

John 16:5-15
Second Sunday after Trinity
Who Is the Triune God
Part 3 – God the Holy Spirit

Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church
Winchester, VA
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⁵ Now I am going to him who sent me. None of you asks me, ‘Where are you going?’
⁶ Rather, you are filled with grief because I have said these things. ⁷ But very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. ⁸ When he comes, he will prove the world to be in the wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: ⁹ about sin, because people do not believe in me; ¹⁰ about righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; ¹¹ and about judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.

¹² “I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. ¹³ But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. ¹⁴ He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you. ¹⁵ All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will receive from me what he will make known to you.”

Today is the last day in our three-week teaching series on the Holy Trinity and we’re going to be turning our attention to the third person of the Trinity, God the Holy Spirit. Two weeks ago, when we studied God the Father, we looked at one of Jesus’ first sermons, the Sermon on the Mount, and the words of the Lord’s Prayer. Today, to learn about God the Holy Spirit, we’re going to look at one of the last sermons that Jesus preached, words which He shared with the disciples on Maundy Thursday, the night before He died.

There are other places in Scripture that tell us about the Holy Spirit but these words that Jesus shared with the disciples on the evening of Maundy Thursday give us a nice summary of who He is and how He works. Jesus tells us the Holy Spirit’s job description, He explains the condition that had to be met for the Holy Spirit to come to us, and then He explains the two ways in which the Holy Spirit works: through convicting the world of its guilt, and guiding believers into the truth of the gospel.

In the words leading up to this morning’s text, Jesus had told His disciples that He was going back to God the Father who had sent Him. And that was something they didn’t understand it. They could not fathom what good could possibly come from Jesus, their beloved friend, teacher, and Lord, leaving them and returning to heaven. They didn’t yet understand that Jesus’ road back to the Father through Good Friday, Easter Sunday, and the day of His ascension was not something that should cause them to grieve, but to rejoice. And that was because Jesus was leaving them, not to abandon them, but to win them the most amazing gift, a treasure beyond their comprehension, forgiveness from all sin and eternal life in heaven.

It was, in fact, the Holy Spirit whose coming Jesus was promising them that night who would illuminate those truths for them, but the Holy Spirit could not come until Jesus’ work was completed. Think about it, if Jesus hadn’t finished the work He had set out to do—if He had skipped any step along the way, or taken any shortcuts—then what work would there be for the Holy Spirit today? If Jesus hadn’t died on the cross how could the Holy Spirit bring us the joy of redemption and forgiveness? If Jesus hadn’t risen triumphant from the grave then what

confidence could the Spirit fill us with that our sin and death had been defeated? And if Jesus hadn't ascended into heaven to rule over heaven and earth then who would there be to send the Holy Spirit to us in the first place?

No, the condition for the coming of God the Holy Spirit was that the salvation work of God the Son had first to be completed. That's because the message of Jesus' saving work—that good news of the gospel—is the tool the Holy Spirit uses to carry out His work of making sinful people like us holy. That is who the Holy Spirit is the great evangelist, the agent of the gospel.

In verse seven, Jesus calls Him the Advocate. Now “advocate” means someone who supports someone else, who stands by their side. In a court room, an advocate would be someone who takes up your case. We might think that Jesus is referring to the Holy Spirit as our advocate, our supporter because we know that He does help us in incredible ways. But in the court room of heaven and at the final judgment our advocate, the one who takes up our cause, is Jesus. The Holy Spirit is an advocate in a different sense; He represents the cause of the Father. Just as Jesus had been sent to reveal the Father's will and so that the Father could be seen and known through Him, now that Jesus' work is complete, God sends the Holy Spirit to present His case using the gospel as His means to teach us about our loving Father and the salvation He won for us through the death and resurrection of His Son.

But the gospel isn't the only tool the Holy Spirit uses. Before He shines the light of Jesus into the heart of any man, woman, girl, or boy He has to first convict them of their guilt, and to do that He uses the law.

Jesus says that **when the Holy Spirit comes He will convict the world of sin, and righteousness, and judgment.** The first thing that the Holy Spirit does is convict us of our sin. Every single human being is born with a sinful nature inherited from their sinful parents that is hostile to God and does not trust in Jesus Christ as their Savior. And because they do not believe in Jesus, their sin stays with them and condemns them. The work of the Holy Spirit is to convict us of those sins. He does that through our consciences, the law of God written on our hearts.

This is something that is true of every single person that has ever lived. They have been told through their conscience by the Holy Spirit that they are sinful. That leads to a search for righteousness. But for all the ideas that the world has about what makes someone righteous, it never gets any further than the best righteousness we can muster up ourselves, a righteousness of works. You can hear work-righteousness preached everywhere today, in homes and on the streets, in newspapers and magazines, from the government and sadly even in many churches. Work righteousness—earned righteousness—is the natural religion of the world. But the world is wrong. The Holy Spirit convicts us through God's Word that the only righteousness God accepts is the righteousness of His Son Jesus Christ. He may not convince every single human being, but He convicts them nonetheless. By raising Jesus from the dead and glorifying Him by seating Him on His heavenly throne, God made clear that Jesus' righteousness and His alone is satisfactory in His sight.

The idea that God has to accept the righteousness that we attempt to offer couldn't be any more mistaken. It's entirely backward! We are not God's judge; He is our judge. We have to meet His standards; He by no means has to accept ours.

And that brings us to judgment. If our own efforts and contrivances are worthless before God—which our consciences tell us is indeed the case—if we have not lived up to the righteousness of God's Son, then we are found wanting and justice will be carried out against us.

This strange work of conviction which the Holy Spirit performs is something that is hidden from us. We can't see it because it's something that takes place in people's hearts. We

can't see it happening, but we know that it does happen first of all because Jesus promises right here that it will, and second we know it's true because while we can't see it going on in the world around us, we can feel it at work within us. There are times when we feel proud and vindicated over something we have done, "This certainly must be pleasing in God's sight!" But then our conscience reminds us that we are far from perfect, the law cuts us down again and shows us how far we are from righteous, and the shadow of that encroaching judgment draws a little closer around us.

If Jesus hadn't left His disciples that night to return to His Father, completing the work He had come to accomplish, that would be all the work the Holy Spirit would have to do—convicting the world of sin, righteousness, and judgement—and we would be left in a very dark place, wouldn't we?

But Jesus did accomplish His work. He did die on the cross. He did rise again. And He did ascend to His Father in heaven. The law, therefore, is not the only tool the Holy Spirit has to use, because He also has the gospel! And the reason He uses law to convict you of your guilt is to prepare you for that gospel. Yes, you are a sinner; there is nothing you can do to make yourself righteous in God's sight; on your own, your judgment is sealed.

But God has sent His Holy Spirit with the power of the gospel to call you out from under the darkness of sin and death and the shadow of hell and into the light of all truth. He brings us that light of truth in the Gospel message. As Jesus offered up His life on the cross, He endured the punishment your sins had earned. He took your sins away from you and left them buried in the tomb. He took His own perfect righteousness—the only righteousness that is satisfactory to God and clothed you with it so that you are now acceptable in God's sight. The Holy Spirit works by bringing that forgiveness and righteousness to you. In the Lord's Supper, we celebrate that gracious gift of Jesus' body given in death for the forgiveness of our sins and His righteous blood which covers over and purifies us. Through the gospel proclamation of that sacrament the Holy Spirit fills us with the joy of forgiveness from all our sins and increases our love for one another empowering us to live in harmony with the righteousness Jesus bestows on us. The Holy Spirit works through Holy Communion.

As Jesus burst triumphant from the tomb on Easter morning, God proclaimed not only that Jesus' perfect righteousness had prevented death from keeping its hold over Him, but that death itself had been defeated, sin had been destroyed and there is eternal life for all with faith in Jesus. The Holy Spirit works to make those blessings yours as well. In Baptism, the Holy Spirit worked through the gospel to create that saving faith in Jesus in your heart. He brought you that priceless gift of everlasting life, making the death and burial of Jesus the death and burial of your sinful flesh, and making the resurrection of Jesus your resurrection to new life in Him. The Holy Spirit works through Holy Baptism.

As Jesus ascended into heaven, He claimed His rightful place as Lord of His Creation. And as the Almighty Lord, He sends the Holy Spirit forth with the power of the gospel of salvation in His holy Word. The Holy Spirit works through that Word of God, as He is doing right now, to strengthen you and build you up in your faith filling you with the peace of a right relationship with God your Father and the confidence and desire to live the new life He has given you to the glory of His name. The Holy Spirit works through God's Holy Word.

That is how the Holy Spirit works as God's Advocate: through the gospel. Bringing God's case before the people of this world, that though we are sinful people who have failed to live according to our Father's will, we have been washed clean by the blood of God's Son and given a new life to praise and glorify Him.

What an incredible blessing it is, that God has sent His Holy Spirit to call us out of the darkness of sin into the light of His gospel truths. What a blessing that He continues to shine the light of those promises before us through the gospel in Word and Sacraments. Take advantage of that blessing. You have been rescued from sin by your Savior. Called out of the darkness and enlightened with His gifts.

Fill your lives with those gospel gifts and join the Christian Church in praying, Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts your faithful people, work peace and joy within us through the gospel, and kindle in us the fire of Your love. Amen.