

30 May 2004
The Festival of Pentecost

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“The Work of the Holy Spirit”
Text: John 15:26-27; 16:4b-11

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

If the Holy Spirit had not been given by Christ to His Church, the memory and knowledge of Christ would long ago have been extinguished. Apart from the work of the Holy Spirit, there would be no faith, no Church, no truth, no hope. Such is the nature of sinful mankind. On our own, we exchange the truth of God for the lies of Satan. It happened in the Garden of Eden, and it is still happening today. God says: *I have done it all for you – simply believe and trust in Me.* Satan says: *You can do it yourself, and that’s what God wants after all. He’ll help you if you need it, but He really wants you to do it yourself.* And which of those two voices do we most often listen to?

We heard a real “do-it-yourself” story this evening – the story of the building of the Tower of Babel. It is the story of sinful mankind not listening to the Word of God. Sinful mankind wanting to make a name for *themselves* instead of for God. Sinful mankind worshipping themselves instead of God. And is this not a picture of us today? We do not listen to the will and Word of God for us, we would rather follow our own will. With the latest and greatest technology we try to make a name for ourselves. And yes, we even worship ourselves. For your worship is who you believe and trust in; who you rely on; who you look to for all good. And do not even we, yes we Christians, often look at the Church as a kind of spiritual “Home Depot” where we go to get the tools to do it ourselves?

But the world is full of the ruins of spiritual “do-it-yourself” projects. Broken homes, broken relationships, broken churches, broken people. Self-help books and tapes and videos are flying off shelves, self-help gurus fill arenas . . . but our world and society continue on a downward spiral. What further evidence do we need? When will we see that self-help is really no help at all! Why are we still trying to build ourselves towers to the heavens when all we see around us is confusion and rubble?

Yet despite all of this, the memory and knowledge of Christ have not been extinguished. There is faith, Church, truth, and hope in this world. And that there is, is the work of the

Holy Spirit. For as we heard in the Holy Gospel, the work of the Holy Spirit is to testify about Christ. Everything He does is to point us to the person and work of our Saviour. And as long as He is in the world, that is what He will continue to do. For only in Christ is the forgiveness, truth, hope, and salvation that we need. Only in Christ can us broken people be healed. And as Christ has given us the Holy Spirit, so the Holy Spirit gives us Christ. He keeps us connected with Christ. It is not our doing; it is His doing alone. And that is what we celebrate this day of the Festival of Pentecost – the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the Church, and His work in this world for us.

And of this work of the Holy Spirit Jesus was telling His disciples in the Holy Gospel that we heard. For of the Holy Spirit, Jesus says: *“And when He comes, He will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment.”* In all of these ways He points us *away* from ourselves and our abilities, and toward Christ. **First by convicting us of our sin.** And that includes the sin that we are born with, the sin that we do by our actions, and the sin that we do by our inaction. It is the work of the Holy Spirit that you and I could stand here this evening and confess that we are sinners; sinners through and through; sinners in thought, word, deed, and desire. Many people in our world cannot do that, because they think instead that they’re not so bad; that there must be something good inside of them; thinking that yes they sin, but they also do good, and that it will all be a wash in the end. And so the Holy Spirit, in order to lead us to Christ, must first lead us to see ourselves for who we really are: failures and rebels. Persons who cannot even begin to live up to the perfection that God requires. And that this is a problem what we cannot fix ourselves. No matter how hard we try, or how determined we may be, we cannot fix ourselves.

Then once the Holy Spirit convicts us of sin, He then **convicts us of righteousness** – not our own, but Christ’s. Once we realize that we cannot fix ourselves, He leads us to the One who can; and who, in fact, has done it for us. He leads us to see the Son of God, not just as a good man or a prophet – but as our Saviour. And He gives us the faith to believe that all that the Son of God has done in the person of Jesus Christ, He did precisely **for me**. He was born **for me**. He lived a perfect life **for me**. He died and rose and ascended **for me**. And all that He has done and accomplished and earned **He gives to me**. He takes what is mine – my sin and brokenness – and gives me what is His – His forgiveness and perfection. And it is the Holy Spirit that has enabled you and I and all believers to know this, and to believe. To look at the cross and see not only the pain and punishment and consequences of my sin, but also to see there the greatness and love of Jesus. Again, many people cannot see that. They look at the cross and fear. Only by the Holy Spirit can we look at the cross and see our salvation.

And then, once the Holy Spirit was worked such faith in us, **He convicts us of judgment,**

for ***“the ruler of this world is judged.”*** We now live in the conviction that Satan has been defeated. He struck Jesus with all that he had, all the tools in his arsenal, to try to defeat our Saviour, and by defeating our Saviour, defeating us – but he could not. He lost. He was utterly and completely routed. And so he is judged. His lies, his temptations, his misleading promises, his evil – all is exposed. And exposed to the light of Christ, he and his evil must shrink back. For evil loves the cover of darkness. It hates to be exposed. But that is exactly what Christ has now done, and Satan now has no power over us. And to *know* this is the work of the Holy Spirit, because as you look around in our world today, it seems that exactly the opposite is true! It seems as if evil is in control and that our world is spinning out of control. But the Holy Spirit has convicted us and given us the faith to believe that it is not so. What we see is not all there is. And the One who defeated sin, death, and Satan in His death and resurrection is still the ruler of this world. We may not know the answers to all the “why” and “when” and “how” questions we have, but we can be confident that ***“everything is working together for good for those who love God.”*** (Rom 8:28)

And by this work of the Holy Spirit – this work of convicting the world of sin and righteousness and judgment – it is God who is doing the building. God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is active in the world, building not a Tower of Babel, but a Temple not made by hands. It is the building of which Jesus said, ***“Destroy this Temple and in three days I will raise it up again.”*** (John 2:19) He did just that, as we celebrated on Easter, for the Temple He was speaking of was His body. And now the Holy Spirit is continuing to build this Temple, the Body of Christ called the Church. . . . Now, perhaps it doesn't look like it! Many churches are struggling to survive; many are shrinking; many are giving in to the ways of the world. We may not ever see three thousands persons baptized on the same day as on the first Pentecost. . . . But just because we can't see it does not mean it isn't happening. Perhaps in churches all around the world, the count of those being baptized is even greater! But it is the *Holy Spirit's work*, and because it is, He determines the results, not us. For we heard at the end of the reading from Acts, ***“the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.”*** It is the Lord's work, not ours.

And the Holy Spirit is working. Working, in fact, in exactly the same way as He did on that first Pentecost. Through the preaching of the Word of God, through Holy Baptism, through Holy Communion, and through the forgiveness of sins. (Acts 2:42) Are you convicted of your sin? It is the work of the Holy Spirit in you. Do you see in Christ your life and forgiveness? It is the work of the Holy Spirit. Are you here seeking forgiveness and the food of immortality, the very body and blood of your Saviour? It is the work of the Holy Spirit. His work of testifying to Christ. Drawing you to Christ. Setting the eyes of your heart and mind on Christ.

So as we celebrate the Festival of Pentecost, we are celebrating not just an historical event – we celebrate the Lord’s work now . . . in **us**, and in **His Church**, and in **the world** today. His work which never fails. His work which does not tell us about how to get along in this world, but which tells us about another world. A world that is beyond anything that we can experience here and now. A world that was here before I was born, and will exist after I die. A world which will continue when all other worlds are destroyed. That you and I may live in that world, the kingdom of Heaven, is why the Father sent His Son, and why the Son sent us the Holy Spirit. For the work of the Spirit is to lead us to the Son, and the Son takes us to the Father. And this God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, three in one and one in three, is here and working for you. Here to take away your sin. Here that you may live. Here, that you may get to Heaven not by building a way there yourself, but by being in and remaining in His building; in His body; in Christ.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.