

With thanksgiving to God for his Holy Spirit on this Pentecost Sunday, dear friends,

*“A dog barks when his master is attacked. I would be a coward if I saw that God's truth is attacked and yet would remain silent.”* Pastor and theologian John Calvin is the one who said that. *“A dog barks when his master is attacked. I would be a coward if I saw that God's truth is attacked and yet would remain silent.”* I suppose virtually all of us would agree with that. We don't like God's Word being attacked because we know that his Word is the truth and it is salvation for all who believe. So, yes, we would agree that we would have to be cowards to sit silently by and let the truth of God's Word be attacked. We would probably also agree that we are often cowards!

Many are the times we don't speak up for what God says. We know we should say something, but we don't—for lots of reasons. We want to keep peace in the family. We're hyper-conscious of work rules concerning talking about religion. We don't want to be embarrassed among friends or classmates. We don't think that what we say will matter for that person. We're afraid of follow-up questions that we won't be able to answer. We have lots of reasons for not speaking up for God's truth—or are they excuses? Well, today we hear something that can remove our fears and make us determined not to rely on excuses, but instead be people who speak up for God's truth.

The Festival of Pentecost gives us an occasion to remember the way the Holy Spirit works *in* each of us and *through* each of us! Today we concentrate on words Jesus spoke to his disciples just before his death, the promise of the Holy Spirit and command to witness for him: **“When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me. And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning.**

Jesus' words are helpful for us just like they were for those first disciples—if we trust the promises about the Holy Spirit. This is the truth that you can trust:

### **THE SPIRIT CREATES WITNESSES FOR THE TRUTH**

I realize that there may be some here this morning who are not quite sure about the Bible, but for the most part, those who have gathered here for worship today know that God's Word is truth. We know the saving gospel message of sins paid for and forgiven by Jesus and salvation by faith in him is the truth. We've come to know that and believe that as we have read and studied the Bible. The Holy Spirit, in fact, is the one who gave us the faith to trust that.

But think about those disciples for a few minutes. This is going to be painfully obvious once I mention it, but consider what it *meant* for those men: some of them were the writers of the New Testament gospel message, so they didn't have anything actually written down to refer to, to memorize, to guide them. They had no resource to point people to so that their hearers could review what they told them. None of them had this! Sure, they had the Old Testament Scriptures, but that's not the stuff about the

Savior's actual birth and life and death and resurrection. That's not the epistles (or letters) of the New Testament written to help us apply faith in Jesus to our lives. None of that had been written down because it was happening even at that moment! They were part of the history to be written and they were the writers of it too!

Why am I pointing out the obvious? For this reason—when Jesus told them to go out and tell people the truth about salvation, they didn't have the guidebook you and I have in the Bible. They only had in their minds and memories what they had seen and heard from Jesus. How would they remember everything? How would they get it right? What if they couldn't remember? We may tend to put those disciples up on a pedestal in some ways, but remember that they were regular people, just like us. They were sinful human beings living in a sinful world, just like us. And we know what we are like! So how would they remember? How would they get it right? How would their telling people what they saw and heard from Jesus cause people to listen, much less believe it as the most important TRUTH they could ever hear?

There is only one way those things could happen and it is found in the promise of Jesus. Or should I say "He" is found in the promise of Jesus? **"When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me. And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning.** The answer is the Holy Spirit, who is also called the Counselor and the Spirit of Truth. Jesus promised to send the Spirit to bear witness that Jesus is the Savior.

And Jesus placed an expectation on the disciples. This was a command of Jesus to go out and tell. Why? Because they were equipped to do so! They knew Jesus. They had been with them from the beginning. They had seen him live a perfect life in every instance and had seen him do miracles only God can do. Who else knew what they knew? They were good witnesses because their lives had been personally touched by Jesus' love and forgiveness. They held the promise of eternal life by faith in Jesus.

At Pentecost we celebrate the Holy Spirit's work. With these words today we are especially mindful of God the Holy Spirit's work of encouraging, reminding God's people of the important truths of faith and even giving us words to speak as we witness the love of Christ to the world. When Jesus gave this promise, it wasn't the first time he had talked to the disciples about the Holy Spirit's working through them so that they could be witnesses for the truth. It was a year prior to this that Jesus sent out the Twelve and part of his instruction to them at that time was this: **"On my account you will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to them and to the Gentiles. But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. (Matthew 10:18-20).**" Jesus promised them that the Holy Spirit would give them the right thing to say at the right time as they went about sharing the gospel with people.

Christians over the centuries have taken great comfort in Jesus' words of promise. Part of the Spirit's work is making up for our deficiencies! Where we are weak, the Spirit is strong! Maybe you've experienced this. Someone shot a religious question your way and you "somehow" came up with the right answer, the appropriate thing to say! It's not like you rehearsed or even knew the subject would come up but you were able to help with the right words. When that happens we're often surprised, because we certainly remember the times when we DIDN'T remember what to say. But we shouldn't be surprised. Actually, a little before he words of text, Jesus had told the disciples this: **"All this I have spoken while still with you. But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you (John 14:25-26).**

So on several occasions and in different ways, Jesus had reassured his followers that the Holy Spirit would remind them and give them the proper words to say. Yes, they were entrusted with a great responsibility in handling the truth of God and sharing it with others so that they might be saved, but they would have help. There was no reason to fear or worry, because the fact is, **THE SPIRIT CREATES WITNESSES FOR THE TRUTH.** The most dramatic demonstration of that, of course, was on the Day of Pentecost, 50 days after Jesus resurrection on Easter. In the Scripture lesson from Acts, we heard about the bold testifying of the disciples and the incredible gift they were given—the ability to speak the truth of God in different languages. The Holy Spirit took men who were sometimes fearful, sometimes timid, sometimes overcome by sin, who were limited by their language skills and he turned them into these incredible witnesses! **THE SPIRIT CREATED WITNESSES FOR THE TRUTH!**

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*"Wow, that's great pastor! That's wonderful how the Holy Spirit did that for those guys. I'm happy to be reminded of the Spirit's power like that and I'm thankful that those men became witnesses for God's saving truth because that's how the gospel came down to me. I am grateful for the Holy Spirit's work on this fine Pentecost morning!"* Maybe you wouldn't say it exactly that way, but I hope you feel that way. But what I really hope is that you realize that there is even something more for you here. You see, what the Holy Spirit did for them, he also does for us! **THE SPIRIT still CREATES WITNESSES FOR THE TRUTH!**

That is a reason to celebrate because we are very much like those disciples of long ago. We are sinful people. We can lack confidence and give in to fear and be forgetful. Sometimes we try to compensate for our forgetfulness by placing the burden on others, right? Why just this last Sunday here at church, I heard Pastor Kassulke tell his wife something like: *"Remind me that Pastor Koehler changed our meeting time on Tuesday."* Poor Beth apparently gets the same burden placed on her that I place on Debbie! I do that all the time, maybe you do too. We may have a lot going on or we just don't have good concentration or a strong memory, so we ask for help in remembering. One of the great things about the Holy Spirit—along with working in baptism (as we were privileged to witness this morning) and giving us faith and prompting us to do things that please God—is that he actually helps us like he helped those first disciples.

Consider this—the Apostle Paul writes in 1 Corinthians, **Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you (3:16)?** You see, it's not just that the Holy Spirit did these awesome things back on the day of Pentecost where the disciples spoke in languages they hadn't learned and people repented and believed and 3,000 were baptized. And it's not just that he gave those first disciples the assurance of his help as they witnessed for Christ. The Holy Spirit does for us what he did for them! It is the Spirit who actually lives in you and moves you to live in a way that pleases God and gives you words to say—and gives power to the words you say—so that some who hear you also put their faith in Jesus as their Savior!

If you're anything like me, you can look back on times when you have not behaved as a child of God. You didn't do the good things God wants from his dearly loved people. And at other times you did things that God absolutely says are wrong. And you may not have to think back real far to come up with those things—maybe even moments ago—here at church! And if you're anything like me, you can recall times where you didn't think of an especially helpful or appropriate thing to say to someone as you tried to witness for the truth. Is the Spirit not really working in us then? Does this mean that Jesus' promises are not for us, that the Holy Spirit doesn't really help you and me?

The answer is “no.” The Holy Spirit still does his work on us and in us. Since the new person we are by faith in Christ, the sanctified part of us, does work along with the Holy Spirit to please God, it is important that we keep our connection to the Holy Spirit very strong. All the ways that this happens are evident here at Grace this morning! We have/had a baptism today. We celebrate Holy Communion today. The Word of God is involved in those two sacraments and it is proclaimed in readings and song also. It is that Word of God that the Spirit works through to create and strengthen faith so that we live for Christ and have the ability to witness for him and the truth of God's Word. I'm sure it makes sense to you then that if you and I are not regularly connected with God's Word—and therefore the faith-strengthening work of the Holy Spirit—we are going to have more difficulty combating sin and witnessing for the truth.

What a blessing, what a relief to know that we have forgiveness for our sins of the past and our blown opportunities to witness. Jesus' blood paid for those sins completely and we have a totally fresh start with God going forward. So this is what we can do and ought to do—stay connected to the Holy Spirit, the one who CREATES WITNESSES FOR THE TRUTH. Read your Bible. Go to church. Go to Bible Study. If you have not been baptized, talk to one of the pastors about that. Go to the Lord's Supper as you have opportunity. Through these things the Holy Spirit works on our hearts, sanctifying us and preparing us to witness for the truth. And finally, *trust* that the Holy Spirit has the power to take cowardice away and turn our weaknesses into strengths so that we can speak up for God and the saving truth of forgiveness and eternal life through Jesus our Savior. Amen.

Now the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.