

Pentecost Sunday
May 31, 2020
Lincoln Heights Lutheran Church
Jesus Promises to Send the Holy Spirit

Dear Friends in Christ,

My tastes have changed and I now enjoy eating things I tried hard to avoid when growing up. When I was a child, foods like lettuce, broccoli, cauliflower, and many other vegetables were on the list to avoid at all costs. I guess that was the case with milk for some people too because of the ad campaign years ago. “Milk, it does a body good.” I could agree with that because I liked milk and if it was good for my body so be it. But I was told that those dreaded vegetables were also good for me. How could something that tasted so bad be good for me? Why do all the good tasting things have to be bad for us while the healthy things taste like dirt? So parents have to use all their powers of persuasion to get their children to eat their vegetables because it is good for them.

Jesus tells his disciples that something they think is horrible is actually good for them. Jesus tells them that he is going away. That is a plate full of tasteless vegetables to the disciples. But Jesus says that it is for their good. For he promises to send them the Holy Spirit. On this Pentecost Day, we remember Jesus’ promise and rejoice that he has also sent the Holy Spirit to us for our good.

John 16:5–11 (NIV84)

Now I am going to him who sent me, yet none of you asks me, ‘Where are you going?’⁶ Because I have said these things, you are filled with grief.⁷ But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.⁸ When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment:⁹ in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me;¹⁰ in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer;¹¹ and in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.

It had been about three years since Jesus called his disciples to follow him. They left their fishing boats, tax collecting business, friends and family to follow Jesus. For three years, they were almost always with Jesus. They traveled with him. They learned from him. They watched him interact with the people. They saw amazing miracles. Peter’s mother-in-law was healed. Peter himself was saved from drowning. They saw the dead raised. No enemy stood a chance when challenging Jesus. Jesus always had the perfect answer for the Jewish leaders who tried to trap him in his words. Even though the disciples ate rather ordinary food for their physical meals with Jesus, their spiritual meals were steak and lobster every day. They were with Jesus. What could be better?

We are in the middle of Jesus’ discussion with his disciples on Maundy Thursday. John gives the events and discussion on that one day five full chapters in his Gospel. Before this day and repeatedly on this night, Jesus told his disciples that he was going away. He has told them that he was going to die in Jerusalem at the hands of the Jewish and Roman leaders. He told them he would be returning to his Father in heaven. Now, on this night it would actually begin to happen. Jesus would be taken from them in the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus’ life would be ended at the request of the Jewish leaders, the verdict of Pilate and the actions of the executioners. The disciples get Jesus back when he rises from the dead. But Jesus does not stay with them for even three more years. After 40 days, he ascended into heaven and was not seen by them anymore.

The disciples were filled with grief at the thought of Jesus leaving them. *But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to*

you.

The Counselor is of course, the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Triune God, equal with the Father and the Son. Therefore, we cannot say that the Holy Spirit is better than Jesus or the other way around. All three are equally God, equally powerful, equally eternal. The plan of our Triune God is for Jesus to die, rise and then ascend into heaven. Therefore, while sad that Jesus is leaving the disciples, it will still be good for the disciples because the Holy Spirit will be sent to them.

We heard of the special way the Spirit came to the disciples in Acts 2. Tongues of fire, the sound of wind, the ability to speak other languages, boldness to preach the gospel. In the promise of Jesus before us today we see the more regular work of the Holy Spirit for the disciples and for us.

When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment:

To be honest, this work of the Spirit sounds a little like eating your vegetables. Convict the world of guilt does not sound like something good for us, certainly not something pleasant. However, the word for convict does not necessarily have the negative connotation of convict of guilt. It can mean something more positive like convince. With the last two items in the list, it almost has to mean convince, as we will see. With the first item, sin, the Holy Spirit's strange work is to convince and convict us of sin.

Jesus explains this strange work of the Holy Spirit: *in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me;*

I have learned to like vegetables (some of them). However, it is more difficult to like being convicted of sin. How is it good for us to be convicted of sin? Quite simply, there is no reason to believe in Jesus unless we are sinners. Think of some of the men who did not believe in Jesus. Many of the Pharisees refused to believe in Jesus because they had no need of a Savior from sin. They had overcome their sins with their own efforts. Herod and Pilate would not believe in Jesus. They had the power and saw no need to repent. Even for us who are believers, the Spirit must continue to convict us of our sins. Otherwise, we too would begin to drift from Jesus. For if I think I am doing well at resisting sin, I don't see my need for Jesus. So the Word of God clearly shows me my anger, lust, greed, selfishness and more and the Holy Spirit works through the Word to keep me close to Jesus by convicting me of my sin. For then I run to Jesus and his forgiveness.

This is the Spirit's primary work, to show us Jesus as our righteousness before God. *in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer;*

This is where the translation convict of guilt does not fit at well. The Spirit convinces us about righteousness, not our own, but the righteousness of Christ. While Jesus was with the disciples, they could always know what God thought of them. Jesus could tell them and show them that they were loved children of God. Jesus could forgive them when they sinned. They would never have to wonder if God was angry with them or pleased with them. Simply look at Jesus and as long as he was there, they could know God's love. But then Jesus left.

How do we know what God thinks of us? How can we be certain that we are counted righteous in God's sight? The Holy Spirit continues to point us to Christ's righteousness. The Spirit continues to work through the Word and Sacraments to assure us that our sins are forgiven and that we stand before God clothed in the righteousness of Christ. The Spirit is at work when a child is baptized and connected with the righteousness of Christ. The Spirit is at work when we have doubts and fears and wonder what God thinks of us. For the Spirit can bring to mind those Bible passages we learned in youth or read in devotions that morning – passages that convince us of God's unconditional love for us in Christ. The Spirit is at work in our confirmation students as they learn God's

Word, confess their faith before the congregation and receive Communion for forgiveness of sins, new life and salvation.

The liturgical church year begins with the Advent of Christ at Christmas, goes through the ministry of Christ, the suffering and death of Christ, the resurrection of Christ and the ascension of Christ, and then the teachings of Christ. There are fifty Sundays focused on the work and teachings of Christ and only one, Pentecost, focused on the Holy Spirit. Why? Because the Holy Spirit's work is to point us to Christ. We are right to focus on Christ but we also praise the Spirit for continually pointing us to our Savior through Word and Sacrament.

Jesus explains the third aspect of the Spirit's work: *and in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.*

Again, the translation of convict of guilt in regard to judgment gives a very negative connotation. But the explanation Jesus gives is positive and comforting. The Spirit will convince us of judgment, but not our judgment. The Spirit convinces us that the prince of the world has been judged already. The devil now stands condemned. We need to be convinced that our enemy has been condemned because our eyes and ears will not give us that evidence. Just look at what is happening in our world. Millions live in refugee camps, driven from their homes by violence and oppression. Look at Hong Kong or North Korea. Look at what is happening in our own country as the prince of this world sows suspicion and hate and fear and violence. Think of what the disciples and first believers would face. Soon, Stephen would be executed. Then James would be killed by Herod Agrippa. It did not look like the devil was condemned. It looked like he was winning.

But the Holy Spirit convinced the first Christians of the truth. Christ had won the victory over sin, death, and Satan. They believed that their sins were forgiven. They believed that they would rise to live forever with Christ. They believed that the devil's days were numbered. The Holy Spirit convinced them to believe the gospel in spite of what the world and their own lives looked like. Their lives showed their convictions.

The Spirit continues to convince us of the gospel through the gospel. May our lives also reflect the convictions given us by the gospel. No matter what this world looks like, no matter what our lives look like, the truth is that Christ has died, Christ has risen and Christ will come again. The truth is that we are forgiven, we will rise and Christ will take us to be where he is.

Thanks be to the Father for sending his Son. Thanks be to Christ for sending us the Holy Spirit. Thanks be to the Spirit for pointing us to Christ. Our God is truly good for us.

Amen.