

John 15:26-27; 16b-15

May 23, 2021 (Pentecost Sunday)

Grace and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ! Amen.

One of the most difficult of all golf shots, at least in my opinion, is those in which the flag stick or even putting green are out of visual sight. The pin and green are that target you align your body toward, set your sights on, and set your golf ball upon. Yet, there are times, particularly when the putting service is elevated, when you simply must trust it is there; even when cannot physically see it.

Or perhaps its like the gymnast that lets go of the bar and flies high into the air above it, twists, flips and then in a moment descends again to grasp onto that same bar or another one slightly below it. I imagine, through much practice, a trust is built up in their routine and they know the bar is there; even though, mid-twist or tumble their eyes may not be upon it.

Or maybe it is that pilot who is navigating a landing amidst a dense fog, making the runway impossible to see. The instrumentation panel assures him it is there; but not until he is nearly on top of it, does he finally spot the lights illuminating the landing strip.

Perhaps, the Holy Spirit is somewhat like these examples in that we do not always see the Spirit; as those gathered in the house did that first Pentecost when the sound of a rush of a violent wind filled the house where they were sitting or divided tongues, as of fire, appeared and rested upon them. We may not see the Spirit, but we trust the Spirit is present. We know the Spirit is there.

The golfer, gymnast, pilot can execute those aforementioned actions because of much practice, hard work, education and training, and a variety of gifts entrusted to them. These things have made the difference. So, how does the Spirit, make a difference in our lives and in the world?

Our introduction to the gospel stated, “While speaking to his disciples before his death, Jesus refers to the Holy Spirit as ‘the Helper’ and describes the *difference* the Spirit will make in their lives and in the world. Especially, when it is difficult to see the Spirit’s presence and perhaps trust the Spirit is near.

It is the very fact we can point to workings of the Spirit that bears witness to the Spirit’s presence. It is the very fact we can trust the Spirit’s presence when we cannot see a flame upon our forehead or hear the sound of a violent rush of wind sweeping through the rooms, we find ourselves in that indeed bears witness to the activity of the Spirit making a difference in our lives. Because, as Jesus stated, the Spirit “will guide you into all truth.” Or as Martin Luther states in his explanation to the third article of the Apostles’ Creed in his *Small Catechism* which speaks to the work of the Spirit, it is the Spirit that “enlightens” us.ⁱ

Thus, while discernment informs us the destructive winds of the derecho were not the presence of the Spirit rushing into world to wreak havoc upon the thousands of lives impacted; make no doubt about it, the Spirit’s presence was made known in the aftermath of such a devastating and rare meteorological event. How about Spirit’s calling the people of the Southeastern Iowa Synod to respond to their neighbor’s plight in stewarding financial gifts of \$78,924 to assist those in need. Or, how about the Spirit’s work of gathering countless volunteers, even amidst a global pandemic, to remove fallen trees, rake limbs and debris, provide tons of supplies such as water, ice, food, and generators.

This work of love, care for another, seeing our neighbor, hearing our neighbor, and acknowledging our neighbor created in the image of God matters is a result of the enlightenment of the Spirit to trust in the grace we have received through Jesus Christ. Grace that sets us free from sin and death. Grace that sets us free to love and serve. Grace that turns us outward rather than inward. This is the wind that rushes through our bodies. This is the fire that burns within our souls. This is the Spirit making a difference in our lives and in the world.

I posed that question, that is “How is the Spirit making a difference in your life?” earlier in the week on Facebook. Two people responded. One, Patsy Ernst, says “The Spirit helps me to serve my God and grants me wisdom and faith as I go thru

life and teaches me to love and inspire others.” The second, Toni Dodds, states “[The Spirit] encourages me to build others up, lift them up.”

I hear Luther’s explanation of the work of the Holy Spirit in these responses. He states it is the Spirit who, “calls, gathers, enlightens, and makes holy the whole Christian church on earth and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one common, true faith.”ⁱⁱ While we Lutherans may tend to be more Christologically centered and focus our attention on the second article of the Creed, we must not forget the third article because without the third, the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit, we would have no understanding of the first and second article that speak to God the Creator and Jesus Christ the Redeemer. It is the promised Holy Spirit that guides those disciples, the young church of Acts and the entire Christian assembly that has followed into the truth we can grasp through the gift of faith.

That wind and fire of the Spirit that makes its home within us indeed does make a difference in the lives of God’s people. Rob Merola writes about our 3 Bible passages this morning:

In Acts, the Spirit empowers the disciples to speak in languages they had never learned and gives them a boldness to do so publicly—a boldness that up to this point they had not had. In Romans, the Spirit helps believers pray in ways that they could not pray on their own. And in John, Jesus says the Spirit will guide the disciples into all truth—truth that they “could not bear” without the Spirit’s help. The Holy Spirit will reveal things to the disciples they could not discern on their own, and then give them the strength to live that truth accordingly.”ⁱⁱⁱ

Need we look further to see the Holy Spirit. Trust the Spirit is in the valley we find ourselves in and just beyond the rise of that hill set before us and the other side we cannot see. Trust the Holy Spirit will be the ever-present bar to grasp ahold of when amidst a spinning and spiraling world. Trust the Spirit’s light will illuminate our path when the fog settles in around us. The Spirit Jesus promised to send and has sent is indeed with us. It is the Spirit of Hope that guides us into all truth.

The truth that we are set free from sin and death through the cross of Christ, the empty tomb of Easter. The truth that allows us to say, “Alleluia! Christ is risen.” The truth that promises life in the face of death. The truth that we are beloved. The truth that we are called, gathered, enlightened, and made holy. The truth that the Holy Spirit breathes life into those dry spaces of our lives and renews us in the gift of grace, forgiveness, and love. The truth that calls us to love our neighbor as God has loved us. All of this makes a difference in our lives. As Bishop Current spoke of in her message yesterday as the annual assembly of the Southeastern Iowa Synod concluded, we “can’t help but share the good news of Jesus.” The Holy Spirit is with you dear people of God. Making a difference in your life and through you and the church on earth making a difference in the world God so dearly loves. Amen.

ⁱ *Luther’s Small Catechism*; 2016, Augsburg Fortress, Minneapolis; p.16.

ⁱⁱ *Ibid*; p.16.

ⁱⁱⁱ Rob Merola; “Radical reliance: Acts 2:1-21; Romans 8:22-27; John 15:26-27, 16:4b-15; <https://www.christiancentury.org/article/2006-05/radical-reliance>