotes a false understanding of the Holy Spirit and how he works. (And I know that many well-intentioned Lutherans watch these programs and, unknowingly, accept these teachings as ok.) And secondly, because our lazy, sinful human nature is inclined to think the Holy Spirit works faith in us apart from the Gospel. If I had a dollar for every time someone told me that they don't go to Church or read their Bible at home, but at least they pray, I would be a rich man! Don't get me wrong: prayer is important. But prayer will not save you nor will it keep you in the true faith. Only the Gospel will do that because the Holy Spirit does not work faith in a person's heart apart from the Gospel. Let me repeat that again because it is so incredibly important: the Holy Spirit does not work faith in a person's heart apart from the Gospel.

The Holy Spirit was not sent to give us emotional ecstasy. He was not sent to entertain us with healings, miracles and speaking in tongues. He was not sent to speak to us in our prayers or dreams so we can be lazy and stop reading Scripture. No. As we will learn in our sermon for this morning, the Holy Spirit was sent to remind and instruct us in Christ's teachings, and by doing so give us true spiritual peace.

Part One: To remind you of Christ's teachings

Our sermon text is part of the larger discourse that Jesus had with his disciples on the night before his crucifixion. He was using this time to encourage and teach his disciples. He spoke of many things - like how he was going to prepare a place for them in heaven and come back, the institution of the Lord's Supper, how the disciples were to love each other, and many other things.

When you look at all Jesus said, one wonders how the disciples would be able to keep it all straight. Well, the answer to that dilemma is this: Jesus didn't expect them to understand and remember it all at once. He says to them: *All this I have spoken while still with you.*²⁶ *But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.*

Jesus promised to send someone to help them and us: the Holy Spirit of God who is himself God. Jesus talks about his role as being that of a "Counselor." Now, the Greek word used for this term ("Paraclete") is a difficult to translate. It means so much more than any single English word can describe. It means someone who comes to the aid of someone else - a helper. This helper will defend, speak on a person's behalf, teach, guide, counsel - all these things rolled into one!

And this is exactly what the Holy Spirit - true God himself - comes to do for us in love! He is our "Paraclete," our helper. He intercedes on our behalf, protects, guides and - most importantly - instructs us and reminds us. What exactly does the Holy Spirit instruct and remind us of? Everything Jesus taught his disciples.

This was an incredibly important promise that Jesus gave his disciples. Could you imagine trying to keep everything straight that Jesus taught his entire ministry— let on that one evening before his betrayal? The disciples needed the Holy Spirit's instruction and inspiration so that they could know and remember everything Jesus did and taught, so that the Gospel could go forth into all the world.

And today we celebrate God keeping this promise to His Church. On Pentecost - 50 days after Easter - the Holy Spirit was given to Jesus' disciples in a visible way, and with him they were given all the gifts necessary to preach the Gospel in all the world. The Holy Spirit reminded the apostles and evangelists of everything Jesus said and did, so that they could write it down, so that there would be a divine record for all people to know about Christ.

This divine record is the New Testament Scriptures that the Holy Spirit uses, together with the Old Testament, to continue to instruct his Church until the end of time. Yes, the Holy Spirit was sent to remind and instruct all Christians about Jesus, his works and his teachings, and so it is crystal clear that the tool the Holy Spirit uses to accomplish this task is Scripture itself.

How sad it is that so many people think they don't need the Bible or further instruction in the Bible. How sad it is that we are tempted to think the very same thing! I have heard, over the course of my ministry, people say that they don't need Bible class because they learned it all in Sunday School, Day School or confirmation. Let me ask you this: does a football player, once he finishes summer practice, cease to review the team playbook because he read it all in the summer? Does a soldier, after he finishes boot camp, stop training, because he already knows the basics? Any soldier who would be so stupid to do that would end up dead on the battlefield - just like the Christian who thinks He does not need training beyond what he learned in confirmation. Such Christians, if they continue in this arrogant way of thinking, end up spiritually and eternally dead.

We need training. We need to be reminded of both God's law and Gospel. We need to be constantly refocused on Christ. We need to be in the Word, because this is the tool the Holy Spirit uses to instruct and point us to Christ.

Sadly, we sometimes fall into the trap of the so-called "charismatic" Christians in thinking that as long as we pray for the Holy Spirit to keep us in the faith and give us understanding that He will zap us with knowledge and faith, that he will speak to us in our prayers, and increase our feeling of joy without our having to read the Bible. Listen carefully to what I am about to say: The Holy Spirit NEVER promised to work apart from His Word. He does not speak to us in prayer and He does not zap us with knowledge and understanding.

What, then, does the Holy Spirit do? He uses the Gospel to create and strengthen faith in our hearts. His Word is the tool for doing all his work: from calling us to repentance to reassuring us of Christ's forgiveness. He uses the Word to point out our need for Christ and then all that Christ has done to save us. With His Word He creates faith in our hearts and awakens in us a desire to show love to God and our neighbor in response to God's love for us. By means of His Word alone that He commanded His apostles to write down, the Holy Spirit accomplishes his task of making us Holy by keeping us in Christ.

Holy Spirit, forgive us for the times we have despised you and attempted to seek your blessings apart from your Word. Keep us in Christ, dear Lord, by keeping us in the Gospel.

Part Two: To give you peace from Christ's Work

Why did Jesus promise to send the Holy Spirit to His disciples? To give them peace. *Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.*

True peace is what the Holy Spirit gives us as we read and meditate on His Word. And what is this true peace? It is the peace of knowing that all our sins have been forgiven for Christ's sake - that God no longer holds us accountable for them. It is the peace of know that God loves us, that heaven is our home, that nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. It is the peace that enables us to love God and our neighbor in response to God's love for us.

We should also note what this peace is not: it is not merely a subjective feeling of being relaxed. No, this peace is an objective reality that exists even when we don't feel it. When trouble comes our way, when God allows persecution or cross to come upon us in such a way that we feel no peace, we can still take comfort in the fact that we have peace. God loves us. We are his and He is ours. This peace we have with God is true regardless of whether we feel it or not. This peace is only found in the Gospel.

How different this peace is from what the world offers - especially "charismatic" Christianity! I once met a gentleman, who went to a charismatic Church and confessed to me that he had no peace. And why not? Because he didn't feel saved all the time, and this bothered him. You see to him, being saved was all about feeling the Spirit, and when he didn't feel it, he was sacred.

How sad this was! I hope he took my words to heart. I told him that he should not look to his feelings but to God's Word for salvation. When you look to Jesus in His Word you will find peace. And this peace is a product of the Holy Spirit himself, working faith in your heart through the Gospel. He gives to us objective peace, peace that has nothing to do with how I feel or with what I have done for God, but peace that is founded upon everything Jesus has done and promised to do for me.

Look to Christ. Remain in the Gospel. As you focus on Christ and His work the Holy Spirit will instruct you with the Gospel and give you peace. This is why He was sent.

So how did I answer the man who asked me whether or not my Church was "Spirit-filled? I said, " We most certainly are a "Spirit-filled" church, because without the Holy Spirit, it is impossible to confess Christ as our Lord and Savior. We don't speak in tongues or do faith healings, but we preach the Gospel its truth and purity and show Christian love with sincerity. This shows beyond any shadow of a doubt that we are Spirit-filled." Amen

ⁱ *Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. (2Co 11:14 NIV)*