

May 20, 2018

St. John 15:26-16:15:

“The Spirit of Truth Will Glorify Jesus”

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Today we celebrate Pentecost. In our Gospel lesson for this morning we are told that the Father will send the Spirit of Truth who will bear witness about Christ. **The Spirit of Truth Will Glorify Jesus.** We define Pentecost according to the words of Jesus in the Gospel of St. John as the time when the Holy Spirit gave birth and ultimately completed the New Testament Scripture which speaks of all the saving realities connected with Jesus and his Father.

All of the miraculous happenings that we read about surrounding Pentecost facilitated and proved, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that the words that have been handed down to us from the apostles are everything that we need to know until the day we see our Lord face to face. Nothing has been held back by the Spirit. In fact, the Spirit has given us everything that is embodied in Jesus. In this way, Jesus is with us always until the end of the age. And, as Jesus says in another place, “no one comes to the Father except through me (John 14:6).” Indeed, if we have the Spirit through the apostolic Scriptures then we have the Son and our heavenly Father. We have the gracious presence of God who comes and remains with us in the means of grace. By faith we are certain that the Triune God is with us!

Peter writes in his second epistle (1:3-4): “His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.” Those are magnificent words! The apostles were deeply troubled and afraid at the consideration that Jesus would depart from them, according to our Gospel lesson. However, these things had to be for the mission of God, that many might be saved including us. Jesus promises that he will send the Spirit as “another helping presence” who will even connect us to Christ and the Father. This was designed to encourage the apostles who were struggling to come to terms with the implications of Jesus physically leaving. It also is designed to help and relieve us as well. The Triune God, the only one who saves us, has not left us as orphans to somehow make it on our own and hopefully reach the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus talks about the coming of the Holy Spirit, and sends the Spirit of Truth to the apostles in order to prevent them from falling away. The Spirit and the first hand eye-witness testimony of those who heard and saw the resurrected Lord prevent us from falling away as well. Our Pentecost is in the Word and Sacraments. After all, how can anyone ever survive the attacks of this unbelieving world and the sinful desires of the flesh without the precious promises that lift us far above these earthly cares? As Peter says, “that you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in this world because of sinful desire.” Indeed! All of this through “precious and very great promises.” This is a great and wonderful comfort to hearts that are troubled and afraid.

And there is much trouble and fear caused by the lies of this unbelieving world and the raging of Satan who uses everything he can to touch our sinful desire and throw us into despair. It is rather remarkable that many Christians are reluctant to study the testimony of God or teach it to their children for a myriad of reasons. Whatever the reasons may be, they overlook a very dangerous situation. We leave

ourselves and our children and grandchildren vulnerable when we fail to teach the truth by talking about these things when we are sitting in our houses, when we are walking or driving down the road, before bed and when we rise (Deuteronomy 11). The words of Hebrews (10:24-25) are powerful: "And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near." What is at stake is eternity. The Lord Jesus gave us the Holy Spirit and the testimony to keep us in the truth faith in order that we might be ready for the moment when we meet God. What Pentecost gave birth to and completed is with us to this day that we might be ready for the coming of the Son of Man.

On Pentecost Sunday, we rejoice at the creation of the New Testament Church and the Spirit guiding us into all truth (16:13). We rejoice that the Spirit will glorify Christ, take what is his, and give it to us, for Jesus says, "all that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you (16:15)." This is the reality of what has been given to us. What a sad thing it is to say, "Well, I love Jesus and that will have to see me through." Really?! Lest we forget, the way in which we use the Word and Sacraments is a true and genuine reflection of the way in which we love Jesus. We gather together around God's Word and Sacraments to receive life, salvation, and the forgiveness of our sins. In his three epistles, the apostle John frequently and lovingly refers to us as "children" - offspring of the God who loves and saves us. Should we ever then think to ourselves that if we choose not to remain in the Word and Sacraments that everything will be okay? If we are not abiding by the truth, we will abide by lies.

In our culture today we are surrounded by a Pontius Pilate wherever we may go, always needing us with the question: "What is truth?" Truth is pretty much up for grabs in our society, isn't it? According to apologist Greg Kouss, truth in this day and age is so nebulous that we are living with our "feet firmly planted in midair!" Quite a picture! The assertion that there is absolute truth by which we measure ourselves and others is almost a guarantee that we will be branded as "mean and intolerant." And still Jesus firmly says, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free (John 8:31)." Free from what? Free from sin, death, and hell! We can either listen to the voice of Pontius Pilate, or we can listen to the words of Christ through the Spirit of Truth.

The Spirit of Truth Will Glorify Jesus. But let us understand that the Spirit of Truth that Jesus describes is sent not merely to get us to say, "I'm telling the truth" or "honestly, it happened this way." No. The Spirit of Truth testifies and points us to Jesus who is the way, the truth, and the life. It is significant to note that in the chapter before our Gospel lesson for this morning Jesus says these very words to Thomas when he says: "Lord, we don't know where you are going. How can we know the way." And Jesus answered him saying, "I am the way, the truth, and the life (14:6a)." He says these words within the context of a lengthy discussion about his departure from this world and his promise to prepare a place for us and come back to take us to be with him. Jesus spends his final moments with his followers (and us through them) preparing them for life until the day of judgment. Luther writes:

With a view to the beginning He is called the Way; He is the Truth with regard to the means and the continuation; He is the Life by reason of the end. For He must be all - the beginning, the middle, and the end of our salvation . . . Hold to Christ in faith; thus you make the right

beginning. Remain with Him; then you proceed aright. Persevere thus until the end; then you are saved.

These are really insightful words on the part of Luther. When we have Christ by faith, we are on the right way. This way is reliable and will not mislead us, for it truth. But, there are many hostile forces that would keep us from reaching the end - the life. We must be prepared to hold firmly to Jesus and not be troubled or afraid no matter what shocking and terrible things may confront us. They are not to frighten, or even lure and entice us away with beautiful deception. These are the lies and deceit of the devil and his friends who lead us to eternal death. We are bid to rely on Jesus who is with us by the Spirit of Truth. In this way we are guided safely from death into eternal life, from the unbelieving world and the devil's realm to our Father in heaven. It's a little long, but Luther uses a wonderful illustration. He writes:

The story of the Children of Israel in the Red Sea helps us understand this verse all the better. It was not enough that, in compliance with God's command, they ventured into the sea and now proceeded on their way, confident that they would reach the opposite shore. When they were halfway across and saw the shore or the land before them, then king Pharaoh with all his host appeared behind them. Now their peril was just as great as it was before they had stepped into the sea. It was no help to them that they had found a way where there had been no way, and that they were now nearly across. No, God had to come to their aid miraculously and rescue them from the death that was breathing down their necks. The messenger who led them with a wall of fire and clouds had to come between them and the enemy with thunder and lightning, to frighten the latter and turn them back. But before the enemy could look back, the ocean fell upon them and swallowed them up. In this way the Children of Israel were saved from imminent danger of death; and for them this Christ was the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

Like the Children of Israel in the Red Sea, we are on the way. Pharaoh with all his host is pursuing us. God has miraculously come to our aid by the Spirit of Truth who will Glorify Jesus who is the truth and this comes between us and our enemies to frighten and turn them back. In the end, we will reach life. We will reach the other side, and the waters will fall upon our enemies and swallow them up. This is the why and the victory of Pentecost!

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott