

The Coming of the Holy Spirit—The Day of Pentecost

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Christ the Rock Evangelical Lutheran Church
Farmington, New Mexico

John 15:26,27 “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.”

“Wonderful Witness in Weakness”

It was one of those events you never want to learn about. Even when it is confirmed, you have to force yourself to read more and learn all the details. On January 31, 2017 Stephen Schroeder was piloting a Blackhawk helicopter on a training mission. An accident brought that aircraft into a violent and fiery crash to the ground. Steve and the three other soldiers with him all survived thanks to the swift response of emergency personnel. But they all faced life-altering injuries. His wife reported just a few days later that Steve suffered a broken left arm and right ankle, broken ribs, 3rd degree burns on 3% of his body (torso), and a broken back with spinal injuries. Later doctors discovered a small brain injury as well.

Posting about the accident and treatment on Facebook, Steve’s wife Sarah went on to praise the doctors and nurses who attended to the injured soldiers, the response of family and friends, the support of fellow soldiers and their families. His recovery would involve various kinds of therapy: physical, occupational, recreational, speech. But there was something else I noticed as I read through the lists of people she was acknowledging. As she reported on the long road to recovery ahead of them in the wake of that horrible crash, she kept saying “we.” His family was at his side through it all. I can’t even guess what kind of difference in outcomes he would have seen if he had faced it all by himself. But I guess I don’t need to wonder, because Steve was never alone. Even in his darkest and most discouraging moments, he had someone there for him, right at his side.

Today we focus on two short verses from John chapter 15. Yet Jesus gives his disciples a beautiful promise. What he says to them, he says to us: you will never be alone. In your weakest moments, Jesus gives you the presence of the Holy Spirit. In your darkest hours, you have someone who is there for you. Jesus gives you a wonderful Witness. The Holy Spirit is your wonderful witness in weakness.

In these two short verses Jesus teaches the Holy Spirit is there for you in three very important ways:

1. The Holy Spirit shows you your need
2. The Holy Spirit gives you the Truth you need
3. The Holy Spirit powers you by his gifts to be what Jesus made you to be

In John 14-17 Jesus has been preparing his disciples for his departure. At the Ascension, it actually happens. In Acts 2, his promise to them comes to completion. Before all that takes

place, Jesus wants to get them ready. Just before he is betrayed and arrest, put on trial and executed, Jesus tells the disciples: **“And you also must testify.”** (John 15:27) Whether it is practice or game time, a training mission or actual combat, Jesus sends the Holy Spirit to be there for disciples so they can be what he has called them to be.

We tend to think of our need for the Holy Spirit in a different sense than Jesus does. We tend to look at our need for the Holy Spirit like making a quarterly trip to the doctor for a shot of B Vitamins or a cortisone injection or an occasional blast of steroids to battle against allergies.

There are a few details here that are easy to overlook, but they’re important. Jesus promises to send the Holy Spirit. Jesus proceeds to give us a glimpse into the divine teamwork that takes place within the Holy Trinity: **“When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father—the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father.”** (John 15:26) We don’t go after the Holy Spirit. We don’t solicit his work in our hearts any more than we ask for telemarketers to call our phones or salesmen to ring our doorbells. Naturally, all by ourselves, we would never ask for the Holy Spirit. We would not even recognize the benefits we could get from the Holy Spirit. We would just stay focused on ourselves and our interests.

This is the first key role of the Holy Spirit. Jesus calls him the Spirit of Truth. Jesus sends him to help me recognize the truth of my need for help from God. The truth I need to come to grips with is I don’t naturally want to carry out that role of being a witness who testifies about Jesus. Intimidation is real. Hostility from a world unfriendly to Christianity is real. But the bigger danger than what is out there is the danger inside me. When I feel unnaturally suited for a calling Jesus gives me, I get overwhelmed. I retreat. I recognize my own weaknesses and wait for someone else to step up. I am not bold or active or looking for opportunities to be that witness. And it’s not just that I might be a shy person or the fact that I’m not a type-A personality. It’s not about recognizing the fact that I’m not the strongest player on team Jesus or the most qualified on the staff of project gospel. There is a better reading to John 15:27 than “you also must testify.” It’s actually more accurate that Jesus says you do testify. Not you might be or could be or will be. But you are the ones Jesus chooses to be his witnesses.

Sometimes doctors have to bring bad news. They don’t do it because they enjoy it or they get points for negative diagnoses. They do it so they can go on to the next step of treating what’s wrong with you. Jesus sends you the Holy Spirit to give you the truth about yourself. This truth is more important than what you think or how you feel or the way you view yourself. You need the work of the Holy Spirit to give you a brand new heart.

That brings us to the second key role of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is there for you to give you the truth you need. He testifies to you about the truth of Jesus. In the previous chapter of John, Jesus says: **“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”** (John 14:6) Jesus is the truth disciples need. The Holy Spirit is there for you to lead you to Jesus. The Holy Spirit teaches disciples that Jesus is true God come down to earth to rescue sinful humanity. The Holy Spirit reminds us all that Jesus

walked this earth without any missteps or mistakes. Jesus could not be sidetracked from his ultimate goal and destination. Yet even when disciples disappointed him or religious opponents attacked him, Jesus never gave into normal human reactions of hatred or bitterness or resentment. The path through life for Jesus was pure all the way to his innocent death on the cross.

Notice how different the work of the Holy Spirit is than the work of therapists? If you were recovering from a serious crash and trying to build up your strength after multiple operations, they would offer encouragement and support. They would coach you and cheer for you. They would help you to dig deep to find strength. 'You can do it!' would be their constant refrain. But the Holy Spirit doesn't do that. The Holy Spirit is there for you to point you to the work Jesus has done for you. Jesus lived a perfect life for you. Jesus shed pure blood as your sacrifice. Jesus rose on Easter to conquer your death. Jesus ascended into heaven because he completed your salvation. The Holy Spirit implants in you confidence in what Jesus has done for you.

The Holy Spirit takes the reality of what Jesus has done and makes it yours. One noted Lutheran theologian explains it this way: "All the bitter suffering of Christ would have been of no avail, if the glad tidings of the gospel were not made known to the world; for of what advantage is a hidden treasure? Thus our most merciful heavenly Father has not only prepared a great benefit in the passion of His Son, Jesus Christ, but also desired to offer to the whole world, and make effective, that grace by the gift of the Holy Spirit. Our faithful God withholds nothing from us, but sends both His Son and His Spirit to provide for the salvation of us miserable sinners." (Johann Gerhard, Sacred Meditations, p. 119)

That brings us to the third key role of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is there for you to bring you his gifts. By his gifts he equips you to be what Jesus has made you to be. The Holy Spirit gives you the power to carry out the work Jesus has given you to do.

One of the biggest ways the Holy Spirit empowers and equips is by bringing disciples into community. One recent author described the gathering of Christians together in this way "Community is beautifully awkward and awkwardly beautiful."¹ In a Christian community people who are different are pulled together and united by Christ. But we are also brought together for a purpose. The Holy Spirit knits together very different people from different backgrounds to find mutual support and encouragement from Scripture. Fellow community members in the church will also challenge you. Our differences will sometimes lead to clashes and conflicts, but draw us deeper into God's Word to find a truth bigger than ourselves.

If you had survived a terrible accident, you would probably be happy just to be alive, just to have all of your body parts after multiple, lengthy surgeries. But Steve Schroeder isn't satisfied with the first rounds of therapy. He is not content just to be able to perform basic functions. He might always need help to walk. He might never run again like he did before.

¹ Geiger, Eric. How to Ruin Your Life . B&H Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

But he goes to the gym to build up his strength to walk and goes to the pool to increase his capacity. He wants to challenge himself and push himself.

God's people know God has an amazing life in store for us. God knows your weaknesses. God knows what you are good at and what you're not. And yet Jesus says his disciples are his witnesses. They do testify. Testimony means just telling the facts. God's people remember and share the truth about who Jesus is and the salvation he accomplished for us.

On the first Pentecost, the disciples of Jesus were able to witness a violent wind and flames of fire. But the most impressive, the most miraculous things happened on a person to person level. Cowardly confused disciples were able to boldly and confidently share the truth about Jesus. In his Word and through his Sacraments, Jesus sends the Holy Spirit to you today. In your weakness, the Holy Spirit is your witness. And in your weakness, the Holy Spirit gives you opportunity to testify to the truth of Jesus. In tragedy and triumph, in setbacks and success, in times of conflict and times of confidence, when you feel at your best or when you are under a cloud, when you are in a comfortable routine and when you are confused by change, at the birth of someone you love or the death of someone dear to you, the Holy Spirit is at your side.

In John chapter 15 Jesus call the Holy Spirit the Paraclete. There are various translations, but they all give us that comfort of someone who is there for you. The Holy Spirit is your Counselor who stands at your side to give you advice. He is your Intercessor to represent your needs to the Father. He is your Comforter to support you in the middle of grief. He is your Advocate to plead in your defense. He is your Helper, active and present to give you the assistance you need. But the important thing to remember is Jesus sends you the Holy Spirit so you are never alone. The gifts of the Holy Spirit embolden you to give testimony. Testify about Jesus in your life boldly and courageous with the presence of the Holy Spirit. He is your wonderful witness in weakness. Amen.