

Fifth Sunday of Easter
+ John 16:5-15 +
“Jesus Sends the Spirit to Show Sin, Righteousness, and Judgment”

“But now I am going away to him who sent me, and not one of you asks me, ‘Where are you going?’ Yet because I have told you these things, sorrow has filled your heart. Nevertheless, I am telling you the truth: It is good for you that I go away. For if I do not go away, the Counselor will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you. When he comes, he will convict the world about sin, about righteousness, and about judgment: about sin, because they do not believe in me; about righteousness, because I am going to the Father and you will no longer see me; about judgment, because the ruler of this world has been condemned.

“I still have many things to tell you, but you cannot bear them now. But when he, the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you in all truth. For he will not speak on his own, but whatever he hears he will speak. He will also declare to you what is to come. He will glorify me, because he will take from what is mine and declare it to you. Everything the Father has is mine. This is why I said that he takes from what is mine and will declare it to you.”

There is an old short story from Russia about a kind old farmer with a pain in his chest. The pain grows worse and worse, until finally the farmer goes to see his friend, the village doctor. When he gets there, the doctor greets the old farmer warmly, because everyone in town knows him and likes him.

After hearing the kind farmer’s complaint of chest pains, the doctor listens closely to the beating of his heart, and right away he knows there is serious trouble: the kind old farmer’s heart is giving out very quickly. He will probably not live more than a couple more days.

Seeing the concerned look on the doctor’s face, the old farmer asks, “What’s wrong?”

The doctor straightens up and smiles. He cannot bring himself to break the terrible news to the dying farmer. In a panic he lies and says, “It’s nothing serious. You only need some medicine that we do not have here in the village. I will write the name of the medicine on this paper. Get on the train, take it to the city, and give the note to the doctor there. He will get you your medicine.”

And the doctor takes some paper and writes on it in Latin, so the farmer will not be able to read it: *pectus defectibilis; antepassio fatum* (defective heart; prognosis fatal).

Of course, the old farmer is delighted to hear that nothing serious is wrong. He goes skipping down the stairs of the doctor’s office to catch the train to the big city, so he can find the doctor there and get the medicine he needs.

The world that we live in is a lot like that old farmer skipping down the doctor’s stairs. The world is dying, but it doesn’t know it. So the world goes skipping along thinking that everything is fine, that everything will turn out fine in the end. Meanwhile, there is actually something very, very wrong. As the world goes skipping and whistling along, it is carrying a death sentence in its front pocket. It just doesn’t know it.

The world may not know it, but it is suffering from a fatal illness: sin. The world needs a doctor that is willing to tell it what is wrong and give it the treatment it needs, rather than letting it go on thinking everything is fine.

In a Gospel that leans forward hard to the celebration of Pentecost (and in some lectionaries is the Gospel for Pentecost), we mark and celebrate the work of the Holy Spirit, and our risen Savior's role, together with the Father, in sending him. Today we learn that the Spirit of God is the doctor the world needs, commissioned by the Father and the Son. First, The Spirit works to show the world that there is something very wrong with it, to put away the delusion that everything is just fine. Jesus told his disciples: **"When [The Holy Spirit] comes, he will convict the world about sin."**

God sends his Holy Spirit into this world to show the world its sin. The Spirit does this through the law – the commandments of God. To any human being who thinks their relationship with the Almighty is just fine – to anyone who thinks there's no way God would ever hold them accountable, certainly no way he'd ever send them to hell – to anyone who thinks that somehow after they die everything will work out just fine – to the people skipping through life thinking everything is okay – the Holy Spirit comes through God's law and tells them the truth. And he does not hide it in some strange language they cannot understand. He tells the world very bluntly: **All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...The wages of sin is death...The soul that sins will die.**

Many in this world, even after they hear the Spirit's dire news, keep skipping along, thinking it's jokes or hoax. And that is their problem. It does not stop the Holy Spirit from continuing to work through the law of God to tell the truth to the world. Those who ignore him or think that he is fake or funny remain under the sentence of death, for unbelief is the sin that makes every other sin stick to a person.

We Christians are also members of the world that the Spirit convicts of sin. He holds the reality of sin and its punishment up to your face and my face, too. But every one of us has a little stubborn, delusional part of us that wants to think everything is okay by itself. Every one of us lives in a world that hits us with lies that that as long as you do your best, if there turns out to be a God he will accept and reward you in the end.

The sin in us bites into those lies, and tries to pull us whistling along with the rest of the world who do not listen to the Spirit's fatal diagnosis. It is not pleasant to know it, but we must know the truth that the Spirit proclaims in God's Word, and know it is true: We have sinned and fall short of God's glory. We deserve God's wrath. And by ourselves, we have earned his wrath and we own it.

Only then will he fix our disease of sin, which is God's end goal for convicting hearts of their sin.

And just like the Holy Spirit, we must not be afraid to tell the world what is wrong. We may want to avoid the awkward moments. We may not like calling "sin" "sin" and telling the world that because of their own sin, they stand condemned by God. We do not want to be called judgmental; but this is God's judgment, not our own.

Sometimes church members don't like their leaders doing it, either, because they fear it will empty our pews (or keep them empty) if we're so hard on people and convict ourselves and others of sin. But if we don't, we fail in the first half of the mission that Jesus gives us as the Spirit's mouthpiece. We sacrifice the law for the sake of popularity. (And, ironically, that doesn't work anyway. Churches that have neglected the work of convicting themselves and others of sin are, for the most part, just as empty – emptier in fact – than those that do.)

And we must not be afraid to do it, because the Holy Spirit does not convict the world of sin in order to leave it die in sin. The Holy Spirit also has the cure for sin. He shows us the disease only so that when the cure is offered, we will receive it gladly. Those who do not know their sins and its punishment don't want the medicine. "What do I need it for, anyway?" But those who have heard the Spirit's condemnation and know the seriousness of their sin cry out for the cure. And the Holy Spirit shows us the cure. He shows us sin; then he shows us righteousness. Jesus said: **"about righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer."**

Jesus is the cure for our sin. By his death and resurrection, our disease is cured. The righteous life that he lived, the righteous death that he died, belong to us through faith in him. His righteousness, his perfection, is ours. But Jesus said that we need the Holy Spirit to show us his righteousness, because he is at the Father's side. Since Jesus is at the Father's side, we can't see him with our eyes. We need the Spirit to show us our Savior and his righteousness.

The Spirit has a very specific way of showing us Jesus, the cure for our sin. He does it through the Bible, baptism, and the Lord's Supper. When we see the righteousness of Jesus in the Word, baptism, and the Lord's Supper, only then can we believe in him. And only then does Jesus' righteousness become our righteousness.

The Word and Sacrament are the only ways we know of for us to see Jesus' gracious life and death for us, the only ways we receive the forgiveness of sins. Apart from the good news of Jesus in the Bible and the sacraments, there is no way to see him. Apart from the Word and Sacraments, Jesus' righteousness is hidden from our view, and we cannot believe in him.

Lutherans are sometimes accused of underemphasizing the Holy Spirit and his work. We speak a great deal more about the Father's main work of creating and preserving our lives and our world, and even more about Jesus' main work of taking our sins away and replacing them with his righteousness. I wouldn't consider that an accusation exactly, and would admit it's true. But that doesn't make the Spirit any less God, or his work any less important than the Father's or the Son's. Because without the Spirit we would not know it or believe. Their work would, to steal an illustration from Martin Luther, remain hidden like a treasure underground. It would still be real, but it would remain hidden from us, and we would be unable to enjoy it.

So, The Holy Spirit shows the world its sin; but he also shows us the righteousness of Christ – righteousness that is ours through the faith he creates and sustains.

And because the Holy Spirit shows us that Jesus' righteousness is ours, we have the assurance that we belong to God forever. Jesus also said: **"...about judgment, because the ruler of this world has been condemned."** He is the doctor who shows our sin. He opens and distributes the treasure of Jesus through Word and Sacrament. And he is the Comforter who promises us that Jesus' work judges and condemns our enemy, Satan. Because of what Jesus has done, Christians know that Satan cannot harm us. And hell can never touch us, because Satan is defeated by our Savior. Knowing our sin and seeing our Savior's love brings peace and comfort into our hearts, because we now belong to God, who has defeated our greatest enemy.

Jesus and his Father send the Spirit with the truth of God, and he works. He works through God's law to show sin. He works through the gospel in God's Word and sacraments to show righteousness in Christ. Along with that he shows the judgment of our enemy Satan, so that we live with peace in our hearts. Listen to him as he convicts you with the world; then watch as he shows you the righteousness of Christ – your righteousness, through faith! And then live in the comfort of knowing you are his, and your enemies are conquered. Amen.