**John 15:26-27** May 15, 2016

Pastor P. Martin **Faith Lutheran Church, Radcliff, KY** Pentecost Sunday

*John 15:26 “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. 27And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning.*

Dear Friends in Christ,

**Always Pointing at Someone Else – The Holy Spirit**

A recent television series from Britain, followed a family of nobility. I need not say its name, but it begins with a “D” and ends with “Abbey.” What gave the show an interesting balance was that it not only followed the lives of the aristocrats, but also the fortunes of many of the servants in their employ. One thing that came across loud and clear, especially in the first seasons of the show, was that the staff were not the center of attention. They existed so that the wealthy family could live, and live comfortably. How would you feel about that? Being the servant of others? Their needs, their wants, their public image always being your concern? Some people could be okay with that. But at some point each of us would say, at least in our own minds, “What about me? I’m a person. I have my needs, my hopes, my dreams.” At points we want to be noticed for who we are. One irony of that TV series is that they focused our attention on people who lives are about not creating attention.

Working to not be noticed is sort of like humility, but not quite. When I think of healthy humility, I think of Jesus. Yet though he was humble, he never wanted people to ignore him. This humble Jesus, as he ate his last meal with his twelve disciples, he said he had plans for their future. He said that after he left them, ***“The Counselor, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of Truth… will testify about me.”***

In the future, when the disciples would feel the heartache following Jesus’ departure, he promised to send someone to take his place, the Holy Spirit.

**The Holy Spirit Points Us to Someone Else**

Especially in the last hundred years or a little more, there has been quite a bit of confusion about the Holy Spirit. Some build their faith around the Holy Spirit doing all sorts of spectacular things, like speaking in tongues and doing miracles and all the rest. This could be discussed at great length. But let me just say this: Anytime the Holy Spirit becomes the focus of our faith, we fundamentally undermine his work. Let me repeat that. Jesus said, ***“He will testify about me.”*** The Holy Spirit’s job is to be sure the attention stays on someone else, on Jesus.

In a sense, the Holy Spirit is like the perfect butler. He does great work, a huge amount of work. He works tirelessly. But his goal is always to let the attention fall on someone else. As a good butler would be horrified if a room full of nobility drank a toast to him, so the Holy Spirit does not want to be the center of attention.

But what would make the Holy Spirit not want the attention? Is he, like a butler, inferior? Not at all. The Holy Spirit is equal to, indeed is, true God. Perhaps nothing illustrates this better than our baptismal formula, “I baptize you *in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.*” (Matthew 20:28). Notice the equality. The Holy Spirit is on the same plane as God the Father and Son.

So the Holy Spirit avoids attention, not because he is inferior, but because of something else. Then what?

The reason is simple: God’s plan of salvation is through faith in Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit’s work is important, but it’s about Jesus. Jesus, the Son of God, is the one who offered the sacrifice for our sins (1 John 4:10). Jesus is the one who became fully human (Romans 9:5), he is called our Brother (Hebrews 2:11). The Holy Spirit knows that the plan of salvation is all about faith in Jesus as our Savior from our sin. That’s why the Holy Spirit directs us to Jesus, not to himself.

The Holy Spirit’s role is important, very important. But it is always pointing at someone else.

**The Holy Spirit Uses the Means of Grace**

So how does the Holy Spirit focus us on Jesus? ***“He will testify about me.”***

Think of the first Pentecost. The Holy Spirit did amazing things. The disciples, simple men from Galilee, started talking in languages they had never heard. Incredible! But that wasn’t the point. The point was not to amaze people into the Christian Church. The point was not to entertain them into faith. The fireworks got attention, but the fireworks weren’t the point. The point was to get them to listen. And listen they did. *“Utterly amazed, they [said]: We hear them declaring the wonders of God!”* (Acts 2:7,11) The wonders they declared were all about Jesus Christ. Now we didn’t get that far in our second reading from Acts. The reading was already almost a whole page long, and that was only one third of the sermon. But if we were to read all of the Apostle Peter’s sermon on that Pentecost day, we would hear a message, not about the Holy Spirit, but about Jesus, the Savior. The fireworks of Pentecost were lit by the Holy Spirit, but they weren’t about the Holy Spirit. They were to bring the crowds to hear the message about Jesus.

We Lutherans call the Holy Spirit’s tools the “Means of Grace.” Now this is getting into you back into that catechism class, or those membership classes you took many years ago.

“Grace” is God’s underserved love, especially that love of forgiveness given in Jesus Christ. The *Means* of Grace is how that grace gets to us.

Picture it this way. Grace is like water. The Means of Grace are how that water gets to you. Water goes through pipes, comes from bottles, is carried in pitchers or glasses. The water gives life, but it has to get to you somehow. The water is forgiveness in Jesus Christ. How does that life-giving message get to you? What are the pitchers, pipes and bottles? The means of grace are God’s Word and the Sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion. These are how the Holy Spirit testifies about Jesus.

That is why we have these three principal pieces of furniture in the front of our worship area. Each signifies the Means of Grace. The pulpit is the Word, the font is a reminder of Baptism, and the altar a reminder of the Lord’s Supper. These are the ways the Holy Spirit carries God’s grace in Jesus Christ to us.

**Only the Holy Spirit Can Convert Us**

You may well know that already. But this raises a problem. The problem is that there is no other way to know Jesus than by the Holy Spirit using these means. You cannot approach God through human philosophy. You cannot look at many different religions like a salad bar, and take the bits you like, and leave the rest on the table. If God is infinitely greater than us, then we cannot really know what God is like. We cannot claim to know his plan for us or the world. It is completely beyond us. The idea that we are bright enough to know God is actually quite a bit sillier than thinking that my son’s hamster can understand me. The gulf between me and God is greater than that between a hamster and me. And we Christians acknowledge this.

We cannot know God on our own. He is too great, and we are too sinful. The great salad bar of personal spiritual philosophies proves that by looking out of the hamster cage into the infinity of God, we really cannot adequately understand any bit of him. The very fact that there are so many opinions of God tells us that human nature cannot know the truth about God.

But what if God, who is infinitely greater than us and beyond all human understanding, chose not to have us hamsters reach out to him, but instead he has chosen to reach inward and downward to us, to reveal himself to us, not subjectively with each person imagining his own God, but objectively in his own written record, in a way simplified for us limited humans to understand—then we can know God.

That is what the Holy Spirit does. The Bible tells us, *“Prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”* (2 Peter 1:21). The responsibility of communicating God’s plan of Grace belongs to the Holy Spirit. The means he uses to convey that Grace is the Word of God. *“…[prophets] spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”*

**The Holy Spirit Uses Us As Tools**

Jesus said, ***“The Counselor… will testify about me.”*** Now Jesus tells us, ***“And you also must testify.”*** Jesus lays it on the consciences of his disciples. ***“And you…”*** he looks them in the eye—***“And you also must testify.”*** We cannot, we must not keep quiet about these things. The most natural place for us to testify about Jesus is with our family and friends. ***“You also must testify,”*** means that it is our duty to share the news of Jesus with those closest to us. But it means something beyond that.

Remember our church’s mission statement on the front of the bulletin. “It is our mission to seek the unchurched… through the Word of God and His Sacraments.” In our congregation’s plans for Vacation Bible School, for appearing at Hooray for Heroes, our church’s Outreach Committee is putting before us ways to fulfill Christ’s mission for us. ***“You also must testify.”*** The Outreach Committee has made it easy. It gives us the place and puts the people in front of us. Please consider serving Jesus in these ways. Please help put that message of Jesus in front of those who may have no other way to know God’s plans for them in Jesus.

May the Holy Spirit enable you to do his work of always pointing at someone else, Jesus our Savior. Amen.