

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

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Today is Pentecost. It's the day that God poured out the Holy Spirit on his disciples exactly 50 days after Jesus rose from the dead. We heard all about it in the first reading today. You remember, the sound of a loud wind, the tongues of fire, speaking in foreign languages, Peter stood up and delivered a sermon to the crowd that day. We didn't read the whole account, but the end result was that the Holy Spirit worked powerfully through that message, and in one day 3,000 people came to believe and were baptized. The Christian church was born.

So Pentecost is really a festival to the Holy Spirit and his work. So here's why you should listen today. **The Holy Spirit is perhaps the most misunderstood person of the Holy Trinity.** If I asked Christians in Omaha, "What does God the Father do?" the answers would be fairly similar. If I asked, "What does Jesus Christ do?" We'd probably get a few more misconceptions in there, but also a fairly narrow scope to the answers. But if I asked, "What does the Holy Spirit do?" Here, I think we'd get more variety.

- Catholics: The Holy Spirit works through the church hierarchy to govern and rule Christ's church.
- Pentecostals: The Holy Spirit works powerfully in believers to give them supernatural gifts.
- Other Christians would say: The Holy Spirit is the one who draws all attention to Jesus Christ.

So there is confusion about what the Holy Spirit does, and I hope to clear that up for you today.

The second thing I hope to accomplish today is that we see why his work is so needed. We're going to see why the Holy Spirit's work is so needed by us as individuals, and also why the Holy Spirit's work is so needed by the world.

Let me pull this all together. The sermon theme today is simply this: "The Holy Spirit Works." To unpack that statement I'm going to answer to questions about it. "The Holy Spirit Works." So what? Doing what? The answer is in John 16:5-11.

I'll start today with a little disclaimer right up front. The portion of Scripture we're looking at today is tough to understand. We're looking at the Gospel lesson which we heard just before the hymn. At the end of that reading, were you kind of going, "Huh?" It's not one of those places that you read once and you just get it. It's one of those places that requires a lot of thought, and a lot of comparison with other parts of Scripture. For this reason, I've never preached on this text. But today, we're going to tackle it together. So kind of sit up straight, put your thinking on, let's roll up our sleeves and get to work!

Now let's look at Scripture. Once again, the setting is the day before Jesus was crucified. Doesn't it seem like a lot happened that day? It did. Much of it is recorded in John's Gospel. If you get a chance this week, read from John's Gospel, chapters 13 – 17. These 5 whole chapters all take place during the evening meal on Maundy Thursday, the evening of Jesus' last supper

with his disciples. The evening Judas would betray Jesus. By 9am the next morning, nails would be pounded through his hands and feet as he's hung to die on a wooden cross. Jesus has some very important things to say to his disciples before he dies, and John captures a whole lot of it in those 5 chapters. Read them!

So here's what Jesus says to them in the reading before us today. (Again, I'm working with the NIV 2011 translation.)

**11 But now I am going to him who sent me.** Jesus has predicted many times already that he will be betrayed, crucified and he'll rise again. He would return to the Father who sent him. Remember that he's already said this many times to them.

**None of you asks me, 'Where are you going?' 6 Rather, you are filled with grief because I have said these things.** Jesus had said this so many times, they weren't asking him about it anymore. In fact, they weren't really thinking at all about what Jesus would soon be suffering. They weren't contemplating the purpose of impending suffering and death for them and for the world. Instead they were thinking about themselves. And they were sad. Jesus was leaving. They were behaving like two year olds.

If Mom is leaving to go to the store to buy ice cream for the kids, the older kids are happy. Mom can't leave soon enough! But the two year old is very unhappy. All he thinks is, "Mom is leaving!" He can't comprehend that her short absence will mean yummy ice cream. So also Jesus' short-sited disciples couldn't understand that his departure was going to bring them blessings beyond measure. He was about to accomplish the forgiveness of all their guilt... and they were sad! In fact, his departure was good for a second reason:

**7 But very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.** Not only would his "going away" result in their forgiveness, but there was another good thing that would come of it: Jesus would send the Holy Spirit to them. The translation in your pew Bible calls the Holy Spirit the "Counselor." The NIV 2011 calls him the "Advocate." Other translations say, "Helper." So who's right? The problem is that this word doesn't have an exact English equivalent. The Greek word here is "Paraclete." Literally, it means, "one who can be called upon to provide help." Jesus will send to you the one who can be called upon to provide help. So what's one word that means that? Counselor? (Psychology tone.) Advocate? (Legal tone.) Helper? (Very general to the point of being vague.) Comforter? ("Mom" comes to mind.) Encourager? (Sounds like he doesn't provide real help, just a pep talk.) Take all those terms and roll them together and you have what a Paraclete is. **One whom you call on who immediately comes to you side to provide help.** That's who Jesus promises to send when he goes away!

"The Holy Spirit Works." So what?! So you have one by your side that comes to your aid every time you call upon him. What a blessing! Imagine if Jesus hadn't left, and when you needed help you had to make an appointment with him in Jerusalem to see him. You'd never get the help you need. But Jesus departed to the Father, and now he has sent you the Holy Spirit. And he works. Doing what? Helping you in all your needs.

Let's get more specific about the work the Holy Spirit does. This is the part that can be a little hard to understand, but we'll take our time with it, and we'll get it.

**8 When he comes,** [now Jesus is going to explain what he will do. The Holy Spirit works... doing what?] **he will prove the world to be in the wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment:**

So Jesus lays it out first, and then he explains each of those three things. The world has it all wrong about three things: sin, righteousness and judgment. The Holy Spirit works to prove the world wrong about those three things. First: sin.

**9 [The Holy Spirit will prove the world to be in the wrong] about sin, because people do not believe in me;**

The world has it all wrong when it comes to sin. People don't believe in Jesus because they don't believe they've done anything wrong... or at least nothing wrong of significance.

In Seminary I was still a bit naïve. I used to think, and I bet you did (or do) too, that if only someone heard the Good News about Jesus: his perfect life, his innocent death for the sins of the world, and his glorious resurrection... if only they heard about it, they would believe. But it's not true. Why don't they believe? Why do people not embrace the rescue plan of our loving God? Why do so many reject a message that is so good, unconditional, generous and free? They reject it because they *believe* that sin isn't so bad and God can't be too unhappy about it.

The Holy Spirit proves people wrong about sin. God hates it. Despises it. Is intolerant of it. Is repulsed by it. Is angered by it. He's furious over it.

Many churches today soft pedal this message. They're gagging the Holy Spirit, silencing him. Jesus sent the Holy Spirit for the very purpose of proving the world wrong about sin. Sin, especially and finally unbelief, has damning consequences for eternity.

**10 [The Holy Spirit will prove the world to be in the wrong] about righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer;**

This is hard to get at first glance. Maybe if we remember the Pharisees, it will help. The Pharisees were self-righteous, convinced they were good and therefore right with God. They considered Jesus to be an imposter and they killed him, believing that they were righteous and he was an evildoer. Their concept of righteousness was wrong! And Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit to prove that they were wrong.

If Jesus were in fact unrighteous, the Father would have rejected him. He would have remained in the grave. But he rose, and he ascended. And he is at the right hand of the Father. Therefore, we have the proof that Jesus was righteous and the zealous Pharisees were misguided and in fact not righteous in their actions.

There are plenty of people today who do "spiritual" things. They deny themselves, are zealous for a cause, they do good and help others. They perceive themselves to be righteous. They think they have what God is looking for. If *we* have what God is looking for, then we do not need a Savior. We reject Jesus.

The Holy Spirit proves the world wrong about righteousness too, in that Jesus returned to the Father. Jesus truly was what the Father was looking for! He was righteous. We know it because he returned to the Father. If we are not righteous and Jesus is, then we need his righteousness. The Holy Spirit points us to Jesus and his righteousness.

The Holy Spirit works. Doing what? Convincing the world that righteousness is not found in us, but in God's Son Jesus!

**11 [The Holy Spirit will prove the world to be in the wrong] about judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.**

Here's what I think this means. Satan is the prince of this world. Satan rebelled against God, and he leads people to do the same. Satan teaches people to live our way, according to our feelings, wants and desires... and *not* God's way and according to his wants and desires. The world, then, has this wrong notion that Satan is not condemned for his rebellion, and that they will not be either. The Holy Spirit's work is to prove the world wrong in this way of thinking. Truth is, Satan is already condemned. His fate is sealed. He has lost the war. It all happened at Calvary's cross. As Luther said of Satan: "He's judged, the deed is done. One little word can fell him. His influence continues for a time, but the day is already appointed for his eternal condemnation.

So here's the thing. Anyone who follows Satan in selfish, rebellious living, is also under the judgment of God. They will share the same fate.

The Holy Spirit works... doing what? Proving the world to be in the wrong about sin, righteousness and judgment. The Holy Spirit shows us the truth and convinces us of God's truth. The Holy Spirit creates faith in our hearts to understand the way things really are when it comes to sin, righteousness and judgment.

It's interesting to me to see that the very first sermon preached after the Holy Spirit was sent contains all three of these things. Peter stood up before the crowd and with the power of the Holy Spirit, he proved the people to be in the wrong about sin. He said, "Jesus was God's son, and you crucified and killed him!" He showed them their sin.

He also said, "Jesus of Nazareth was a man approved by God." He corrects their notion of righteousness: Jesus had it. They did not.

Finally he told them, that Jesus would "Make his enemies a footstool." And the admonition to "Save yourselves from this crooked generation." He corrected their misunderstanding of judgment.

What was the result of the Holy Spirit's work? They were cut to the heart. They asked, "What shall we do?" His answer: Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and be baptized. 3,000 of them believed that day.

The Holy Spirit works!!! So what? So you have a one that you can call to your side for help 24 / 7. The Holy Spirit works! Doing what? Condemning the misunderstandings of the world about getting right with God, and convincing the world that forgiveness, life and salvation are found in Jesus Christ alone.

Praise God for that the Holy Spirit works. He works for us, to give us faith, for our salvation. To God be all the glory. Amen.