

15 May 2005  
The Festival of Pentecost

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

## Jesu Juva

“The Comforting Work of the Spirit”

Text: John 16:5-11

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

Today is the great Festival of Pentecost. The fiftieth day after Easter, when the promise of Jesus to send the Holy Spirit, was fulfilled. That fact is beyond dispute within the Holy Christian Church. Which is significant because there seems to be very little that is beyond dispute in the Christian Church these days!

But while the *existence* and the *presence* of the Holy Spirit is believed by all who can truly be called Christian, the *work* of the Holy Spirit – what the Holy Spirit is for and what He does – *is* a matter of **dispute**. Entire denominations have been built around their particular understanding of the purpose and work of the Holy Spirit, and even within denominations – including our own – there are groups whose desire it is to focus *more* on the work of the Holy Spirit, and what He is doing in the church in these modern times. And most of that focus tends to be heavily weighted on individual gifts and abilities and experiences. Or what the Holy Spirit is doing to me.

And so it is good for us today that the Word of God we heard from St. John tells us quite clearly what the work of the Holy Spirit is. The prophet Joel foretold *what* would happen on the day of Pentecost, and the book of Acts tells us of *how* that was fulfilled – but it is St. John – recording the very words of Jesus Himself – who tells us of the significant work of God that is accomplished by the Holy Spirit. And His work is this: ***And when He [the Holy Spirit] has come, He will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment; concerning sin, because they do not believe in Me; concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father and you will see Me no longer; concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.*** That is the work of the Holy Spirit, both then and now. And if you want evidence of the work of the Holy Spirit, that is what you should look for.

So what does this mean?

Well first, we heard that the Holy Spirit ***convicts the world concerning sin.*** Now, when

Jesus told us that He would send the Holy Spirit, He called Him *the Helper*, or *the Comforter* (John 14:16, NKJV). But notice how Jesus now says how this Holy Helper, or Holy Comforter, does His comforting – He starts out by making you uncomfortable! *By convicting you of your sin*. And notice that the word there is sin – singular; not sins, in the plural. The work of the Holy Spirit is to convict you of the sin that is the source of every sin – and that is the sin against the commandment from which all others flow. The First Commandment: “*You shall have no other gods.*” For the truth is that you and I and everyone in the world do have other gods. And the Holy Spirit, in order to give us His true and lasting comfort, must first make us realize this. And make us realize the seriousness of this sin.

For every time you sin, you are following not the true God, but another god. A god of your own making. And so when you let your thoughts and desires determine your action instead of God’s Word and desire, you are your own god. When you allow money to shape your life instead of God, that is your god. When you look to your job or what you do to give you value, that is your god. When you look for happiness in the things you own, they are your gods. If there is someone if your life you think you could not live without, he (or she) is your god. Or in other words, anything or anyone we rely on or look to for what we need – that is a god. And we must admit, we have many. And if you doubt that, just consider – what happens when the things of this world and life are taken away from us? If you lose all your money, if you get cut off from your family, if you lose your job or have your possessions stolen. How we then fret and complain, worry and whimper! Why? *Because we’ve lost our gods, that’s why*. We’ve lost what we were relying on, and looking to for our comfort and needs.

And so the Spirit convicts us of this sin of ours. He enables us to see that these gods are really no gods at all. That they are only *mirages* of comfort – that we chase after, but which then disappear and do not deliver what we see or think! . . . And so the Holy Comforter begins His comfort by leading us to confession and repentance. For there is only One who can deliver what we need. Only One who can truly comfort, and that is Christ. You have more than enough God in the one, true God. He is strong. He is faithful. He has given you His promise. He is all that you need. And so to comfort us, **the Holy Spirit convicts us of sin.**

But once He does that, the Holy Spirit doesn’t leave us there – condemned by our sin, condemned by the Law! That is just the first step. Next He ***convicts us concerning righteousness, because Jesus has gone to the Father and we will see Him no longer.*** Now, the word “convict” is used there again for continuity, but that word can also be translated as “*convince,*” or “*bring to light.*” And so after the Holy Spirit “brings to light” our sin, He then “brings to light” our righteousness – not that we have any right-ness

within ourselves! But the righteousness that is ours in Jesus Christ. First He directs our eyes to honestly look at ourselves, and then He directs our eyes to see Jesus. Not our physical eyes – for we can see Him no longer! He directs our eyes of faith – that we may *know* and *believe* all that He has done for us. All that He has done in coming and taking our place. His birth **for us**. His perfect life **for us**. His death **for us**. His resurrection **for us**. His ascension **for us**.

Or in other words, once the Holy Spirit makes us see the filth of our sin that is splattered all over us, and that lives in us, He then *removes* that sin from us. **The work of the Holy Spirit is to give forgiveness.** To give the forgiveness won for you in the death and resurrection of your Saviour. And so He washes you clean in the water of Holy Baptism. He strips you of your filthy, stinkin', sinful rags, and dresses you in the white robe of Jesus' perfect obedience and righteousness. He takes your hard, stony, other-god-lovin' heart, and gives you a new heart, a new life, that you might be a new creation. And He joins you to your Saviour. He joins you to Jesus, and so closely that when the Father looks at us, He sees not us and our sin, but the perfection and love of His Son. And the Father tenderly calls us His children, and we respond, *Our Father, who art in heaven*. We sinners and enemies of God are adopted and taken into the very family of God! Not through anything that we can do, but purely by grace – by what God does for us. And what a comfort that is! And the Holy Comforter wants us to be so comforted. And so that we may have this comfort, **the Holy Spirit convicts us of righteousness.**

And then the Spirit begins His third task. Once He has led us to repentance, and then once He has shown us the *forgiveness* of sin that is ours in Christ, He then **convicts concerning judgment, for the ruler of this world is judged.** And here also is the sweet comfort of the Comforter, to convince our hearts that no matter what we see happening in this world, no matter the struggle or the pain in your life, that the ruler, or prince, of this world – the devil – has been utterly defeated. And nothing, no amount of hellish effort, can ever change the fact that upon Satan's neck rests the foot of our risen, ascended, and victorious Saviour Jesus Christ! Satan can kick and scream and threaten and tempt and make all the ruckus he can in our lives – but He does so as a crushed foe. Crushed by the cross. He has lost. The judgment has already been rendered and the verdict passed. Jesus descended into hell, into the devil's own house, to proclaim His victory and strip the foe of his power! And so let Satan send your way whatever He will – He is powerless over you, and nothing can change that – ever. For in Christ, you are victorious over Satan also! And it is important that you know that. We don't want to belittle Satan and his work, but neither do we want to give him more credit than he's due! And so to comfort us, **the Holy Spirit convicts of judgment.**

And that, according to the Word of our Saviour, is the work of the Holy Spirit. *And it is*

*all that we need!* Or to put it in other words and summarize it a little differently, the work of the Spirit is – in all things – **to lead us to Christ**. And that is also the bottom line that we heard at the end of the second reading today from the book of Acts. For after the Holy Spirit had been poured out upon the Church, the believers did not revel in the gifts that had been given to them. That was not their focus. Rather, Peter stood up *to preach*. For this outpouring of the Holy Spirit had one purpose, that ***everyone who calls upon the Name of the LORD shall be saved***. And that is what the Holy Spirit desires – that all call upon the Name of the LORD, the Name that Jesus revealed to us in the flesh. To call on the Name of Jesus – in repentance and faith – and be saved. That is the work of the Holy Spirit, without whom not one of us would be saved.

And so if you are looking for evidence of the work of the Holy Spirit in your life, you will not find it in any extraordinary gifts, or feelings, or experiences. But you will find it here, as in Christ's Church you call on the Name of the LORD. For 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. That is His work. It is He who brought you to this Church. It is He that keeps you in this Church. And it is He who will finally take you from this Church on earth, the Church Militant, to the Church Triumphant in Heaven.

So as we celebrate the Festival of Pentecost, this is what we celebrate! Not just an historical event, but the Lord's work now . . . His work in **us**, and in **His Church**, and in **the world** today. His work of forgiveness, life, and salvation. His work which not only makes a difference in our lives here and now, but which will continue for eternity. So ***come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of the faithful, and kindle in them the fire of your love. Alleluia!*** (Introit Antiphon for Pentecost)

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.