

THE PERSON AND WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

John 15:26-16:15

The Day of Pentecost (Series B)

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The gospel lesson for the Day of Pentecost comes from *The Gospel According to John*, beginning at chapter 15, verse 26, and reading through chapter 16, verse 15. In this gospel lesson, Jesus introduces us to the Holy Spirit. Please stand as you are able for the Gospel. From John 15, beginning at verse 26, we read in Jesus' name.

²⁶“But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me. ²⁷ And you also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning.

^{16:1}“I have said all these things to you to keep you from falling away. ² They will put you out of the synagogues. Indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God. ³ And they will do these things because they have not known the Father, nor me. ⁴ But I have said these things to you, that when their hour comes you may remember that I told them to you.

“I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you. ⁵ But now I am going to him who sent me, and none of you asks me, ‘Where are you going?’ ⁶ But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart. ⁷ Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you. ⁸ And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: ⁹ concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; ¹⁰ concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer; ¹¹ concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.

¹²“I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. ¹³ When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. ¹⁴ He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. ¹⁵ All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.”

Father, these are your words. Sanctify us in the truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

You may be seated.

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Dear baptized Christians,

You have received the gift of the Holy Spirit. This is what the apostle Peter declared in the reading from Acts. He said, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself” (Acts 2:38-39). There Peter ties the gift of the Holy Spirit, as well as the

forgiveness of sins, to Baptism. And he declares this promise to all people. Every baptized believer has the gift of the Holy Spirit. So this Pentecost we will consider two basic things: who the Holy Spirit is and what the Holy Spirit does.

First, *Who is the Holy Spirit?* And notice, I didn't ask, *What is the Holy Spirit?* The Holy Spirit is not a "what." He is a "who." He is not an impersonal force like in Star Wars. The Holy Spirit is a person. That might be a little confusing, because when we speak of persons, we usually think of human beings, but the Holy Spirit is not a human being. He is God. There are two basic categories of persons: persons who are God and persons who are human beings. And the reason we consider all human beings to be persons is because God created man in his own image. First God is a person, or really three persons in one God, and then we are persons because we are created in his image. So the Holy Spirit is a person, even though he is not a human being.

Also, the Holy Spirit is a "he." This also might be a little confusing, because the Holy Spirit is not a human being. So he is not male in the sense that Adam was male and Eve was not. We do not assign human maleness to the Holy Spirit, because he is not human. But Scripture consistently speaks of the Holy Spirit with the pronoun "he." He is not a "she." He is not an "it." The Holy Spirit is a "he." Now I should also say that just because all three persons of the Trinity reveal themselves as "he's," does not mean that human males are closer to the image of God than human females. That is not true at all. God created both male and female in the image of God. So both male and female, in distinct ways, reflect the image of God. That's enough about that.

So the Holy Spirit is a person. Scripture uses the pronoun "he." And he is God. That means he shares the same divine nature as the Father and the Son. He is equal in glory and majesty. He is uncreated, unlimited, eternal, and almighty. He knows all things. He is present in all places. He is equal to the Father and the Son in every divine attribute.

So let's review. Who is the Holy Spirit? The Holy Spirit is a person. He is a personal being. He is not human. Rather, he is God. And he shares the same divine nature as the Father and the Son. That's who the Holy Spirit is.

Now let's talk about his work. This is where the theology we've learned so far becomes more obviously practical.

And as we move into the Holy Spirit's work, we'll start with what the Holy Spirit is not. The Holy Spirit is not a feeling. Somewhere along the lines we got the idea that the Holy Spirit is something you can feel. But you won't find that verse in the Bible. When you feel something, it might be the Holy Spirit, or it might be the music interacting with your emotions, or it might just be something you ate.

Several years ago I was at a Bible camp. I won't say which one, and it's not worth guessing, because I've been to a lot of them. There was a worship band, and they were really rockin'. These guys were very talented, and I mean recording artist good. So the kids were really into it. And I remember noticing that one of the songs had a lot of false teaching in it, and it bothered me. But at the same time, I could feel my emotions reacting positively to the music. It was a really weird experience to feel something positive for something that I knew was bad. Five or ten years earlier in my life I would have thought that feeling was the Holy Spirit, but at this point I knew it could not be, because the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Truth, not the spirit of error. So this was something else. And I don't think it was necessarily demonic. It was simply the natural effect that music has on our emotions.

And this power that music has is actually a good thing. God created music. God also created our emotions. God is the reason music influences our emotions. He created that relationship. The problem is that we don't always use that relationship rightly. Sometimes, usually unintentionally, we use music to make something bad appear good. And it's not just music. But anything that impacts our emotions can be used rightly or wrongly. The problem is us. And when we're talking about the Holy Spirit, the problem is that we equate our emotions with the movement of the Holy Spirit. This is really an idolatry of self. Idolatry is worship of a false god. And idolatry of self is the worship of ourselves. That's what we're really doing when we identify our emotions as the Holy Spirit. We make our feelings out to be god. Instead of the one true God being our authority, we project our thoughts and feelings onto God. That is the danger of confusing our emotions with the work of the Holy Spirit.

So what is the work of the Holy Spirit? What does he do?

Jesus teaches us about the work of the Holy Spirit. And the first thing Jesus says is, **“He will bear witness about me”** (15:26). That is, the Holy Spirit will bear witness about Jesus Christ. He doesn't talk so much about himself, but he talks about Jesus, because Jesus is the one who died for our sins and was raised from the dead. Faith in Jesus Christ is what saves us for eternity. And the Holy Spirit wants us to be saved for all eternity, so he bears witness about Jesus. For this reason, theologians have sometimes called the Holy Spirit **“the shy member of the Trinity.”** They're on the right track, but it's not totally right. The Holy Spirit is, by no means, shy. If anything, he is the talkative member of the Trinity. He just doesn't talk about himself very much.

There are different kinds of extroverts. Imagine you're at a party, and you talk to three different extroverts. The first extrovert likes to talk about himself. We don't like this one, because he's conceited. The second one wants to talk all about you. We like this kind, because they're interested in us, and that makes us feel good. But eventually it gets tiring, and there's really no point except to puff us up. The third one talks about other things. This is the best kind, because we learn all sorts of new and interesting things. And instead of talking himself up, and instead of talking you up, he talks up the host of the party, and this makes us enjoy the party more. That's how the Holy Spirit is. He's very talkative, and he talks up Jesus Christ, because that creates faith in our hearts, it makes us to know this salvation, and it helps us appreciate it more and more.

Then Jesus says the Holy Spirit will convict the world concerning three things: sin, righteousness, and judgment (16:8). First, the Holy Spirit convicts us of sin. This is the work of the Law. **“The Law is the divine Word which tells us what we must do”** (H.U. Sverdrup, **“Explanation of Luther's Small Catechism,”** 33). So when the Word of God is read or preached, the Holy Spirit attends to the Word and uses it to convict us of our sins. That is, he points out to us, in our minds and in our hearts, how we have violated God's Law and what the punishment for that sin is. The Holy Spirit convicts us of sin. And this is the way we usually use the word **“convict.”**

But Jesus uses that word in two more ways. So second, the Holy Spirit convicts us concerning righteousness. This takes a little more thought to figure out, but Jesus is speaking of the work of the Gospel. The Gospel is the good news of the grace of God in Jesus Christ our Savior” (Sverdrup, 34). We figure this out when Jesus says, **“Because I go to the Father”** (15:10). Our initial thought might be that Jesus is talking about the ascension, but then we remember that Jesus says this to his disciples on the evening before his crucifixion. Jesus is going to the Father, by way of the cross, to present his blood as the atonement for sin. So when he says the Holy Spirit will **“convict the world regarding ... righteousness,”** he means that righteousness that God

gives to us as a gift because Jesus paid for our sins. When the Word of God is read or preached, the Holy Spirit attends to the word and convicts our hearts and minds that our sins have been paid for and Jesus' righteousness has been credited to us.

Third, Jesus says the Holy Spirit will convict us **“concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged”** (16:11). By **“judgment”** he means the Judgment Day when Christ returns to raise the dead and take his believing saints into his eternal kingdom. This judgment is Law to unbelievers, but Gospel to believers. The Holy Spirit convicts our hearts and minds that something better awaits us. The Holy Spirit attends to the Word of God to teach us not to hope in this world, where we will inevitably be disappointed, but to hope in the world to come. Jesus says the Holy Spirit will convict the world concerning these things.

Then he shifts to a specific promise for his apostles. He says, **“When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth”** (16:13). It is absolutely essential here to remember who Jesus is speaking to. He is speaking to his apostles. That is who the promise was given to. It is not a promise to you and me that the Holy Spirit will guide us into all the truth, at least, not in the same way as he did for the apostles. These apostles are the ones who would go on to write most of the New Testament. The Holy Spirit would teach them all things and bring to their remembrance the things Jesus had taught them (14:26). Then they wrote these things down in the Scriptures. So we have no reason to think the Holy Spirit will reveal truths to us in a supernatural way. But we do have confidence in what he has revealed to the prophets and apostles. That is how the Holy Spirit speaks. He speaks by inspiring the Scriptures. And then we pray that the Holy Spirit would attend to his Word as it is read and preached to us. We pray that he would cause the Word to fall on our hearts to bear the fruits of faith and obedience. But we do not expect direct revelation from the Holy Spirit.

I was having this conversation with another person once, and they said to me, “You’re putting God in a box.” That is, they thought I was setting limits to what the Holy Spirit can do. They didn’t disagree with me that the Holy Spirit inspired the Scriptures, but they were open to the Holy Spirit speaking in other ways. So I said, “No, I’m not putting God in a box, but God has put himself in a box, and he has put himself there for our good, so that we can know where to hear his voice.”

Imagine some very important person says to you, “I have a very important message for you.” You say, “Okay, what is it?” And he says, “It’s everywhere.” You say, “So every message in the world is your message to me?” He says, “No. Some messages are not from me. And sometimes people pretend to write messages from me. But every message could be from me, so watch for them.” This sounds difficult, so you ask, “What happens if I believe the wrong message?” And he says, “Oh, you’ll probably go to hell.” You know what I would say to that guy? I’d say, “You’re a jerk!” That’s not how God is. That’s not how the Holy Spirit is. He is not trying to be coy. He wants us to know him. And he has revealed himself in such a way that we can know him and have certainty concerning the things he has spoken. That is why the Holy Spirit inspired the Holy Scriptures and instructed us to listen to them.

Sometimes we suffer from this false notion that we have a reluctant God. It’s like God is reluctant to forgive us, so we really have to prove to him that we’re sorry and we’ll do better next time. Or it’s like God is reluctant to hear our prayers, so we have to be really persistent, and we have to get lots more people praying so that we can change his mind about something. Or it’s like God is reluctant to be found, so he’s hiding from us, and we have to find him, and when we do find him he goes and hides in another place so we have to find him again. God is not reluctant! Let me say that again. God is not reluctant! No one had to cajole God into sending his

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Son for us. It was his idea. No one ever had to plead with God for him to forgive their sins. It is his will. No one has to persuade God to listen to our prayers. He has commanded us to pray and has promised to hear us. No one has to search for God. He came to us to find us. In the person of Jesus Christ, he declares, “I AM.” And he did all sorts of miracles to prove himself. And the Holy Spirit inspired the Scriptures so that we can know with certainty when we are hearing the voice of God. God revealed himself. God wants to be known. God wants to be found.

It’s like when I play hide-and-seek with my three-year-old son. He says, “Come and find me in my room.” He always tells me where to look. So he goes to his room. I count to five. Then I go to his room, expecting him to be in the closet or under a blanket. Nope. He’s standing in the middle of the room with a big smile. Why? Because he wants to be found. He doesn’t want to leave any possibility that I might not find him. That’s how God is in the Scriptures. He tells us where to look, and when we look there, there he is. He’s not hiding. That’s what I mean when I say, “God has put himself in a box, and he has put himself there for our good, so that we can know where to hear his voice.”

This is the work of the Holy Spirit. He inspired the Holy Scriptures, and he attends to that Word. It’s not even us who, once we hear the Word, then apply it to our lives to change ourselves. If by the word “apply,” we mean that we obey the commands of Scripture, that’s fine; we should obey them. But the Holy Spirit is the one who applies the Word of God to our hearts and minds so that we understand it and believe it. He teaches us to trust the Word of God and to trust the God who is revealed in the Word. It is the Holy Spirit who convicts us of sin and convinces us that Jesus has removed that sin. The Holy Spirit does this, not just once at the beginning of our Christian life, but perpetually. And in this way the Holy Spirit preserves us in the faith. The Holy Spirit is given to us so that we might know Jesus Christ and know him for eternity. Amen.

Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:7). Amen.