

Every week we gather together as God's people in worship, and as is our custom, we confess our faith in the Triune God, Father Son, and Holy Spirit. This is done all around the world each Lord's Day. Since we do this so often there is the potential to just mouth the words of the Creed without giving them much thought. After all, we all believe that God the Father is almighty and the Creator of all things. And that's good. We also believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God; that He was sent by the Father in human flesh to live, die, and rise again for the forgiveness of our sins. And it is very good that we believe that, since that is the very basis of our hope of salvation and eternal life. We also believe in the Holy Spirit. But if pressed concerning what we believe about the Holy Spirit we may run into a little trouble.

Today we celebrate Pentecost. It is the one day in the Church Year when we give particular attention to the work of the Holy Spirit. So, let's begin by reading the Third Article of the Apostles' Creed and its meaning from the Small Catechism as found on page 323 in the hymnal (Lutheran Service Book).

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.

*What does this mean?*

I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith.

In the same way He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith. In this Christian Church He daily and richly forgives all my sins and the sins of all believers.

On the Last Day He will raise me and all the dead, and give eternal life to me and all believers in Christ.

This is most certainly true.

This confession is not merely the words and ideas of men, it is what the Scriptures teach concerning the Holy Spirit whom Jesus promised to send to the Apostles. This is what the Scriptures teach concerning the Holy Spirit whom the Father has sent to you in order that you may have saving faith in His Son.

We do not have time to explore every aspect of the work of the Holy Spirit today. But with the Lord's help I hope we will come to a better understanding of how He works through means to generate saving faith in sinners like us.

In our confession concerning the work of the Holy Spirit we humbly admit that we cannot by our own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, or come to Him in anyway. We confess this because that is what God tells us in His Holy Word. Jesus Himself says in John 15:16, "You did not choose Me, but I chose you..." And in the 8<sup>th</sup> chapter of Romans Paul speaks the plain truth concerning the true nature and attitude of our sinful souls toward God. "The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so" (Rom 8:7 NIV). That sounds a whole

lot like, “I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Him or come to Him.” And again in Philippians 1:6 Scriptures clearly describe who is responsible not only for giving us faith, but also who is responsible for causing it to grow. “And I am sure of this, that He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.” This is all the work of the Holy Spirit.

This comes as quite a surprise to many people, even among Christians. We are so accustomed to thinking that we are in charge of every aspect of our lives that the notion that we are not also in complete control of our own salvation is simply impossible for many people to accept. But the truth is that it is not by your own efforts that you have faith in Jesus as your Savior. It is He who chose you to be His disciple. Your conversion is all the work of the Holy Spirit who has been sent by the Father to come to you with His gift of saving faith.

Like those dry bones that God showed to Ezekiel, we are unable to do anything to quicken our souls toward God. As St. Paul tells us, “But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ— by grace you have been saved” (Eph 2:4,5).

Like those dry bones we were dead in our sins. And everyone knows that when something is dead it is incapable of do anything for itself. All life, both physical and spiritual life, comes from God. Our sins made us dead, eternally dead, until God out of His great love for us, made us alive in Christ Jesus. We who were once dead in our trespasses were made alive by our gracious Lord, and we were merely passive recipients of His life-giving gifts.

Through the prophet Ezekiel God declares, “I will put My Spirit within you” (Ez 37:14). Here again we learn that the Spirit of God is the One doing the action, not us. How comforting and reassuring it is to know that God through His Holy Spirit, takes upon Himself the difficult task of quickening our dead and dying souls to new life in Christ Jesus. He opens our hearts to hear and receive His message and promise of salvation and thereby converts our sin hardened, stone cold dead souls to believe in Jesus as our Savior. And all this He does by sending His Holy Spirit to dwell within us.

But how does the Holy Spirit accomplish His life-giving, saving work in the dry bones hearts and souls of sinners like us? He works through means. But unlike the ways and means of men, God does not resort to coercion, compulsion, or intimidation. Instead, He uses the lowly and ordinary things of this world. He uses the power of His Word and the gifts He offers in His Holy Sacraments. Concerning the power of God’s Word we know that “faith comes by hearing, and hearing through the Word of Christ” (Rom 10:17). Through this means the Holy Spirit calls, gathers, and enlightens us to faith and new life in Jesus Christ, just as He brought life to those dry bones in the valley of death through the proclamation of His Word by Ezekiel.

Through the prophet Ezekiel, whom God brought out in the Spirit of the Lord, He commanded those dry bones to “hear the Word of the Lord.” And as he spoke the Word of the Lord those dry bones heard the Word and God brought them to life. God’s Word is living and active and gives life to all who hear and receive it. That which had been dead and cutoff from life, was given new life by God’s means of grace, the proclamation of His Word, and through this same means of grace the Holy Spirit continues, today, to quicken the dead souls of sinners and give them new life through faith in Christ Jesus.

Jesus said the Holy Spirit “will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: concerning sin, because they do not believe in Me; concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father... concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.”

Here again the Holy Spirit works through means to accomplish that which He has been sent to do. He convicts the world, and us, of sin and unbelief by the proclamation of God's word of condemnation in the Law. Just as the Apostles pricked the hearts of those who crucified Jesus by proclaiming the harsh truth of God's judgment, so through the proclamation of the Law the Holy Spirit pricks our hearts and shows us our sins and the punishment we deserve.

Once we know God's wrath for sin the Holy Spirit leads us to contrition and repentance for our sins. He directs the dry bones of our sin deadened souls to the cross of Jesus, where in His grace and mercy He grants us new life through faith in the Son of God, who in order to fulfill all righteousness gave His life on the cross as the ransom for our sins, and not only ours but the sins of the world.

The Lord God says, "I will put My spirit within you, and you shall live...then you will know that I am the Lord; I have spoken, and I will do it." (Ex 37:14). God cannot lie. He says what He means and He means what He says. He will, He does, and He has put His Holy Spirit in those who will believe in His Son. He does this that may have life and have it abundantly in Him. All this He accomplishes by the power of the Holy Spirit working through the means of grace; His Word and Sacraments.

Having revealed to us the rotting putrid stench of eternal death caused by our sins, God the Father puts His Holy Spirit in us to enliven our souls and reveals to us the righteousness of His Son, who now sits at the right-hand of the Father in power and glory.

Just as the dry bones in the valley were enlivened by the proclamation of the Good News, so our dead and dry souls are enlivened by the Holy Spirit through the proclamation of the Good News of Jesus' victory of sin, death, and the devil. Christ has done it all for us.

As Jesus so plainly tells us, "Apart from Me, you can do nothing." Without the Holy Spirit, who has been sent by the Father and the Son to enliven your soul to faith, you cannot even make a decision for Jesus. Your sinful flesh will not permit it, for it is dead in your trespasses. But Jesus tells us, "When the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into the truth... All that the Father has is Mine; therefore I said that He will take what is Mine and declare it to you." (John 16:13, 15)

It is through this declaration of God's Word of Truth that the Holy Spirit calls you by the Gospel, enlightens you with His gifts, sanctifies and keeps you in the true faith. Having enlivened you with the Gospel the Holy Spirit now empowers you to live a holy and God-pleasing life in acts of love and service toward God and your neighbor.

Through the Good News of the Gospel He empowers and enables you to live a holy life out of love and gratitude for the salvation Christ has won for you by the shedding of His blood on the cross. Those who are alive in Christ live for Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit whom the Father has sent to dwell within us.

We know that the Holy Spirit comes to us by means of God's Word of Truth, but is this His only means? From the Book of Acts we learn that the Holy Spirit also comes to us in the waters of Holy Baptism. Peter declares on the Day of Pentecost, "Repent and be baptized every one of you..."

Please note, Peter did not mention any exceptions for children or infants. In fact, he goes on to say "This promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to Himself" (Acts 2:39). So, the Lord is no distinguisher of age. The forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit, both of which are freely given by God in Holy Baptism, they are for everyone.

Now, returning to Peter's sermon, "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" (Acts 2:38).

Here is another eye opener for many people. Baptism is far more than a symbolic act of our obedience to God, or our outward show of unity with a particular faith community. There is no denying the truth of God's Word. He is alive and active working in those baptismal waters. The Holy Spirit comes to us in the life-giving water of Holy Baptism just as He has promised to do. And when He comes He brings with Him the free gift of forgiveness for our sins. The Holy Spirit, Himself, is bestowed as God's gift to us, and He brings with Him God's gift of forgiveness and eternal life. Here again we are the passive recipients of God's grace through means. The Holy Spirit is sent to us to dwell within us and bestow God's gifts of grace upon us.

I know this is a lot to take in so short a time, and we have not nearly covered the work of the Holy Spirit in the Church, or His role on the Last Day, but it really isn't all that complicated. It is the Holy Spirit who calls unbelievers to faith by the proclamation of the Gospel and fulfills God's promise of salvation and eternal life through that same faith in Jesus Christ.

The Good News of Pentecost is that God has done all the work of salvation for you. And out of His great love for you, He has called you by the Gospel that He may freely give salvation to you through faith in His Son. What joy it is to hear this wonderful good news of the Gospel, that God the Father, who created you, sent His only-begotten Son to Redeem to you, and now the Holy Spirit dwells within you to quicken your soul to new life through faith in Christ's all sufficient saving work on the cross for you.

May this Good News of salvation that has been revealed to you by the Holy Spirit enable you to joyfully live each and every day in the new life you have been given as a redeemed and forgiven child of God.

Amen