

May 31, 2020

**Brothers and Sisters, Grace to you and peace from
God our Father and the Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.**

Today is Pentecost! We celebrate the Holy Spirit coming upon the disciples. Our reading from Acts is very dramatic. And our gospel reading from John is very organic. Jesus comes upon the disciples, and they are locked away in fear. Jesus says peace be with you and breathes upon them the Holy Spirit. Again, the breath of life...

In this time of living with a spreading Corona virus, this idea of breathing on a group of people who are in an enclosed space, all seems wrong! But I have to confess, it does make a nice contrast. Whereas the breathing and spreading of the virus brings death and disease, the breathing of the Holy Spirit brings life and forgiveness. Just the opposite...

We confess to believe in a triune God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit... The three in one and one in three... Next week we'll focus on the Trinity... This week I'd like to focus on the Holy Spirit. And I'll be honest, the Holy Spirit has always been a little mysterious to me. As Lutherans we tend to talk a lot about Jesus, the Son. And we're not always so good about talking about the Holy Spirit.

Couple stories to share today... I must have been in 9th grade and was invited by a friend to go to a youth gathering of the Assemblies of God denomination, there were hundreds of kids and it was held at the Radisson Hotel in Bloomington. My friend and I were there just to be in the cities... Because, well when you grow up on a farm near Willmar, going to the Cities was a big deal!

That gathering was an eye opener! I've never seen anything like it, before or since. The speaker started talking and almost immediately, people were holding their hands up in the air, standing, sometimes on chairs, and making vocal noises. And it seemed to ebb and flow, sometimes quiet, then sometimes very loud...

At one point, I think everyone, except us, was standing, with their hands in the air and making some kind of noise. To me, it sounded like repetitive vocalizations... My friend and I just sat there... And I remember feeling a little judged, there were some people giving us side glances, like, "what's wrong

with you!” Now, I won’t judge if they were speaking in tongues or not, that’s not my point. I only want to say these people were very enthusiastic, and it sure seemed genuine to them.

In seminary I heard that this kind of reaction is called “glossolalia.” And of course, there are Pentecostal church traditions where it is a sign of the Holy Spirit speaking. After Seminary I watched a documentary on glossolalia, and one of the speakers said something very helpful. He said, “some people have an experience of God that words cannot express, and so glossolalia happens.” Now, that makes sense to me, that I can understand...

Again, it’s not for me to judge, but I will tell you, it scared me... And, at that time in my life, I had questions about Christianity to begin with, and that experience was not helpful.

Much later in my life, after I was baptized, but before I went to Seminary, I took a class on prayer. There were several instructors, one was a Pastor and another was a Spiritual Director. They put us in small groups, had us close our eyes as they read from a particular psalm. They read it three times. Each time we were to listen for a word that seemed to stand out for us.

Then they gave us some paper and color markers, and we were to draw a picture of the psalm. And, I immediately knew what I was going sketch. After we were done, we shared our pictures with one another in the small group. Not too surprising-- all very different.

The instructors then explained that it was the Holy Spirit at work within us, that brought that particular word to our attention. And again, it was the Holy Spirit at work within us as we drew the picture. Then we were asked to reflect on our lives, what was going on in the context of our lives, why did the Holy Spirit draw our attention to those words... What was the meaning of that?

And again, it seemed obvious to me, I was struggling with the idea of going to seminary. It wasn’t a little decision... We were then instructed to write a one sentence prayer addressing what was going on in our lives. And of course, for me, it was all about having courage to make that decision.

The whole exercise became an example to me of how the Holy Spirit works in our everyday lives. Every week when I sit down to come up with a sermon, I ask the Holy Spirit to give me the words that I need to say. Words that would be life giving...

And I'm always amazed at what different people hear. People will tell me what was meaningful for them, and again, it's always very different, from one person to the next. I've come to trust that the Holy Spirit works in and through us as we dwell together as a community in the Word of God.

Luther called the church the mouth house, it's where we speak, and in and through the Holy Spirit, God speaks. God speaks to us: through confession and forgiveness, with every song we sing, with every scripture lesson we read, through preaching, through every prayer we say, we trust the Holy Spirit to work amongst us, comforting and strengthening. This is how we as a congregation, dwell in the Word, and how the Holy Spirit makes us loving, kind and gracious people.

And frankly, I've come to see the Holy Spirit working in our lives, all the time, not just in worship, but every single time we reach out in love. The ways we love our families, the ways we love our neighbors, even the ways we love those we don't like. Luther said that it was the Holy Spirit that gets you up in the middle of the night to change the baby's diaper. It can't get any more organic than that!

In our epistle lesson, the Apostle Paul says, "there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good."

In this Body of Christ, we are all different from one another, and it is the Holy Spirit that orchestrates our diversity, our unity and our giftedness. And all of this is for the common good, and for the sake of the world.

Amen...