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Our Saviour Lutheran Church

Easter 6  
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Let us pray...May the words of my mouth and meditations of our hearts be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, for you are our strength and you are most certainly our redeemer. AMEN.

Sisters and Brothers in Christ, we are fast approaching the festival of Pentecost.

Pentecost falls on May 28 this year, the Sunday of Memorial Day weekend.

Pentecost is always the 50<sup>th</sup> day after Easter, but because Easter moves around on the calendar, so does the date of Pentecost.

And so Pentecost is sometimes in May and sometimes in June.

PAUSE

And, if we didn't know the Festival of Pentecost and the Celebration of Christmas share a common theme.

On both Christmas and Pentecost, God shares with God's people an expression of God's self.

Yes, on these two Church holy days, God gives to God's people, God reveals to God's people, an "expression" of God's self for lack of a better word.

At the time of Christmas, we celebrate the fact that God comes to us in the person of Jesus Christ.

The "second person" of the Trinity, that expression of God's self is shared with the people of God.

A similar thing happens at Pentecost, in that at the time of Pentecost, God shares with God's people another expression of God's self, the "third person" of the Trinity, namely the Holy Spirit.

So, Pentecost and Christmas are really quite similar in this way—both days are about God sharing an expression of God's self to God's people... Jesus at Christmas, the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

But Pentecost doesn't nearly get the same kind of hype in our secular world as does Christmas.

At the end of May, we will not find people are going around, knocking on their neighbor's doors and singing Pentecost carols.

Nor will we find people putting up their Pentecost decorations inside and outside their homes.

I am not even sure what Pentecost decorations would look like—doves and red streamers, maybe?

Nor are people are not making their Pentecost gift lists.

There is no equivalent of Santa Claus for Pentecost.

There is no Pentecost tree to put up.

There are no Pentecost stockings to hang by the chimney with care.

None of that. We don't even have a preparatory season to prepare for Pentecost, like we do for Christmas.

The season of Advent at least allows us time to prepare for Christmas.

The closest we get to any "preparatory" time for Pentecost are the one or two Sundays leading up to Pentecost, with gospel readings like the one today.

Jesus tells his disciples on the eve of his arrest that he (Jesus) will ask the Father to send an Advocate, to be with the disciples forever.

This is the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth.

And then Jesus ascends to the Father, which is celebrated this Thursday, Ascension Day, May 18, and then we celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit on May 28<sup>th</sup>.

So, there is hardly a preparatory time preceding Pentecost.

But, like I said, Pentecost is hugely significant in the life of the Church.

Pentecost is at least on the same ground as Christmas.

Indeed, the three big festivals of the Church Year are Easter, Christmas, and Pentecost.

But, Pentecost, usually does not garner the same interest, the same excitement as Christmas, why?

Well, for starters with Pentecost there is no cute baby lying in a manger.

There are no cute animals in a stable. There is no story of a holy family, nor of angels, nor of wisemen.

No, Pentecost does not conjure up the same sentiments as the story of Jesus' birth with all the details surrounding it.

And all the more, the reason Pentecost doesn't garner the same interest and excitement as Christmas is no doubt because the Spirit is sort of this amorphous entity, without shape or form.

The Holy Spirit is like some a shadow, like a ghost, which is beyond our comprehension.

At most the Spirit is represented as a dove, a white pigeon, which is a far cry from a cute baby in a manger.

And so, as a Church Festival, Pentecost is almost an afterthought.

Indeed, by the time we reach the festival of Pentecost, we are probably more excited about the end of school if we are kids, or more excited about Memorial Day weekend plans, or more excited about the summer and our vacation schedule.

And into the mix of all that is the festival of Pentecost.

PAUSE

Now, I will spend more time talking about Pentecost in a couple of weeks.

But I did think we needed to take some time now to talk about Pentecost, after all the gospel reading alludes to the festival when we hear Jesus saying that he will ask the Father to send another Advocate to be with the disciples forever.

And this is the Spirit of truth.

So then, what is this Spirit of truth? What is this Advocate?

PAUSE

And, here then is where Martin Luther becomes very helpful.

For Luther said that the Spirit does four things.

The Spirit probably does much more than four things, but Luther says the Holy Spirit does four things in particular.

The Spirit calls. The Spirit gathers. The Spirit enlightens. And the Spirit sanctifies.

The Spirit calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies.

And I wish I had a nice, neat mnemonic device to help us remember those four things, but unfortunately I don't.

But, I do have an example, an image, that captures these four things very vividly.

Now, so let me break these down, let me break down these four activities of the Spirit by way of our attendance at worship this morning.

Because if there one place where the Spirit is at work, one would hope it would be here among God's people.

But the Spirit was already at work even before we got here this morning.

You see, this morning, something moved you, something stirred you, so that you got awake, and got yourself out of bed, and got yourself showered and dressed, and maybe had time for breakfast...but eventually after your morning ritual, you came to church.

How did that happen? Maybe our spouse said, "You need to get ready for church."

Maybe our parent, or grandparent said, "You need to get ready for church."

Maybe our alarm clock, or the alarm on our phone told us to get up, even so, some thing moved us to set an alarm to wake us up.

Regardless, however, by whatever means you were awoken and prompted to get ready for church, you are here now.

And Luther would say, "That is the work of the Spirit."

The Spirit calls to our individual spirits, and the Spirit gathers us, as we are gathered here now in worship.

And, I like to say to folks that ask, "How do you know there is a God? What proof is there for God?"

To which I like to say, "Worship on Sunday morning."

This, what we do here, doesn't happen unless there is a God.

Without the existence of God, we would sleep in on a Sunday morning, and then maybe get up and have a leisurely breakfast, read the newspaper, and go about our day, never thinking about church and worship.

But something moved us, stirred us, called us to get up and get to church, and that is the very Spirit of God.

So, the Spirit calls and gathers. And the Spirit also enlightens us.

And that word "enlighten" means to gain understanding, to bestow or receive knowledge.

It means to be informed, to be edified, to teach.

In short, here, in this place we learn about God, and we learn about what it means to be the people of God.

And that takes us to the fourth thing the Spirit does, which is sanctifies, which is a big word meaning to make "holy," which if we didn't know, is just a nice fancy church word meaning to be set apart for a special purpose.

To be sanctified is to be set apart for a special purpose.

So most anything can be "holy." One's favorite piece of clothing which is worn for only certain events—that piece of clothing is "holy," for that piece of clothing is set apart for a special purpose.

Or a particular meal that is served at your home on only certain occasions—that meal is "holy" because it is set apart for a special purpose.

So, yes, most anything can be deemed "holy," in that regard.

But, here, in church we are talking about us, the people, who are made "holy." We are sanctified. We ourselves are set apart for a special purpose, that is, to be God's servants in the world.

We are to proclaim God's love by word and deed. We are to live out the Gospel of Jesus Christ. That is our purpose.

And it is here in church, in worship, in Sunday School, in community with other sisters and brother in Christ, that we learn to do that.

So, enlightenment, learning to be God's servants in the world, leads to sanctification, being God's servants in the world.

Enlightenment, learning to be God's servants in the world, leads to sanctification, being God's servants in the world.

And so, in essence, this is what Luther says the Spirit does. It calls us, gathers us, enlightens us, and sanctifies us.

And here then is what I think Jesus means when he describes the Spirit as the Spirit of truth, and when he describes the Spirit as well as the Advocate.

The Spirit of truth reveals to us how God empowers God's people to be God's people—through calling, gathering, enlightening, and sanctifying.

The Spirit of truth reveals to us how God empowers God's people.

That is the truth, spoken about here, as I see it.

The Spirit of truth reveals to us how God empowers God's people.

And the Spirit as Advocate, as one who supports a particular cause, which is one definition of an advocate...

The Spirit advocates for us, supports us, supports us in our becoming the Gospel servants God would have us be.

That is the Spirit advocating a particular cause—the cause being for us to become Gospel servants.

The Spirit supports us to become the Gospel servants God would have us be by calling, gathering, enlightening, and sanctifying us.

That is why, as I see it, the Spirit is described as an Advocate.

The Spirit advocates, supports that particular cause, which is for us to become Gospel servants.

PAUSE

So, this, sisters and brothers in Christ, this is the work of the Spirit—calling, gathering, enlightening, and sanctifying.

And it is not just within the church that the Spirit works this way.

Think about children and young persons who go to school.

They are called to school. They are gathered together in the classroom. They are enlightened, instructed, taught in school, so as to be set aside then for a special purpose, which is to be decent people who can function in society as citizens of this country.

If young persons continue their education by going to college, they are set aside for an even more specialized purpose in some particular profession.

And even in our professions, we are called to work, gathered to work, we are enlightened in the particular way our employers do business, and we take up the reins to do our work as individuals of that company or business.

In essence, we are set apart in that business for a particular purpose.

Yes, most every organization or club, institution or group, or business, functions in a similar way.

People are called, gathered, enlightened, and sanctified, to be a participant in that particular group, to serve in that particular organization or institution or company.

This is the Spirit at work in the world, whether we recognize it as such or not.

Again, Martin Luther was extremely helpful in defining the role of the Spirit at work in the world.

The Spirit advocates in people's lives to prosper the person's life, and through that person's life to contribute to the well-being of society as a whole—not just as a Gospel servant, but also as one who participates and serves in other groups and organizations.

And so, as Jesus says, "You know the Spirit. You see then how the Spirit works, how God works in the world—calling, gathering, enlightening, and sanctifying. You know the Spirit, because he abides with you, advocating for you so as to help you become a Gospel servant and a blessed servant in society."

Thanks be to God. Amen.