

Pentecost

Acts 2:1-21

June 5, 2022 at St. Matthew, Port Washington, WI

Come Holy Spirit!

Touch us with your word

Touch us in our hearts

If it was possible, I would guess that the Holy Spirit would be a little jealous of the Father and the Son. The Father gets mentioned every time we pray the Lord's Prayer or marvel at the wonder of the creation. Jesus gets all the attention on Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Easter, etc. The Holy Spirit just gets one Sunday – Pentecost. Of course, the Holy Spirit is not jealous. Even though we do not give the Holy Spirit near as much attention as we give the Father and the Son, the Holy Spirit is just as much 100% true God as they are. All of us have watched a baseball or football game on television. We see the game, but we hardly ever see the cameraman. Without the cameraman, though, we would not be able to watch the game. We can think of the Holy Spirit as God's cameraman. Without the work of the Holy Spirit, we would not know about the Father's love or the Son's salvation. This morning, we pray Come Holy Spirit. Touch us with your Word. Touch us in our hearts.

Touch us with your Word

A few years ago, a lady from our neighborhood knocked on our front door. She needed a babysitter and knew that we had some teenagers who could help. As soon as I opened the door, she blurted out, "Just before I knocked, I said a short prayer that you could help me and as soon as I prayed, I saw a butterfly. God sent that butterfly to tell me that he wants your children to babysit for me." Gently, I tried to tell her that God does not talk to us through butterflies. A fellow once stopped by the church to tell me about some community event. He insisted that God spoke to him through his dreams like he did with Joseph and others in the Bible. Gently, I tried to explain to that while God USED to give such dreams, he does not do that now that the Bible has been completed. God only communicates with us through his Word, the Bible. (Hebrews 1:1; Revelation 22:18,19)

The special work of the Holy Spirit is to spread God's Word around the world. The Apostle Peter wrote that "**prophets spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.**" In the Nicene Creed we confess that the Holy Spirit is true God, equal to the Father and the Son and that the Holy Spirit has "**spoken through the prophets.**" A prophet is someone who proclaims, or shares, God's Word. The Holy Spirit guided and directed the thoughts of prophets like Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Joel and others so that they wrote down the exact thoughts that God wants you to know. It is as if the prophets were taking dictation for the Holy Spirit. The term we use for that in Catechism class is "verbal inspiration."

Fifty days after Jesus rose from the dead, the Holy Spirit made a special appearance in Jerusalem. The sound of violent wind was the Holy Spirit's way of letting people know that he was there. (In their language, they had one word for both wind and

spirit. So when people said, "That's a strong wind," they also heard, "That's a strong Spirit.") The tongues of fire floating above the disciples' heads was another indication that the Holy Spirit was blessing the disciples in a special way. They were able to speak in different languages that they had not studied – Greek, Latin, Egyptian and other languages. Peter explained that what those Jews were witnessing was what God promised in the Old Testament book of Joel that in the last days, all believers – men and women, young and old – would prophecy, share God's Word. Everywhere believers go, they are going to let their little gospel light shine. Ever since Jesus completed the work of salvation and returned to heaven, we have been in the last days. The world could end at any moment. Certainly, the sound of a blowing wind and the flames of fire and the different languages got people's attention, but the message was what really impressed the people.

If you read further in Acts 2, you'll see how Peter told the people about salvation through Jesus by quoting from the Old Testament. Peter pointed the people to God's Word. If they had studied the Scriptures they would have recognized Jesus as their Savior instead of calling for his crucifixion. The Holy Spirit only touches people through the Word of God – not by butterflies or dreams or tea leaves or any other way. We need this reminder because there are many people who do not look to the Bible as God's inspired and inerrant Word that we should not mess with at all.

Permit a few illustrations. The Roman Catholic church officially bases their teachings on what the Bible says AS WELL AS what the Pope and Church Counsels have officially decided. In reality, the Bible gets pushed to the side. For example, they openly admit that there are no Bible passages which say that we should pray to the Virgin Mary, but they most certainly pray to Mary. The UCC – United Church of Christ – advertises that, "God is still speaking," and, "Never place a period where God has placed a comma." With those phrases, they mean to say that, for example, even though the Bible says homosexuality is not God's plan for men and women, the spirit of love has evolved so that now OK. The ELCA – Evangelical Lutheran Church in America – treats the Bible as fables and legends like the King Arthur legend in England. They officially say that the Bible should not be taken literally. Such things are poison to faith.

Even as I warn you about such things, though, the devil is trying to get us to pat ourselves on our backs. He wants us to think that we are better than others and more deserving of God's love because we take God's Word so seriously. And then, even though we believe that the Bible is God's true Word, we can end up trusting in our goodness and missing out on salvation. We need to be careful. At times, members have told me things like, "I just feel that God is telling me to quit my job." Careful! God ONLY speaks to us through the Bible. Yes, the Bible gives guidelines for living our faith, but he lets you decide how you wish to put those principles into practice.

The devil also wants us to get complacent and think, "I know what's in the Bible. I don't need to spend time with it. Going to church once in a while is good enough." If you do not charge up your cell phone, no one can communicate with you. If you do

not charge up your faith by plugging in to God's Word, God will not be able to communicate with you. Can you imagine how blessed we would be as individuals and as a congregation if we spent as much time and effort with God's Word as we did with sports or television or politics, or the news, or YouTube or whatever? We have greater access to God's Word than any other generation in the history of the world with more time saving devices than every before and yet we whine that we are too busy to read devotions, or that the Bible is boring, or that we already know what we need to know. In his explanation to the Third Commandment Luther said, "We should fear and love God that we do not despise preaching and his Word, but regard it as holy and gladly hear and learn it." Does that description fit you? Maybe sometimes, but not all the time. For our lack of zeal for God's Word, we should not be surprised if God decided, "You do not cherish my Word as the one thing needful, I'll take it away from you."

The same Holy Spirit who guided the prophets to write God's Word down has also made sure to preserve that word so that we still have it today. No other book from ancient times has been preserved so carefully with so many copies that you can know exactly what Jesus said. The Bible has been preserved even though some of the world's strongest governments have tried to eliminate all Bibles and stomp out Christianity. What we have in the Bible is nothing less than a miracle of God's grace, a miracle of the Holy Spirit. On that first Pentecost, the Holy Spirit pointed the people in Jerusalem to God's Word and he is still doing that this morning. With believers or all ages we pray, "Come Holy Spirit! Come and touch us with your Word. Your Word is truth."

Touch us in our hearts

Not only does the Holy Spirit make sure that God's Word is preserved, he also uses God's Word to bring people to faith. The apostle Paul explained that "faith comes from hearing the message." And, "**No one can say, 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit.**" Faith is different than knowledge. The Jewish leaders knew God's Word. They were even able to tell King Herod where the Messiah would be born. But they did not trust in Jesus as their Savior from sin. The devil can quote the Bible better than you and me, but the devil will not be in heaven. It is very, very easy, especially among Lutherans who have grown up with God's Word, to take the Bible for granted. It is very, very easy for us to have Jesus in our head, but not in our heart. I know many people who say that they know what Jesus did for them, but their lives don't show it. In this morning's gospel lesson, Jesus said that if we love him, we will do what he tells us to do. I can not look into your hearts to see if you trust in Jesus to raise your cold corpse and take you to heaven or if you are coming to church out of some holy obligation or if church attendance is just a habit that makes you feel good about yourself. I can not look into your heart, but I can encourage you to check your heart and make sure that you are good with God.

God does not bless us because we try to live a good life and love him. God blesses us because he loves us. Through his non-stop love, the Holy Spirit has worked things out so that you are here this morning hearing about salvation again. If we had ears

which could hear spiritual things, we would hear the Bible roaring like a powerful lion, or like a turbo-charged Indianapolis race car engine. It has power. The Bible is more than just good literature. Shakespeare is good literature, but reciting, "To be or not to be, that is the question," to someone on his death bed does not give any comfort. However, countless souls have died in peace listening to Jesus tell them, "Whoever believes in me will live even though he dies. And whoever lives and believes in me will never die."

In the May edition of the Forward in Christ there was a story about a guy named Jack who grew up in New Zealand. There are not many Christians in New Zealand and we do not have any missionaries there. Jack did not know anything about Jesus, but the Lord controlled things so that he fell in love with a lady who was a graduate of our Martin Luther College and happened to be visiting in New Zealand. She shared God's Word, just as the prophet Joel said would happen in the last days, and Jack now rejoices to know Jesus as his Savior. Such a story is a miracle of the Holy Spirit.

Your journey of faith is just as miraculous. Before the world was created, God looked into the future and fell in love with you. He made sure that you came into contact with God's Word through your family or some friend and now you are sitting here rejoicing in Jesus as your Savior. God's Word has touched your heart.

- Through his Word, God you raised you from spiritual death and made you a believer.
- Through his Word, God touches your heart with his love when it feels that other people do not love you or care about you.
- Through his Word, God gives you strength to hold on to him when so many things in our world are pulling you away from him.
- Through his Word, God quiets you with his love when the future seems so sad and scary.
- Through his Word, God comforts your heart to know that your sins are forgiven.
- Through his Word, God gives you a vision of the glory of heaven that is waiting for you.

On that first Pentecost, 12 men told people about Jesus and by the end of the day, there were 3000 more believers in Jesus. The same Holy Spirit is active right now and right here. He is not jealous of the attention that God the Father and God the Son get. In fact, he delights in doing his work in the background – quietly and modestly, like a gentle breeze that refreshes your soul. Thankful for God's love and our salvation, we pray with believers of all ages that the Holy Spirit continue to bless us.

Come Holy Spirit, touch us with your Word.

Come Holy Spirit, touch our hearts.

Come Holy Spirit, and save us. Amen.