

THE HOLY SPIRIT

(sermon for Pentecost)

In bestowing the gift of the Holy Spirit, by giving the Holy Spirit to us, God is taking a chance, giving what is divine to what is human. God is taking a chance.

Speaking of taking a chance. A man and his wife and his mother-in-law went on a vacation to the Holy Land. While they were there, the mother-in-law unfortunately passed away.

The undertaker told them you can have her shipped home for \$5,000 or you can bury her here in the Holy Land for \$150.

The man thought about it and told the undertaker, we will have her shipped home. The undertaker asked why would you spend \$5,000 to ship your mother-in-law home when it would be wonderful to have her buried here and only spend \$150.

The man replied, “Look, a man died here 2,000 years ago. He was buried here. Three days later, he rose from the dead. I just can’t take that chance.”

Yes, God took a chance in giving us the gift of the Holy Spirit. The kind of obedience that God expects comes from the renewing work of the Spirit alone.

In his Small Catechism, Martin Luther teaches:

By my own understanding or strength, I cannot believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to him, but instead the Holy Spirit calls, enlightens, sanctifies and keeps me in the true faith.

When I baptize a person, I mark the sign of the cross on their forehead and say, “Child of God, you have been marked with the sign of the cross forever and sealed by the Holy Spirit.”

The gifts of the Holy Spirit can never be bought. We receive them in our baptism. The gifts of the Holy Spirit are as easy to get as it is to get wet at a baptism. They are poured upon us.

And what are the gifts of the Spirit? There is not a day in your life when you can ever be out of the range of God’s grace. From the very beginning while still in your mother’s womb and every day since your birth to this very minute, God has known you, loved you, surrounded you with all kinds of opportunities to know God. God has fed you with heavenly food, the Bread of Life. During every day of your life, especially during times of struggle and pain, God was with you. Every day of your life has been and will continue to be a grace-filled day and the Holy Spirit was right by your side.

God's gift of the Holy Spirit is grace-filled.

Grace. Grace like when an important founding member of a prominent church died and, naturally, went directly to the pearly gates. Saint Peter met her and said, "It takes one thousand points to get in. So, tell me something about yourself.

The woman confidently said, "Well, until I was twenty-one years old, I never missed Sunday School. I have a string of perfect attendance medals that reaches the floor. I played the piano for Sunday School, I worked around the church, on the altar guild and in the office, doing all sorts of important jobs."

Saint Peter said, "Congratulations, extremely good. That gives you one point. Tell me something else about yourself."

The woman continued, "I am 85 years old. I attend church regularly, have served on the council many times, sang in the choir. I always give 10 percent of my income to the church. I was a life-long church member, founding member. I even was delegate to our synod meeting a few years ago."

Saint Peter said, “Truly remarkable. That gives you another point. Tell me something else about yourself.”

The woman, growing a bit concerned said, “I tried to live by the Golden Rule. I do not believe I have an enemy in the world. I obey the Ten Commandments and always welcomed stranger.”

Saint Peter said, “That is truly wonderful. Worth one more point. Tell me more about yourself.”

By this time, the woman was becoming desperate. If the truth were known, she was a little irritated. She blurted out to Saint Peter, “Look, at this rate the only way I’ll ever get into heaven is by the grace of God.”

To which St. Peter said, “That is worth one thousand points and with the three you earned, it makes one thousand and three. Would you like to come in now?”

What is highly valued by human beings is often not highly valued by God. You have a life, a soul, highly valued by God. What will you do with it?

The right doors won’t open for you until you become the version of yourself that’s meant to walk through those doors.

Religion is a person sitting in church thinking about fishing. Faith is a person sitting at a lake fishing, thinking about God. How much does God occupy your thinking? Where is the Holy Spirit active in your life?

I was testing the confirmation class recently. We had studied heaven. Testing them to see if they understood the concept of going to heaven. So, I asked some goofy questions:

“If I sold my house and my car and had a big garage sale and gave all my money to the church would that get me into heaven?”

They answered, “No, of course not.”

Right answer. I kept on. “If I cleaned the church every day and mowed the church lawn and kept everything neat and tidy, would that get me into heaven?”

Again, they answered no.

This was fun. So, I asked, “What if I was kind to animals and gave candy to all the children and never said anything bad about rap music and loved my wife, would that get me into heaven?”

“Of course not,” they told me.

I was proud of them. They really understood. So, I kept on. I was on a

roll. So, I asked them the payoff question, “Then how can I get into heaven?”

To which, one of our students, with a straight face, said, “You ‘gotta be dead.”

In Martin Luther’s Small Catechism, this is how Luther explains the work of the Holy Spirit:

On the last day the Holy Spirit will raise me and all the dead and will give to me and all believers in Christ eternal life.”

Now I move from preaching to meddling. Do not tell me you have the Holy Spirit if you are a complainer. If you are constantly griping, constantly negative, don’t tell me you have God’s Spirit within you.

How do I know that you don’t have the Spirit. I know you by the fruits you bear. Turn to the letter of Paul to the Galatians, 5th chapter, where Paul lists the fruits of the Spirit. If you have the Spirit, you are not a negative fault-finding complainer. No, the fruits of the spirit are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

That’s not in theory, that is real life. We know you be the fruits you bear and those are the fruits of the Spirit. These

fruits give evidence of the Holy Spirit living in you. Or not.

We repent enough to be forgiven but do we surrender enough to be changed? The Holy Spirit changes us by giving us hope.

“Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and hope in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit, you may abound in hope.” (Romans 15:13)