

**The Mysterious Holy Spirit**

**John 15:26-27; 16:4b-15**

**May 20, 2018**

**Pentecost Sunday**

Grace and peace to you from God Our Father and from the One who promised us his Holy Spirit, Jesus Christ, Our Savior, amen.

How many of you remember watching the TV show “The Lone Ranger”? The Lone Ranger and his trustee horse Silver were among my favorite “superheroes” growing up. Right up there with Superman. I thought the Lone Ranger was cool, not only because he could ride a horse, but because he was somewhat mysterious. He would appear out of nowhere to save the day and then leave before anyone could properly thank him. Those who had been rescued by the Lone Ranger’s bravery and daring would invariably ask, as he rode off into the sunset, “Who was that masked man?”

A similar question could be asked of the Third Person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit. We Lutherans aren’t much for talking about the Holy Spirit. If I had to describe Lutherans in terms or our teachings when it comes to the Trinity, I’d say we’re Jesus People. We’re much more comfortable talking about Jesus than we are the Holy Spirit. I think that contributes to the inherent mystery surrounding this part of our God among Lutherans. Although the Holy Spirit doesn’t literally wear a mask, he is sometimes called the forgotten person of the Trinity. Well today, Pentecost, is the day on which we turn our thoughts to the Holy Spirit, to our holy helper, the one who leads us to all truth.

Although no one seemed to know where the Lone Ranger was from, that question has an answer regarding the Holy Spirit. In our text Jesus said the Holy Spirit, whom he calls the Counselor, comes from the Father and from himself (John 15:26). The Holy Spirit isn’t just the Father and the Son’s messenger boy. He’s equal to the Father and the Son in glory, majesty, and power. In other words, the Holy Spirit is God just as the Father and Son are God.

While the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are equal in power and majesty they do have distinct “jobs.” For example, it was the Second Person of the Trinity, God’s Son, who took on human flesh when he was born of the Virgin Mary. It was he, not God the Father or God the Holy Spirit who died on the cross for our sins. God the Father is the one who spoke creation into existence and is creating still today. We believe and confess that God has created everything that exists, including you and me. So, what is the “job” of the Holy Spirit? Jesus tells us: “the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father…will testify about me” (John 15:26b).

Throughout Scripture the Holy Spirit is given many names. Here, Jesus calls the Holy Spirit the “Spirit of truth” and we’re told he has the job of testifying about Jesus. How exactly does the Holy Spirit testify, or speak? Does he whisper in our ear? Does he give us feelings and premonitions? Does he appear to us in dreams? He certainly can and does do all those things, but if you think he’s spoken to you in one or more of those ways, compare what you think he said to what we know he said in the Bible. The Bible, every word of it, is the Holy Spirit’s testimony. That’s what the Apostle Peter teaches when he wrote: “Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:20, 21).

I know some of you are thinking, “…but Pastor, there is so much written in the Bible! What exactly does the Holy Spirit want me to know?” That’s easy; he wants you to know about Jesus. Jesus said: “When the Counselor comes…he will testify about me… He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you” (John 15:26; 16:14). In some circles of Christianity there is an overemphasis on the Holy Spirit. I’ve met many of these Christians and am honored to call them friends, but I believe even the Holy Spirit would be embarrassed with all the attention he gets in those denominations. After all his job is not to draw attention to himself, but to what Jesus did in saving the world. I think it’s the same for Pastors and Sunday School teachers. My goal on any given Sunday should not be for you to walk out of here marveling at how well-crafted the sermon was or how nice my hair looked. My job is to help you see your sin and repent or change your ways. My main purpose here today is for you to understand no matter how good you try to be and no matter how much you try to make up for your sin, you are never going to be able to be good enough or to repay enough to make up for it all. After I’ve convinced you that you’re stuck in the muck and mire of Sin, then I bring out the big gun and the big gun’s name is Jesus. Jesus is the one who **was** good enough and who **did** pay enough to make all things right and good and whole. The Holy Spirit speaks through scripture, through sermons, through the words of our hymns and songs, and through the words and acts of kindness we show to one another. In Lutheran lingo we call it Law and Gospel. It’s the Holy Spirit that takes my lame attempts at interpreting Scripture and transforms my words into such great good news that they produce trust and faith in the promises made by Jesus Christ and fulfilled when God raised him from the dead. The Holy Spirit is like a good pair of contact lenses or glasses. If they fit comfortably and do their thing, you will hardly notice them. They’re not to be seen, but to be seen through.

Without the Holy Spirit as my holy helper I would never see the seriousness of my sin. I would think, as did the builders of Babel in the Old Testament lesson, that working hard to make a name for myself is OK… News flash - It isn’t. God wants everything we do in our life to testify: “Glory to God in the highest!” Yet with every hammer blow the builders of Babel bellowed: “Glory to us!” … Don’t we do the same? For example, when I was younger and we were raising our children I wanted to be a good parent for my kids, but just as much I wanted to be known as a good parent by my friends and family. For the recognition. If your child’s teacher calls you in to report that your offspring has been disruptive, you’re sorry your child caused others distress, but you’re sorry and maybe even a bit angry because of the embarrassment. When you go above and beyond your basic duty in doing your chores at home, you husbands know this as your honey-do list, are you doing those chores to say thank you or to receive thanks and praise. The worst part of all this is that we don’t believe it’s so bad to think this way. That’s why we need the Holy Spirit. As our holy helper, he opens our eyes to the fact that such self-centeredness is sin and we deserve eternal hell fire for it.

The Holy Spirit is much better than a pair of contact lenses. Contact lenses might help you see a golf ball better, they won’t help you fix your wicked slice. The Holy Spirit doesn’t just help me see my sin, he helps me see and causes me to believe and more importantly, to trust what Jesus has done to forgive those sins covers my sin too and gives me eternal life. Once we finally recognize our sin for what it is, we can turn back to God to receive the forgiveness he’s just waiting to give us, free of charge. Without faith in or trust in the saving power of Jesus’ love, we end up forever separated from God, in the outer darkness, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. Thankfully when the good news about Jesus is proclaimed, the Holy Spirit goes to work on our hard hearts and turns them into little sponges soaking up all the goodness of forgiveness and eternal life that God wants us to enjoy in Christ.

All this might sound far-fetched, but while the Lone Ranger was a fictional character on TV, the Holy Spirit is the real deal. He is our holy helper sent by the Father and the Son. So, listen when God the Holy Spirit speaks to you through the Bible or through fellow Christians who point out sin so the Holy Spirit can point you to Christ and His saving Grace. Listen because the Holy Spirit, our holy helper, speaks the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth so that we will forever enjoy nothing but God’s love in and through the work of Christ!

May you always be listening for that still small voice of the Holy Spirit, leading you away from sin and into the arms of your loving Father in Heaven. May the Spirit of Truth speak to and through you so that God is glorified, Amen.