

Sent with the Holy Spirit May 5, 2024

Our Savior is Way Lutheran Church

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We are going to talk about the Holy Spirit today and how the Holy Spirit works in many various ways. We are talking through this, through this lens of being loved and being sensed. We are in this next week of our series, and the beautiful thing in this sanctuary, and maybe for those of you who are at home, you do not get this necessarily the big picture of what it feels like to be in this space.

In this place, we have these three big windows that let in so much light and so much color. And as we gaze off and stare at them, each service at different points. We see God the Father, and then all the beauty of creation. We see God the Son, and the cross and all that that means. And then we look over here to the Holy Spirit and then, the dove that's at the top with the crosses everywhere and the fire down to the earth.

And it is in those moments where we start to remember that our God is this triumphant God, one God in three persons, God the Father, God the Son, and the Holy Spirit. And we start to realize that we know a lot about God the Father. We know a lot about God the Son, but what do we know about God the Holy Spirit? You see, I think many times we kind of just assume that Spirit is there and active and we do not pay a whole lot of attention, which kind of is really what it is all about.

The Spirit is always there. The Spirit is always around. The Spirit is present. No matter what is happening in your lives or the world, God's Spirit is here and with us. But there's more to it than that. There's more to it than that. Our whole series has been focused on answering these two questions.

Who am I and why do I matter? This questions of identity and purpose. Remember when God comes to us through scripture, He's doing so to help us reconnect with Him. That's His goal. We have been broken away from Him since the Fall of humankind. And God has spent every waking second trying to bring us back to Him.

We saw this in the story of *the Prodigal Son* a few weeks ago, with the father who was just waiting and waiting and waiting for the son to come back. And as soon as he saw a glimpse of his son heading over the hills, he ran out to meet him and with such an embrace, with such joy, welcomed him back to the family. Because the Father loves us. He shows us His love through what He was willing to do to His Son, that His Son would die for us, to pay the penalty for what we have earned, and yet He gives us the gift of life.

How does He give us this gift? How does it make real in this life that we have today? These are the questions that get answered by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is present with us. The Holy Spirit is here, and the Holy Spirit makes a difference. It is the Holy Spirit. It is incredibly powerful. Well, what does that mean?

If you went through the Lutheran church, you had this time in your middle school years when you went to confirmation. And for many of you, that ended and culminated with this time of questioning in front of the congregation. This is the way the kids would line up and the pastor or the elders would pepper them with all the questions that they are supposed to know the answers to, many of which are on the screen here for you. And they had to pass that test. It is like a rite of passage. We do this a little bit differently now. But the purpose and the point of the learning are the same to know that when we say every week that we believe in the Holy Spirit, what we are saying is that the Holy Spirit works and is active through all of these things that follow. The Holy Spirit is active through the Holy Christian church.

The Holy Spirit is present. The Spirit is the force that creates the church. The Spirit is the one who creates faith, sustains it, and brings people together. This is God's church. The Spirit is the one who puts us in communion with the saints. Who are the saints? It is you. It is us. We are the saints. We have been made into saints by who Jesus is and what He has done for us. We are made clean and holy. But it is not just the people in this room or the people watching online. It is us, everyone, who is part of the church, everyone whom Jesus has loved and has saved, and not just those who are living today. But the communion of the saints means that we are connected with those who have gone before us, and even those who will come after us. When we celebrate the Lord's Supper at His table, this feast that we celebrate is not just with us, it is with Christians throughout

the world, throughout the centuries. We celebrate how good Jesus is for us.

Spirit is also active in the forgiveness of sins. How is it that you can swallow your pride to let your ego go to tell someone who has harmed you deeply, “I forgive you”? What strength do you draw on to find that? That’s the Holy Spirit working in and through you.

We say we believe in the resurrection of the body. That is the Spirit at the end of time. It is Jesus returning, making all things new, and putting bodies and souls back together again. But wait a second. Jesus is returning. Where is He now? Well, He has ascended. He is at the right hand of the Father. But do not we say that Jesus is with us today? How is Jesus with us? Through the Holy Spirit. The presence of *God with us* is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit reminds us every day that we believe in life everlasting. And when the Holy Spirit points our eyes to this end goal, it changes the way we live today.

This is the Spirit working in our world and our lives, creates faith, encourages faith, sustains faith, works in and through us in His presence as *God with us*. So, how do we see this in scripture?

Today our readings focus on this. Romans 8 is one of these chapters in the Bible that is so powerful. If there was one chapter in the Bible you would memorize, Romans 8 would be a great one. If this was one chapter where you were wondering what is scripture all about, what is Jesus all about, how can I make sense of my life, go to Romans 8. Everything is there. It is powerful. And taking center stage in that most powerful of chapters is the Spirit.

Because you belong to Jesus, because you have been loved by Him, the power of the Spirit that gives life to you frees you from the power of sin. The power of the Spirit is present in and through you, and it gives you life. It reminds you that you are Jesus’ beloved child and that He has freed you. And because of that, you can live this life differently than before. You can live it as somebody who is greatly and dearly loved. This can be the foundation that you build on that. The spirit is working in you to remind you that you are loved in the direst of circumstances. In the lowest of the low, when you are not certain that anyone cares about you, the Spirit speaks and reminds you that you are greatly and dearly loved.

From there, the encouragement happens. From there, it is about the Communion of saints and the Fellowship of the believers to encourage and help that love grow. The Holy Spirit's main job is to connect us. The love of God, God's whole goal for our scriptures is to connect His people back to Himself, and He has chosen to use His Spirit to accomplish that, reminds us that we are loved, reminds us that we are His, reminds us that our core identity, the foundation that we build our lives on, is that I am a child of God, greatly and dearly loved, saved by Jesus, and it is the Spirit who builds that faith and encourages it.

In our Gospel reading today, we heard from Jesus Himself. When Jesus had been already raised from the dead, when He goes and visits the disciples as they are trying to figure out what does this mean, that *Christ is risen. He is risen indeed. Alleluia?* Because Jesus has been raised from the dead. What does that mean? No, this had never happened before. This is a unique situation in world history. Jesus tells them exactly what it means. He says, "Look, the Father has sent me to you. I am sending you to the world. And so that you know that it is not you who accomplishes these incredible things. Receive the Holy Spirit." Jesus breathes on them.

This word "breath" is such a huge, such an important word in the scriptures. In the Old Testament, in Hebrew, to breathe on someone means to Spirit them. "Breath" and "Spirit" are the same word. So, all these things are together. Jesus breathes on them and says receive the Holy Spirit. And at that moment, something new happened. The disciples can experience this presence of the Spirit in a brand new way. The Holy Spirit is in them and with them and is to work through them as they go, as they are sent into the world. The Spirit is the presence that sustains them, the presence that builds their faith, but it is more than that even. We are going to see that in just a moment in the story of Philip. Jesus reminds us that we are sent, and we are not sent alone. His Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit is present in us as we go into this world, as we are present amongst a world that needs to know Jesus, who lives a life that is disconnected from God.

We are sent there to be there as such. The Holy Spirit transforms us to be the ones who are sent with the love of God to the world. The Holy Spirit changes us so that we might reflect the image of God more clearly to the world around us. This does not mean perfection, that the goal is not to reach perfection. We will never be perfect. Instead, we are called to be faithful. We are people whose eyes are continually pointed to our God, the

Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit reminds us that He is the one working in us to transform us, to change us, to be people who are sent into the world.

Let's look at this story of Philip. This is an incredible story about Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch. It is in Acts, which does not make its way into church a whole lot, but if you read through Acts, it takes this kind of center stage of an example of what happens to the disciples after Jesus leaves them.

You see, Jesus goes, and He is ascended to the right hand of the Father. And the disciples are left wondering, what do we do next? The first thing that happens is they receive the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is present with them. And then, the work of the Spirit starts to happen in amazing ways. Peter preaches an incredible sermon. Thousands of people come to faith in Jesus.

But it is not just about the preachers who preach. You see, I have come across this a lot in my time in ministry that people assume that it is the pastor or the preacher who is the one who helps people come to faith. It is the one who, through words and whatever else, is present in the community. It is the pastor's kind role to do this. Scripture speaks a little bit differently. Here you see the Spirit takes someone like Philip. Philip, who is not one of the top three disciples, and the Holy Spirit simply says, "Philip, go. Go find this person, walk along this way and when you are walking along this way, something's going to happen."

Have you ever had that experience? We have kind of had a prompting by, I would say, the Holy Spirit to simply just go and talk to someone. And maybe somebody has said something to you that you know they want to talk about this issue a little bit more. But you are not quite sure if you want to engage in that conversation because it is going to take the next 20 minutes of your time and you are trying to get somewhere.

You have been there, right? That might be something that the Holy Spirit is prompting you to do, to take that time, to be in that space, to be in that presence. This is what it did with Philip. "Go over and walk beside the carriage." So, Philip ran over and he heard the man reading from the prophet Isaiah. And on this carriage was a man who was trying to figure out who God was.

He was asking questions; he was doubting; he was wondering. And the Holy Spirit takes someone like you and me and places them in the vicinity, to be close, to be near so that when the time comes, people can see Jesus. So, of course, the eunuch asked Philip, "Tell me, was the prophet talking about himself or someone else?" This happens after they are talking together about the scriptures that they are reading. Now, it is through the Word that the Spirit works. It is through God's Word that the Holy Spirit speaks His goodness and His grace. But it is also through us, through the presence of people to be able to help them understand who Jesus is.

So, beginning with wherever he was, Philip told him the good news about Jesus. And this is the key thing, I think, for me here is that the Spirit does not expect us to be incredible expositors of scripture to share the good news of Jesus with the people around us. The Holy Spirit will take you as you are with whatever gifts skills knowledge, and ways that you speak to help people see Jesus more clearly.

So Philip, wherever this guy was, this Ethiopian eunuch, at whatever level he was and whatever words he needed, Philip spoke to him that he was loved, that Jesus had died for him, that He had been raised from the dead, and that life eternal is his in Jesus. This is the Spirit at work in and through Philip. They rode along, and they came to some water, and the Ethiopian eunuch said, "Look, there's some water. Why can't I be baptized?" Is there a problem? No problem at all. There's water. There's God's word and His promise. And right there, Philip baptized him. This is an incredible scene. We are all at one time the Spirit prompts, filled to go be present with people that he did not know for what reason he was not aware of. And then while he was there, he was able to show them who Jesus was, to show this person who Jesus was. And right there, the Spirit created faith, and it is in these waters of baptism that now that Spirit is present in the life of that Ethiopian eunuch in a new way, in a bigger way.

We are going to celebrate some baptisms next week right here in this service, and it is so much fun to teach people about baptism before they are baptized, and you are able to tell them, just like I tell all of you, that in those waters, God's Spirit, the Holy Spirit, now lives within you in a new way, not in some generic way like the Spirit is present within the world, but in a specific way, that He is with you, present with you through everything that you will ever go through in your life, and will bring you into eternal life. The Spirit will encourage you when you are struggling.

The Spirit will guide you when you are wondering. And sometimes when you are not looking forward at all, like Philip, the Spirit will point you in directions that you had no idea were for you. But this is His work because He's working for God's kingdom and not ours.

In the end, I think what we see is that God, the Holy Spirit, is at work in us and through us just like Philip. But also like the Ethiopian eunuch. With the questions and the wondering, God the Holy Spirit is working in and through so that we will see God more clearly.

The Holy Spirit reminds us that we are loved, connects us with God, and then works in and through us to help people see God more clearly. We are both *Loved* and *Sent*, and the Spirit is at work in both of those.

Let's close with a word of prayer. Heavenly Father, we thank you for being with us today, for leading us and guiding us. We thank you for the presence of your Holy Spirit, that in our baptisms, you indwell in us. You, you, you make this presence so different and so unique, so that from that day forward, throughout all of eternity, you are present with us.

Lord, we ask you to help us understand this so that we would see how good you are toward us, that you love us so deeply, and that you have a purpose for us, that you have sent us into this world with your mission to help more and more people connect with you as we go along the way with whatever people you put in our path, Lord.

We pray, Lord, that you would allow us to follow your Holy Spirit, speak your words of good news, and that more and more people will come to faith by the power of the Spirit in you.

In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.