

### “The Spirit of Truth”

The sound of a rushing wind...something like flames of fire coming down on the disciples...languages of all sorts being spoken and understood. It must have been an interesting and amazing experience at Pentecost! Can you imagine what it would have been like to be there and to be an eyewitness of all these things?

Now, notice I didn't say that I wanted to witness the first Pentecost. Pentecost was a festival that God's people had celebrated throughout the Old Testament. It was faithful Jews from many nationalities and locations that gathered in Jerusalem to celebrate this festival. No, this wasn't the first Pentecost, but it was a very special one, one that would change the meaning of Pentecost for believers from that day forward.

As I wonder what that day would have been like, there are many questions that I can't answer. The Bible gives us the important details, but it doesn't give us all the details. It tells us some of the reactions of the people who gathered to hear the disciples, but not precisely how they felt. It tells us what the disciples did and said, but it leaves it to us to wonder how they felt and how surprised they were by all that was happening. What we can say is this: the disciple should have known something special like this was going to happen. They should have known something about it because Jesus had told them about it repeatedly. He had mentioned several times that he was going to send them this special gift.

The words of our text, just two fairly brief verses, record one occasion when Jesus shared this special promise He promised to send his disciples the gift of the Spirit of truth. The Spirit would testify about Jesus, and the disciples in turn would testify about Jesus. Let's take a closer look together at this precious promise that Jesus gave.

Jesus spoke the words of our sermon text on Maundy Thursday, after celebrating the Passover with his disciples. He took this occasion, just before his suffering and death to prepare his disciples for what was coming. He spoke to them about how he would be going away from them and that they would not see him in the same way. But he also promised to be with them and encouraged them to remain connected to him like a branch is connected to the vine. He warned them that many in this sinful world would hate them and despise them, just as many sinners had hated and despised Jesus. They would soon see the depths of that spite, and they would feel it even after Jesus had died, risen, and ascended into heaven.

In spite of the world's hatred, the disciples would have everything that they needed. Jesus would see to it. He promised to send them an amazing gift. Our NIV translation refers to this gift as the Counselor. Some translations have recorded the sounds of the Greek word and called this figure the Paraclete. The word refers to someone who stands at your side, who encourages and comforts, who gives aid and counsel. The Holy Spirit would do exactly that for the disciples when Jesus would send him. In just this short promise, Jesus mentions a great deal about this Counselor, the Holy Spirit.

We find in these verses the close connection of the Holy Spirit with Jesus and the Father. Jesus would send the Holy Spirit from the Father, and the Holy Spirit goes out from the Father. Even in this brief description we begin to see the doctrine of our Triune God. Each person, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, is unique and individual, and yet all together are one true God, indivisible and sharing a common purpose. Of course, this brief description also only scratches the surface of what the Bible teaches concerning the trinity. Next week is Holy Trinity Sunday, and we'll hear more about the subject. For now, we'll repeat what the Bible teaches, the Holy Spirit is true God, one of the three persons of the Godhead.

While Jesus would be away from his disciples compared to the way he had been physically, visibly active and present with them, he would not be leaving them alone. His Holy Spirit would come to them and stay with them. His Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth. The reason the Holy Spirit would come to these disciples was to teach them the truth and to remind them of the truth. He would empower them to speak and to



share the truth with others. And the truth that defines the Spirit is spoken of this way as well: **“he will testify about me.”** The work of the Holy Spirit is to testify about Jesus. That is the truth, the ultimate truth.

It is the truth that all people are conceived and born in sin, the truth that all have sinned and fall short of God's glory. It is the truth that in Jesus Christ, the true and eternal God became also a true human being. He suffered and died to take away the sins of the world, and he rose victoriously as conqueror of sin and death. The Holy Spirit on Pentecost drove that truth deep into the hearts of each disciple and prepared them to share that truth with others. They proclaimed the truth boldly, connecting the Old Testament prophecies with their fulfillment in Jesus. About Jesus Peter testified: **“And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”**

And so the pattern that was established according to Jesus' words was carried out: the Holy Spirit testified to the disciples about Jesus and in turn the disciples testified about Jesus to others. In the confidence of their own salvation, these eyewitnesses of Jesus in his life, death and resurrection, boldly proclaimed him as Savior from Pentecost until their own death.

So today we celebrate Pentecost, but what does that day, almost 2000 years ago have to do with us today? Plenty. First, the truth that the Holy Spirit inspired in the disciples is the same truth that through them and subsequent generations he preserved in order that we might know it today. This Pentecost was an important milestone for the Early Christian Church, growing and establishing it for its role in history.

And it was even more than that. Pentecost as a spectacular and singular event also taught some very general truths. Pentecost highlighted the work of the Holy Spirit in a special way to underscore the importance of his role in our lives and in our work. Jesus' promise in the words of our text applied to the disciples in a special way, but also have application to us today. About the words of our text, our People's Bible commentary says: “The process to this day is essentially the same, though less spectacular. Through the witness of the apostles, the Spirit comes to us and shows us Jesus. Then we bring the witness to others, and the sequence repeats. So God has preserved and extended his church through the ages.”

We celebrate Pentecost because the Holy Spirit has come to us, the Spirit of truth who testified of the truth to our hearts. He has made us members of his Holy Christian Church. We are a part of the Communion of Saints, all believers throughout the whole world made holy through Jesus Christ.

Not a single one of us deserved it. You were dead in your sins. I was dead in mine. We didn't believe because we were smart enough or savvy enough or reasonable enough or because we worked hard enough to figure it out. By our own reason, our own thinking, our own choosing, or our own strength, we would never believe the truth. Sure, we could give our assent to some small truths along the way, some facts that are clear to our reason. But apart from the Holy Spirit we are and remain hostile to God, enemies of him and his Word and his will. We will never come to the truth that Jesus is our Savior and that through him and his work we have eternal salvation.

So the Holy Spirit has come to us, not with the sound of a violently rushing wind, and not in tongues of heavenly fire. The Holy Spirit has come to us in the gospel, in that good news message that Jesus lived and died for us. He has called us to faith and sanctified us to do good works. He has called us to the truth and enables us to proclaim the truth to others. He came in our baptisms, and he continues to strengthen us in the Lord's Supper.

The Spirit of truth moves and motivates us to testify of our Savior. We do in our words and actions, in our church membership and attendance, in our offerings that support the work of sharing his name here and abroad. The Spirit of truth leads us to recognize that many still need to hear the truth.

It isn't accompanied by the sound of rushing wind. It doesn't happen with flames of fire. But the Holy Spirit comes to us in Word and sacrament. It may not be as spectacular and visible, but it is just as vital. The Spirit of truth testifies about Jesus to us and for us.



The Text: John 15:26–27 (NIV84)

<sup>26</sup> “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. <sup>27</sup> And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning.”