

You Have the Holy Spirit!

It is easy to talk about the work of God the Father. We can simply look at the amazing world around us. Someone very powerful and wise had to put it here. It is also easy to speak of the work of Jesus Christ. The Bible clearly documents Jesus living on earth, performing miracles, being arrested, crucified and even rising from the dead as historical events. Talking about the Holy Spirit, however, is a bit more challenging. We can not point to visible things because the Holy Spirit's work is internal, in our hearts. Without the work of the Holy Spirit, though, we would not believe in God the Father or God the Son. Even though we can not see faith in a heart, this morning, we see that you do have the Holy Spirit.

These words before us from John 15 and 16 took place on the Thursday night before Jesus was betrayed and crucified. Jesus told his disciples that he was going to be leaving them, but they did not understand how or why. In fact, they were (:6), “**filled with grief.**” They did not understand that he was leaving so he could send the Holy Spirit to them. There was a lot the disciples did not understand yet. They were constantly focused on earthly power and glory instead of salvation. They selfishly argued among themselves. When Jesus was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane, they ran away like cowards. Peter even cursed and swore that he never met Jesus. When Jesus was crucified, they hid in fear behind locked doors.

It is easy to point at the disciples and criticize them but we are not much better. How many people did you invite to church this morning? How many times did you talk to others about Jesus this week? If people were watching and listening to you all week long would they conclude that you were a Christian or did you manage to blend in with the unbelieving world again with foul language and a nasty attitude? We sometimes sin boldly as if we did not care that Jesus is watching us. The disciples were filled with grief. What is it that fills you with grief? Your physical or mental health? Or, do you struggle with loneliness even though you are surrounded by people? Do you try to do the right thing and be helpful to others, but no one seems to notice or care? Does everyone else seem to be happy and healthy, but you struggle? There are times for all of us when being a Christian doesn't seem to do us any good. This world can

leave us feeling worn out and struggling. There are times for all of us when we are filled with some sort of grief.

A few years ago in California, there was a guy who was hurting and alone and filled with grief. He and his friend were hiking through the Sycamore Canyon just east of Los Angeles. He slipped, fell and broke his leg. His partner could not get him out of the canyon on his own, so he left him to get help. Think how lonely that fellow felt while he was lying helplessly in a canyon with a broken leg. How long would he suffer? Would rescuers find him? Would some wild animal attack him? That's the anxiety the disciples felt when Jesus told them that he was going to leave them. They were scared and worried. We also can easily get scared and worried, frustrated and upset with the situations we face in life. How much longer, Lord? Are things ever going to get better?

The hiker's friend managed to flag down some border agents who called emergency medical services. They located him and carried him out of the canyon. Then he was taken by helicopter to the hospital for surgery and healing. Everything ended up OK. In the same way, when Jesus left his disciples by ascending into heaven, he was able to send the Holy Spirit to his disciples to help them. As we heard in our second lesson this morning, Jesus did send the Holy Spirit to his disciples on that first Pentecost of the New Testament era. The Spirit came with the sound of a blowing wind and with flames of fire. He did not just give the disciples the gift of instantly being able to speak in other languages. He also gave them the boldness to speak. The disciples who ran away from Jesus and denied knowing him now had the Holy Spirit and stood up to boldly tell people that Jesus was the promised Messiah. They boldly explained to the Jews that they killed Jesus by shouting for his crucifixion. But they also told the good news of how Jesus' death and resurrection were proof that salvation was won for them. Those disciples who ran away in fear now stood bold even in the face of death. Those who denied Jesus were now powerful proclaimers. They were able to testify about Jesus, just as he said they would, because the Holy Spirit was with them.

In our first lesson this morning, we heard the story of Ezekiel in the valley of dry bones. Dry bones can not do anything. But when Ezekiel proclaimed God's Word those bones started rattling. Then they came together to form skeletons. Then flesh appeared on them. They became a huge army of people who followed the Lord. What happened to those dry bones has happened to each one of us. Through the good new message of salvation, which comes to us through God's Word, Jesus sent the Holy

Spirit to you. He brought you to faith and continues to strengthen your faith. Through faith – simple trust in the heart – you are connected to Jesus. His perfect life gets transferred to you so that you are declared righteous, perfect, pure, holy! How cool is that? On the cross, Jesus paid for all of your sin and guilt and so all of your sin and guilt are cancelled. Your sins are forgiven. You have the perfection you need in order to get to heaven. How blessed you are because Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to you. Even though there are times when you feel lonely, unloved, forgotten and filled with grief, you can smile and have confidence that the Lord loves you as an individual and he has brought you into this kingdom. Others may have health and wealth and good times, but you have the Holy Spirit which is far greater!

Filled with the Holy Spirit, the disciples testified about Jesus. We also have the Holy Spirit and want to testify to others about Jesus. We share God's Word in whatever way we can. Maybe you read Bible stories to your children or grandchildren. Maybe you invite your neighbor over for a barbecue and reference the fact that we will all die one day, but you are not worried. Maybe casually ask if he knows where he'll go when he dies. Maybe you invite that neighbor to church. Maybe you help by putting door hangers in our community. We still have a few hundred to hang. Maybe you buy your grandchildren some Christian books from <nph.net>. Maybe you give extra offerings to support mission work around the world. We can all pray. In fact, that's what we're praying for when we ask that God's kingdom come. The same Holy Spirit who made the disciples bold is working in you to overcome your fears and do what we can to spread the message of salvation.

At times, I think it would have been neat to be at that first Pentecost and see the flames of fire and hear the apostles speaking in different languages. I'm curious about silly things like – Did those flames of fire feel warm? Did those flames come from a large ball of fire that divided or was each flame split? But then I look at you people, and I realize that I am seeing Pentecost in action. You are people who came into this world spiritually dead, but have been made believers and confess faith in Christ. God is using you to share the message of salvation just as the apostles did. Through Word and Sacrament, you have the Holy Spirit. You believe and are saved. Amen.