

May 23, 2021

St. John 16:12-15; I Corinthians 2:10b-13; Acts 2:1-4:

“The Assurance of What We Have”

- I. From the Holy Spirit.
- II. The Point.
- III. He's What You Have.

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Dear Friends in Christ,

Our text from The Book of Acts begins with, "When the day of Pentecost arrived, they (the 12 disciples) were all together in one place." (Acts 2:1) This, of course, took place after the Ascension of Christ; after Matthias was chosen to replace Judas Iscariot.

Originally, in the Old Testament, Pentecost (the "fiftieth" day) was known as The Feast of Weeks or The Feast of Harvest. It began 50 days after the Passover. The Passover foreshadowed the sacrifice of Jesus, the Lamb of God whose blood covers our sin. Or, as John called out, "Behold, The Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (Jn. 1:29) And, as Paul announced, "For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed." (1 Cor. 5:7b) The Feast of Weeks or Harvest foreshadowed what we are remembering this day: The first New Testament Pentecost - 50 days after Jesus' resurrection - and the beginning of the harvest of souls through the work of the Holy Spirit.

This morning we are examining . . .

THE ASSURANCE OF WHAT WE HAVE

I. From the Holy Spirit.

The Scriptures say, "And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked... (Eph. 2:1-2a) The "dead" here refers to spiritually dead; completely incapable of ever knowing Jesus. A little later, God's Word states "But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ - by grace you have been saved -" (Eph. 3:4-5) God's undeserved love (grace) brought us to faith so that we would know Jesus as the One who secured forgiveness of our sin and eternal life.

The question is, "What did God put into motion to make us alive?" Luther's explanation in The Large Catechism and several among a number of Scriptures further clarifies this.

First, Luther wrote: "Neither you nor I could ever know anything of Christ or believe in him and take him as our Lord, unless these were first offered and bestowed on our hearts through the preaching of the Gospel by the Holy Spirit." (Tappert, The Book of Concord, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1959, p. 415.38) Speaking to the first disciples Jesus said, "These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you." (Jn. 14:25-26)

Second, Romans 10:17 states: "So faith comes from hearing and hearing through the word of Christ." Well, Christ is the Word made flesh. The Word made flesh promised the Holy Spirit to reveal the Word to the Apostles. The Apostles revealed it to the New Testament church. Wherever the Word is present - spoken or written - so is the Holy Spirit. In our Gospel lesson from John 16, Jesus said to those first disciples:

"I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said he will take what is mine and declare it to you. (vv. 12-15)

Third, Luther wrote:

The work is finished and completed, Christ has acquired and won the treasure for us by his sufferings, death, and resurrection... But if the work remained hidden and no one knew of it, it would have been all in vain, all

lost. In order that this treasure might not be buried but put to use and enjoyed, God has caused the Holy Spirit to offer and apply to us this treasure of salvation. (Tappert, The Book of Concord, p. 415.38)

II. The Point.

I ask you to listen as carefully as possible to the following words of Scripture because they further magnify the fact that the Holy Spirit works through the Word to either assure God's love to those being brought to faith in Christ, or condemn those who reject God's love in Christ. For me, this Scripture has always dismissed any notion that humans, through their humanly wise and alluring methods, can win people to Jesus - can make the church relevant to anything people want. This is 1 Corinthians 2:10b-13:

For the Spirit (the Holy Spirit) searches everything, even the depths of God. For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God (the Holy Spirit). Now we have received not the spirit of this world (this world's wisdom which can only lead to constant rounds of miserable upheaval and death), but the Spirit who is from God (the Holy Spirit), that we might understand the things freely given us by God. And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit (the Holy Spirit), interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual.

This is so important. The Apostle Paul who was taught by Jesus said, "...we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit...". When we read Scripture we are reading what the Holy Spirit taught the Prophets and Apostles. We permit ourselves to be confronted by the Holy Spirit, because where the Word is, so is the Holy Spirit, as is Jesus! It has been correctly stated that ***the activity of the Spirit is the continuation of the activity of Jesus.***

III. He's What You Have.

One of the terms you frequently hear is *The Means of Grace*. The Means of Grace are the Word and Sacraments. We are to remember that the Sacraments - Holy Baptism and the Lord's Supper - are the Word of God made visible. Along with the written and spoken Word, they are what the Holy Spirit uses to spiritually work, comfort, strengthen and sustain faith in us.

Recall with me these words from the Book of Acts:

And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off (the future generations), everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself. (Acts 2:38-39).

As has been stated in the past, the only thing that makes this Scripture difficult is unbelief. Baptism is to receive the forgiveness of sins. It is the constant assurance that our sins have been washed away. It is to receive "the gift of the Holy Spirit" - the gift being the Holy Spirit, the One Who works and sustains faith through Word and Sacrament!

Recall with me Paul's conversion. Paul, then known as Saul, was taken to a certain house and the Lord then sent a disciple named Ananias to him. Here's the rest of the account:

So Ananias departed and entered the house. And laying his hands on him he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptized...(Acts 9:17-18)

Do we see? First "scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight." Secondly, he "was baptized", which fulfilled the promise, "be filled with the Holy Spirit."

Dear brothers and sisters, on this Pentecost Sunday, we are once again lifted to the facts that the Holy Spirit entered our lives, worked faith in us, washed away every sin forever, and opened our eyes to the coming joy of everlasting life.

As I think you know, when a loved one dies we often hold on to certain items they've left behind. They remind us of the person. They give those left behind certain comfort. And, maybe, there's the thought that we don't want to forget them.

God gave His only Son to walk this earth and love us to eternal life. He gave us the Word and Sacraments, not only as reminders but promises of His presence, love, forgiveness and Heaven. As Jesus said, "...behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Matt. 28:10b) As Jesus said, "whoever believes should not perish but have eternal life." It's the Holy Spirit Who impresses upon us ***the assurance of what we have*** in Christ, and the assurance that He is moving this world according to His will.

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott