

I.N.I.

Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost
September 15, 2019
Third Article

In Christ Jesus, who with the Father sent the Holy Spirit to us, His Church of Believers, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

It was not a very good day for the Apostle Paul although it started out quite good. They had been walking the streets of Philippi proclaiming the Good News of salvation through Jesus. For a couple of days a certain slave girl possessed with a spirit of divination had been following them and crying out, **“These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation.”** This annoyed Paul for it was distracting the people from their message so he turned to the girl and said, **“I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.”** And the evil spirit came out of her that very same hour. What a great blessing. The girl was now free of this demon possession.

But not all rejoiced. The owners of this slave girl realized that their hope of profit was now gone. She could no longer divine the future, so they dragged Paul and Silas to the magistrates and charged them with troubling the people by teaching customs which were not lawful for the Romans to receive or observe. A mob rose up against them and the magistrates stripped them and beat them and threw them into the inner prison chained to the wall. A day that had started out with such promise now was turning out so bad.

But that day ended really, really great. That night as Paul and Silas were singing hymns to God, there was a powerful earthquake that shook the foundation of the prison and all of the doors of the prison were torn open and the chains broke free from the walls. You remember what happened, don't you? The jailer, who had been sleeping, awoke and pulled out his sword to end his own life, believing he would be held responsible for letting his prisoners escape. But Paul called out to him to do himself no harm. In fear and trembling he fell at Paul's feet and cried out, **“What must I do to be saved.”**

What was the answer? Keep the commandments? Pray 7 times a day facing Jerusalem? Obey all of the Old Testament rules and regulations? No, it was, **“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household.”**

Faith, belief, trust, reliance. All of these words mean the same. We need to believe and trust in what Jesus Christ He did for us, earning our forgiveness or it would all be in vain—the eternal life He won for us would be lost, the salvation He gained for us we could not enjoy.

But what does Martin Luther in his explanation to Third Article write? **“I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him.”** Simply put Luther is saying, “I believe that I cannot believe in Jesus Christ by myself.” Does that make sense? Not to the mind of our reason. But it is what God's Word says.

After the jailer was told that faith in Jesus saves, he took Paul and Silas to his home and they **“spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house...and he and all his family were baptized.”**

Before the earthquake the jailer was **“dead in his trespasses and sins.”** He was **“an enemy of God and spiritually blind.”** He could not say that Jesus was His Lord and Savior. And that is the same for every single unbeliever today and always will be. By nature we were all spiritually blind—living in a spiritual darkness of unbelief; dead in our sins—with no goodness of our own and enemies of God—hating God because of His justice and holy commands.

Because of this natural condition of all people, no one can come to Christ or cling to Jesus by themselves. No one can make a decision for Christ by their own reasoning or strength. For we not only have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, but in our natural hearts and minds there is only unbelief and spiritual deadness.

Why and how are we so sure of this? God's Word tells us! **“No one can say that Jesus is the Lord, except by the Holy Spirit.”** The Holy Spirit using the Good News of salvation gives us the ability, the heart knowledge, the faith to be able to say, “I believe Jesus is my Savior.” It was the

Holy Spirit that created that faith in the heart of the jailer in Philippi and his family members so they were baptized. It was the Holy Spirit that created saving faith in your hearts and in mine. Martin Luther in his meaning writes, **“The Holy Spirit has called me by the gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in true faith.”**

So, who is this Holy Spirit? He is God. He is what we call the Third Person of God. That does not mean that He is last or less important or inferior to the Father or the Son. For each person is true God, none greater or more powerful or before the other. The three Persons are co-equal and co-eternal. In Genesis we see that the Holy Spirit is eternal God when we read in chapter 1:1-2 **IN THE BEGINNING GOD CREATED THE HEAVENS AND THE EARTH. THE EARTH WAS WITHOUT FORM, AND VOID; AND DARKNESS WAS ON THE FACE OF THE DEEP. AND THE SPIRIT OF GOD WAS HOVERING OVER THE FACE OF THE WATERS.** The Spirit of God was imparting life to the things of this world, so that when God said, **“Let there be,”** life sprang forth. Job declared, **THE SPIRIT OF GOD HAS MADE ME, AND THE BREATH OF THE ALMIGHTY GIVES ME LIFE.** In Hebrews we are told that the Holy Spirit is **“the eternal Spirit.”**

When Peter confronted Ananias with his sin of hypocrisy he said to him, **"ANANIAS, WHY HAS SATAN FILLED YOUR HEART TO LIE TO THE HOLY SPIRIT...WHY HAVE YOU CONCEIVED THIS THING IN YOUR HEART? YOU HAVE NOT LIED TO MEN BUT TO GOD."**

The Holy Spirit has the same divine attributes as the Father and the Son. In Psalm 139 we are told that the Holy Spirit is omnipresent. We read **WHERE CAN I GO FROM YOUR SPIRIT? OR WHERE CAN I FLEE FROM YOUR PRESENCE? IF I ASCEND INTO HEAVEN, YOU ARE THERE; IF I MAKE MY BED IN Sheol—the place of the dead—, BEHOLD, YOU ARE THERE.** Paul tells us the Holy Spirit is also omniscient. We read in 1 Cor. 2:10 **BUT GOD HAS REVEALED THEM TO US THROUGH HIS SPIRIT. FOR THE SPIRIT SEARCHES ALL THINGS, YES, THE DEEP THINGS OF GOD.**

God has commanded us to baptize in His name **IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.** And the Apostle Paul gives us the New Testament benediction with these words from his first letter to the Corinthians 13:14 **THE GRACE OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST, AND THE LOVE OF GOD, AND THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE HOLY SPIRIT BE WITH YOU ALL.**

Last week we heard all about what Jesus has done for us to save us. He redeemed us—that is bought us back from sin, death, Satan and hell. He did this by His perfect obedience and His perfect sacrifice. But if the Holy Spirit had not been sent to bring that Good News to us, to create saving faith in us, all Jesus did would do us no good. This work of the Holy Spirit is known as **SANCTIFICATION.** This means to “set apart for a holy purpose; to make holy.” The Holy Spirit has set us apart from the rest of the unbelieving world and made us God’s children through faith in Jesus Christ.

Paul tells us, **BUT YOU WERE WASHED, BUT YOU WERE SANCTIFIED, BUT YOU WERE JUSTIFIED IN THE NAME OF THE LORD JESUS AND BY THE SPIRIT OF OUR GOD...BUT WE ARE BOUND TO GIVE THANKS TO GOD ALWAYS FOR YOU, BRETHREN BELOVED BY THE LORD, BECAUSE GOD FROM THE BEGINNING CHOSE YOU FOR SALVATION THROUGH SANCTIFICATION BY THE SPIRIT AND BELIEF IN THE TRUTH.**

What does the Holy Spirit use to create this saving faith in Christ? The simple Word, the Good News of what Jesus has done for us. Again Paul tells us **SO THEN FAITH COMES BY HEARING, AND HEARING BY THE WORD OF GOD...FROM CHILDHOOD YOU HAVE KNOWN THE HOLY SCRIPTURES, WHICH ARE ABLE TO MAKE YOU WISE FOR SALVATION THROUGH FAITH WHICH IS IN CHRIST JESUS.**

In Acts 2 we are told that Peter preached the Word on Pentecost and many believed. In Acts 8 we read that Philip preached the Gospel to the man from Ethiopia and he believed and was baptized. We already heard of the jailer in Philippi and there are many more cases throughout the Bible of the Word being spoken and faith being created in the hearts of the hearers.

The Holy Spirit does not just zap people, like a lightening bolt, and create faith. The Holy Spirit uses this means, the powerful Word of God. He uses it spoken and written. He uses this Word in connection with the water in Baptism and He uses this Word in connection with the bread and wine in the Lord's Supper. But it must be there. Without the Word, without the Gospel message of salvation the Holy Spirit cannot do its work, cannot create faith.

A flower won't grow unless the seed or bulb is planted. So also faith won't sprout in the heart unless the seed of the Word is planted. This planting and bringing forth growth the Holy Spirit does through the preaching, speaking, teaching, singing and reading of the Gospel. Luther put it this way in his explanation: **"in the same way He (the Holy Spirit) calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth."**

The Holy Spirit has separated us from our former lifestyles. He has set us apart from others who do not believe in Jesus. We are separated for a purpose. The Lord declares **DO NOT BE UNEQUALLY YOKED TOGETHER WITH UNBELIEVERS. FOR WHAT FELLOWSHIP HAS RIGHTEOUSNESS WITH LAWLESSNESS? AND WHAT COMMUNION HAS LIGHT WITH DARKNESS?** We have been washed clean through Christ, made righteous in Christ, why would we want to walk in the paths of wickedness and lawlessness, immorality and disobedience? We have been brought into the light of the Gospel and seen Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, why would we want to go back to the darkness of sin and debauchery, lust and indecency? Again Paul tells us **WALK IN THE SPIRIT, AND YOU SHALL NOT FULFILL THE LUST OF THE FLESH.** The Holy Spirit not only plants the seed of faith in our hearts so that it grows, He continually waters it through the Gospel so that it continually brings forth fruits, fruits of faith and love for Christ. Paul says, **BUT THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT IS LOVE, JOY, PEACE, LONGSUFFERING, KINDNESS, GOODNESS, FAITHFULNESS, GENTLENESS, SELF-CONTROL.**

As Christians walking in the Spirit we will bring forth the fruits of the Spirit. We will be different from the rest of the world and not be ashamed of it. When the rest party to the point of drunkenness we will not want to join in. When the rest curse and swear, misusing our loving God's name, we will be moved to keep His name holy and pure in our mouths. When the rest get angry and fight we will practice patience and peace. When the rest lie, cheat and steal to get ahead we will pray for contentment with what we have. When the rest follow the broad road to indecency, immorality, pornography and debauchery we will be careful about what we watch and read, about how we dress and act and who we spend time with. When the rest boast of themselves and their works we will be led to humbly glory and boast in our Lord. When the rest hoard for themselves and do not share with others we will be led to be gracious in our dealings with others and generous in our gifts. We have the ability to do all of that through the power of the Holy Spirit living within us in His Word and to the glory of our God.

He works in our hearts to live that type of God-pleasing life. He implants in our hearts that love which moves us to sacrifice ourselves, our time, energy and goods in service to others and for the spread of the Gospel. The Holy Spirit prompts us to freely give of our gifts even as Christ freely and willingly gave of Himself for us.

But you and I know ourselves so well that we know that we don't always bring forth those fruits of faith, we don't always walk in the Spirit. There are times when we walk apart from the Spirit and walk in the flesh. Times when we bring forth the rotten fruit of sin and selfishness. That leads us to the next line in Luther's explanation: **"In this Christian Church He daily and richly forgives all sins to me and all believers."** Everyday when we are led to turn from our own sinful ways and words, confess our sins and ask for forgiveness, the Holy Spirit through Christ bestows on us the blessing of having all of our sins forgiven. He reminds us of the words of our Savior, **BE OF GOOD CHEER YOUR SINS ARE FORGIVEN YOU...FOR THE BLOOD OF JESUS CHRIST HIS SON CLEANSSES US FROM ALL SIN.**

One last blessing the Holy Spirit does for us. Luther writes **"and keeps it—the Christian Church--all believers--with Jesus Christ in the one true faith."** May it be that all of us gathered here this morning to hear the Word of God, having the Spirit strengthen and nourish our faith in Christ, be kept in that saving faith until that last great day of Judgment when we will be gathered

before our Savior to hear Him say, **'COME, YOU BLESSED OF MY FATHER, INHERIT THE KINGDOM PREPARED FOR YOU FROM THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD.**
Thank you Holy Spirit.

Amen.