

THE SPIRIT IS BY OUR SIDE

John 15:26-27 | The Coming of the Holy Spirit | May 17/20, 2018

“When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father—the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father—he will testify about me. ²⁷ And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning.”

JUVA, JESU!

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

When I was a kid I enjoyed going to community carnivals. There was so much fun to be had. There were fun things to eat: cotton candy, elephant ears, hot dogs, popcorn. There were fun games to play, like the one where you try to shoot a stream of water into the clown’s mouth. Prizes to win: Who wouldn’t enjoy a huge, cheap stuffed bear or a Van Halen mirror? There fun rides to enjoy like the Ferris wheel and the dreaded tilt-a-whirl. Part of the fun was trying not to throw up.

My favorite were the haunted houses. Actually, *houses* isn’t right. They were really just trailers. You’d enter at one end of this trailer and walk through a dark tunnel to the other end. When you stepped on a certain spot, you’d trigger a loud noise and lights would flash revealing a scary monster standing right next to you. I say I enjoyed this experience, but only if my dad was by my side. With my dad there, holding my hand, I could endure the terror.

Today we celebrate one of the great festivals of the Christian Church, the festival of Pentecost, the Coming of the Holy Spirit. Really, we are celebrating

having someone by our side, to help and guide us. THE HOLY SPIRIT is the Helper and Guide Jesus promised to send. HE IS BY OUR SIDE. He’s by our side pointing us to Jesus. He’s by our side help us point others to Jesus.

I. Pointing us to Jesus

It was the night Jesus’ we betrayed. A lot happened on that Thursday evening. Jesus washed his disciples’ filthy feet showing them the meaning of humble service. He instituted a new meal, Holy Communion, a meal that Christians have celebrated ever since. Jesus also taught his disciple many other things. You see, he was preparing them for difficult days ahead. In a few short hours they would see him betrayed by one of their own brothers. They would desert him and deny him and watch him suffer and die on a cross. Things were about to get very stressful and very strange. They needed strength. They needed help. They needed encouragement. And Jesus gave it.

He gave them a promise: **“When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father—the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father—he will testify about me.”** You may remember that last

week we said that Jesus is our Advocate, our Defender. The same word is used in our text to refer to the Spirit. However, the word is used in a little different sense here. Literally the word means “one called to the side of.” The implication is that the one called to your side is there to help. The word has been translated *Comforter* or *Counselor*. I think the most basic translation is *Helper*. Jesus promised to send the Spirit to help us.

How does the Spirit do that? Well, the Spirit is all about the truth. He’s all about Jesus. Through the truth of the Bible the Spirit points us to Jesus. There is no greater help that we could receive.

In high school I had a biology teacher that didn’t always teach much biology. He would often wander away from the textbook and get off on tangents that had little or nothing to do with the subject matter. Don’t get me wrong – he was a great guy, and those tangents were certainly interesting and often entertaining. But we didn’t always get biology in our biology class.

With the Spirit that never happens. With the Third Person of the Trinity you will always get the truth and it will always be about Jesus. That is his focus and mission. The so-called “shy person of the Trinity” isn’t all that interested in talking about himself. He loves to put the spotlight on Jesus.

And thank God for that! For that’s where we need the spotlight to be. Without the Spirit’s work in our hearts, we would put the spotlight somewhere else – on

ourselves, on the things of this world, on other people – anywhere but on Jesus. Without the Spirit’s work we would not know Jesus, love Jesus, or trust in Jesus. In fact, without the Spirit’s work we wouldn’t care about Jesus at all.

You see, by nature we are spiritually blind and dead and hostile to God. By nature we want nothing to do with God or his truth or his Son. Without the Spirit’s work we could understand nothing about our God our Savior. Paul wrote to the Corinthians: **The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit** (1 Corinthians 2:14). Without the Spirit everything that God says seems like nonsense to us. Without the Spirit’s work we are hopelessly lost in rebellion against God and rejection of his Son and would remain so eternally.

So thank God for the Spirit’s work! Thank God for his work in inspiring the Scriptures. When it comes to the truth about Jesus, the Spirit literally wrote the book. **Prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit** (2 Peter 1:21). Every word of the Bible is God-breathed, Spirit-inspired truth. It’s not man’s Word; it’s God Word, his love letter to sinful human beings who don’t deserve his love.

And yet he loves us anyway! That's the message of the Scriptures. At the end of his Gospel, John says this about the Bible: **These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name** (John 20:31). Jesus himself said: **"These are the Scriptures that testify about me"** (John 5:39). Every word of the Bible points to Jesus and the salvation he won for you and me and all people.

The Spirit has a one-track mind. He's always pointing us to Jesus. In the Word the Spirit points us to the One who obeyed, the One who fulfilled the entire law, the One who loved God and neighbor perfectly and tells us: "His life counts for you."

In the Word the Spirit points us to the One who became sin for us, who carried our guilt to Golgotha, the Lamb who sacrificed himself on Calvary's altar to pay for the sin of the world, and tells us: "His blood cleanses you of every sin."

In the Word the Spirit points us to the Living One, to the One who rose again, whose tomb is empty and whose victory is complete, and tells us: "His victory is your victory."

In the Word –and in Baptism and Communion – the Spirit point us to Jesus and says: "Here is your Shepherd, your Redeemer, your Advocate, your Defender, your Friend, your Substitutue and Savior." And by the Spirit's power working through the Word we believe him. We

trust that Jesus is our Savior, that are sins are forgiven, that heaven is our home.

How wonderful it is to have the Spirit by our side, constantly pointing us to Jesus. And how wonderful to have his help as we point others to the world's only Savior.

II. Helping us point others to Jesus

Jesus told his disciples: **"You also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning."** The disciples had work to do. In fact, it was there life's work to tell others about Jesus. They had witnessed his miracles with their own eyes, and heard his teaching with their own ears. Now it was their task to share this, to preach the good news to all creation, to go and make disciples.

They wouldn't go alone. Jesus promised to send the Spirit to help them. On the great day of Pentecost, he kept his promise. With wondrous miracles the Spirit arrived to help the infant Church. The sound of a great wind (without an actual breeze), tongues of fire, the gift of different languages that none of them had ever studied – all of these signs signaled the arrival of the Spirit and the fulfillment of Jesus' promise. And it was all about helping them to preach the gospel, which they did with great courage and conviction.

The same Spirit is with us today to help us preach the same gospel with the same courage and conviction. The One who points us to our Lord and Savior is with us to help us point him out to others.

Granted, it's a little different for us. I don't recall ever hearing the sound of wind other than when there was wind. I have never spoken a language I didn't study. In fact, I can't even really speak the foreign languages I have studied. And if you ever see a tongue of fire appear on my head, please grab a fire extinguisher.

And yet, though we don't see the same miracles, we do have the same promises. The Spirit is still by our side, working through the same powerful gospel by which he built the church 2,000 years ago. He still gives us the words we need when witnessing to others. That's what Jesus promised: **"Do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you** (Matthew 10:19-20).

And we still have God's promise that the Spirit-inspired Word we share will get the job done: **"My word ... will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it"** (Isaiah 55:11). What a comfort that is to us as we carry out our gospel ministry here in Manitowoc!

I told you before how much I liked those haunted houses. I'm not sure how much my dad liked them. He would come out of that trailer shaking his hand in pain, because in my fear I had crushed it. Without him by my side, holding my hand, enduring my fearful grip, I never would have made it through.

Without the Spirit, we would never make it. Without his work we would never trust in Jesus. Without his help we could never share Jesus with others. But that's something that we will never have to worry about. The Spirit is by our side. Thanks be to God. Amen.

S.D.G.