

The Coming of the Holy Spirit; The Day of Pentecost: May 19, 2024

+ John 16:5-11 +

“The Holy Spirit Works”

**“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 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.”**

Today is Pentecost. The word means “fifty,” and it marks the day, fifty days after Jesus’ resurrection, when God poured out the Holy Spirit on his disciples. We heard all about that in the First Lesson today. You remember: the sound of the wind, the tongues of fire, speaking in foreign languages. Peter stood up and delivered a sermon to the crowd that day, and the end result was the Spirit working through the message to add 3,000 baptized believers, giving birth to the Christian Church throughout the Mediterranean World.

So Pentecost really is a festival celebrating the Holy Spirit and his work. And here’s why you should listen today: The Holy Spirit is the most misunderstood person of the Holy Trinity. If I asked one hundred random Trinitarians in Lake Ridge, “What is the work of God the Father?” the answers would be fairly similar, and mostly accurate. And if I asked those same Christians, “What is the work of God the Son?” we’d probably get a little wider variety of answers, but still they would mostly be the same. But if we asked those hundred Christians, “What does God the Holy Spirit do?” we would get a smorgasbord of responses.

Some of those Christians would say that the Spirit works through church leaders to govern and direct the organization of the Church. Others would say that the Holy Spirit still works to make people speak in tongues or give them other supernatural gifts, as he did on Pentecost. Still others would say that the Holy Spirit’s work is to energize Christians and Christian churches, to provide spirit in the sense of zeal and zip. And from there, the different answers would keep on coming.

What would you say? What is the main job of God the Holy Spirit? We’re going to look at that today, and then also understand why the Holy Spirit’s work is so needed by us as individuals, and by the whole world.

So let’s start here: the sermon theme today is “The Holy Spirit Works.” That’s awfully vague. Architects work, too. So do businesspeople, teachers, and mail carriers. The Holy Spirit works...how? doing what? The answer is in John 16:5-11. And first, a little disclaimer. These seven verses are, without a doubt, some of the tougher ones to understand in the Bible. If you were thinking, as that reading concluded a few minutes ago, “Huh?” that’s understandable. It’s one of those sections of Scripture that requires thought, and careful comparison to other sections of Scripture in order to understand it right. So this is not a Sunday to slouch down in your pew and then fade in and out until you hear “Amen.” Please put your thinking cap on, sit up straight, hang in there and work with me on this one.

The setting is Maundy Thursday, the night before Jesus dies. He is in the Upper Room with his disciples. An awful lot takes place on that night, and John devotes five whole chapters to it. This evening Judas betrays Jesus, and by the next morning already the soldiers are leading Jesus to Calvary.

Among the many things Jesus does on this night is teach his disciples how the Spirit works, why we need the Spirit as individuals, and why the whole world does too. Why does he teach them this? **“But now I am going away to him who sent me.”** Jesus has predicted many times that he will be betrayed, then crucified, and then raised on the third day. **“And not one of you asks me, ‘Where are you going?’ Yet because I have told you these things, sorrow has filled your heart.”** The disciples were not contemplating the purpose of what was about to happen to Jesus. Instead they were only thinking about themselves, and thinking in the short-term. And that made them sad. “Jesus is going to leave us! He’s going away! That’s bad for us!” They were thinking in a short-sighted, spiritually immature way.

If dad goes to the store to buy ice cream for his kids, the more mature ones understand that his leaving is a good thing. His leaving means something good is coming their way soon enough. But the two year-old can only think, “Dad’s leaving! That’s bad!” He’s not mature enough to understand that this departure will bring him something good. Jesus’ disciples are not spiritually mature enough to understand that his leaving was going to bring them blessings beyond measure. He was about to accomplish the forgiveness of their sins on the cross, victory over the grave, and then return to the Father’s side to rule all things – and do it all for their good!

So Jesus tried to help them understand that this was actually going to be good for them: **“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 see you. But if I go, I will send him to you.”** Not only was Jesus’ going away going to mean the successful achievement of their forgiveness and salvation, but there was another good thing that it was going to bring their way: Jesus was going to send them the Holy Spirit. Jesus calls the Holy Spirit a word that our translation renders, “Counselor,” in the sense of advocate or helper.

And basically, that is the work of the Holy Spirit. He works by helping us. You have one on your side that comes to your aid every time you call upon him and ask him for help. That’s a wonderful blessing! If Jesus had not left this world, you would have to make an appointment to see him in Jerusalem every time you needed divine help. And you’d never get the help you need, because that would be a pretty long line. But Jesus departed to the Father, and sent the Holy Spirit to help us. He helps Jesus’ people in all their needs.

But that’s still pretty vague. Let’s get more specific about the work that the Holy Spirit does for us, the help he gives. And now comes the part of these verses that’s pretty tricky to understand. So don’t leave me now. We’re going to take our time and get it right. **“When he comes, he will convict the world [prove it wrong] about sin, about righteousness, and about judgment.”** So Jesus is saying that the world has it all wrong when it comes to three things: sin, righteousness, and judgement. And the Holy Spirit will help us by proving the world wrong, and showing us what is right, on those three subjects.

First: sin. **“[The Holy Spirit will prove the world wrong] about sin, because they do not believe in me.”** The world has sin all wrong, because it doesn’t take sin nearly seriously enough. Most people do not believe in Jesus, and they do not embrace the rescue plan of a loving God, because they are under the

wrong impression that their sin – if there is such a thing – is not so serious, and God cannot be too unhappy about it. “After all, he made me this way, so it doesn’t even make sense for him to be upset at what he made when it goes wrong.”

The Holy Spirit helps us by showing that this attitude toward sin is wrong. God hates sin; he despises it, is absolutely intolerant of it and accepts no excuses for it, ever. He is repulsed by it and furious over it. You need the Holy Spirit to help you, to convince you of that truth, otherwise you will not believe in Jesus for God’s forgiveness. After all, if sin is no big deal, why do you need a Savior like Jesus?

The Holy Spirit helps us by showing us the truth about sin: it’s real, and we need to believe in Jesus, who died for it, to be forgiven.

The next subject about which the world is wrong is righteousness. **“[The Holy Spirit will prove the world to be wrong] concerning righteousness, because I am going to the Father, and you will see me no longer.”** This is hard to understand at first glance. Maybe if we think the Pharisees it will help. The Pharisees believed that their righteousness came from themselves, that they were good people, and therefore right with God. They despised Jesus because he pointed to himself as the only way for them to be righteous before God. Their concept of righteousness was all backward. And Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit to prove that worldly attitude about righteousness wrong.

How do we know Jesus is the true source of righteousness? As he says here: **“I am going to the Father.”** If Jesus had not been righteous, the Father would have rejected him; Jesus would have remained in the grave and here on earth. But he didn’t; he rose, and he ascended. He is at the right hand of the Father. So we know that Jesus is true righteousness, and the one source of our righteousness in the eyes of God.

There are a lot of people who do “spiritual” stuff. They are zealous for a cause, they do good, help other people, and show concern for their fellow humans. Like the Pharisees, most people think they are righteous on account of the good lives they live. They believe they already have what God is looking for, so they don’t need righteousness from Jesus.

But the Holy Spirit is the Helper who proves the world wrong on righteousness, and shows that Jesus is the true source. Jesus is the perfection that the Father is looking for! We know it because he returned, and was accepted, by his Father. He is the righteousness we need.

The Spirit works – he helps us – by pointing us to Jesus and his righteousness, instead of the world’s source of righteousness.

Finally, the Spirit works, he is the Helper, who teaches us to see judgment the right way: **“[The Holy Spirit will prove the world wrong] about judgment, because the ruler of this world has been condemned.”** This is probably the trickiest one of all, but here’s what I think it means. The Bible calls Satan the prince of this world. He rebelled against God, and leads people in this world to do the same. Satan teaches people to live their own way, to follow their own feelings, wants and desires...and not to follow God’s way and do his will. For the most part, the world falls for this notion that following your own path will not lead to judgment.

The Holy Spirit's work – his help – is showing how wrong this way of thinking is. Truth is, Satan is already condemned for eternity. His fate is sealed; he's lost the war. It all happened at Calvary's cross. Anyone who follows Satan's path of rebellious, selfish living, shares the same fate.

The Holy Spirit helps us with his work. He works by proving the world wrong about sin, righteousness, and judgment. The Holy Spirit uses the Word of God to show us the truth of these matters, and convince us that it is true. He creates the faith in our hearts to understand the way things really are when it comes to sin, righteousness, and judgment.

I find it interesting that the very first Pentecost sermon ever preached contained all three of those points. St. Peter was there in the Upper Room to hear what Jesus said about the Holy Spirit. And then on Pentecost, Peter stood up in the power of the Spirit and said, "You people are wrong on sin. You crucified God's Son, and that was dead wrong. Your sin is serious. You do need forgiveness."

Then he showed them they were wrong on righteousness: "**Jesus of Nazareth was a man approved by God.**" Jesus had the righteousness they needed; it came from him alone.

Finally, he told them they were wrong on judgement: Jesus was going to make his enemies a footstool; anyone who rebelled against him and went his own way would be judged in the end.

What was the result? They were cut to the heart and asked, "What shall we do?" Peter's answer: "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and be baptized." 3,000 of them did. The Spirit worked: he helped all those souls by condemning their wrong ideas and correcting them with God's truth, bringing them to faith and saving them.

The Holy Spirit works for us today. He helps us by working for us. Doing what? Using God's Word to condemn the wrong ideas of the world, and using that same Word to convince us that forgiveness, life and salvation are found in Christ alone. To God be glory for the Spirit's work. Amen.