

“Living In and By The Spirit”

Liturgical Date: Pentecost (A)

Primary Texts: Psalm 25:1-15

Grace be unto you, and peace from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ. The primary text for today, Pentecost, is the portion of Psalm 25 that we read responsively. The Holy Spirit is essential to the Christian life as the title of the sermon is, “Living In and By the Spirit”.

On the Day of Pentecost, we remember and celebrate the coming of the Holy Ghost, the Holy Spirit. This fulfills what Jesus had promised the Disciples. Even though He was physically leaving them, He promised to send them the “Comforter”. They would not be alone. When Jesus ascended, He instructed the Disciples to wait in Jerusalem for the power of the Holy Ghost that would descend. This would happen 10 days later during the Feast of Pentecost. A rushing wind, tongues of fire, and speaking in other languages and divine understanding. The Spirit would rain down that day and the Disciples, the Church, and the world would never be the same. Of course, the Holy Spirit has always existed. This is because, He like the Father and the Son is God. He is coequal and coeternal as a member of the Trinity. But now the Spirit had come, just as prophesied in the Old Testament and promised by Jesus. God inhabited the tabernacle and temple in the Old Testament with His direct presence and for the New Testament Church, we ourselves are that temple as God indwells us.

The Holy Spirit is essential to the Christian life. He is not an optional add-on. Without the work of the Spirit, we cannot even believe in Jesus. It is only by the work of the Spirit that we become and remain Christians. As Luther wrote in

the meaning of the Third Article of the Creed in the Small Catechism, *“I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Ghost has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith.”* Without the Spirit indwelling and empowering us with faith, we cannot please God. Luther also wisely said, *“Whatever the Holy Spirit does not perform-however good, just, and holy it may appear to be-is flesh.”* These are really the only two options-we either live in and by the flesh (which is sinful) or in and by the Spirit (which is holy and powerful).

Our reading from Psalm 25:1-15 this morning points us to this fact. Granted it does not specifically use the word “Holy Spirit” or even “Spirit”, but none of the things in the text can be done without the work of the Spirit. Trying to accomplish them in our flesh will lead to naught. It is only by the Spirit that the petitions lifted in Psalm 25 can be accomplished. Psalm 25 is one of the many Psalms of David (about half of the Psalms) found in the Bible. David was as the Bible says, “a man after God’s own heart.” But he was still a sinful human being. He had his own failings and falling into sin. He had many enemies that sought to destroy him. He was a person who understood that without the Spirit working in his life he was only a miserable sinful man. As God inspired David to write in Psalm 51:11, *“Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy Holy Spirit from me.”* Psalm 25 is, as the Psalms are, a prayer that was set to music. It is written in the Hebrew poetic style of an acrostic. This means that each verse of the Psalm (22 total) begins with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet, moving through its 22 letters in order.

And what a prayer this is. It is coming from the heart of King David, empowered by the Holy Ghost, but it is so relevant and relatable to us today, is it not? The Psalm begins with the words, *“To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul.”* This is a posture of prayer, of offering to the Lord. This is our starting point. We humbly approach God, trusting in Him as verse 2 tells us. David was facing enemies who wanted to take his life. We may face such a situation, but even if no one is out to kill us we face many enemies both external and internal that seek to destroy us. As we pray in the Lord’s Prayer, “deliver us from evil” we pray to God for deliverances from our foes and we wait for God to do so. God does this by His power. And how does His power come to us? You guessed it. By the Holy Spirit.

The Psalm continues with verses 4-5, *“Make me to know your ways, O Lord; teach me your paths. Lead me in your truth and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I will wait all the day long.”* How do we know the ways of God? By the work of the Holy Spirit. Sensing a theme? And I am not just talking about some kind of emotive or warm and fuzzy feeling. Our hearts, emotions, feelings, and even our experiences could deceive us. But God never does. We go to the source. He has given us the Bible, 66 inspired books of Scripture. His pure, unadulterated, inherent, and infallible Word to us. Who wrote the Bible? God, of course. But more specifically, even. God chose certain individuals to record the exact things that He wanted them to write. 2 Peter 1:21, *“For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.”* The Holy Spirit inspired the writers, literally meaning the Scripture is “God breathed” as the Holy Spirit is the breath of God. Without the Holy Spirit we would not have the Bible. Without the Bible we would not have the Word that instructs us and teaches us and shows us the truth path of God.

Next, we come to verses 6-7. David calls out, *“Remember your mercy, O Lord, and your steadfast love, for they have been of old. Remember not the sins of my youth or my transgressions; according to your steadfast love remember me, for the sake of your goodness, O Lord!”* David makes no excuses for his sins. He does not try to rationalize them. He does not try to explain them away. He does not offer qualifiers like, “I know that was bad God, but I was under a lot of pressure, I really didn’t mean to do that...”, etc. He acknowledges his sins and appeals to God’s mercy, love, and goodness. This is a winning formula!

Speaking of those “sins of my youth”, this is a difficult area for some people. Now some people do get “more sinful” as they get older. But for many, they remember when they were young and reckless. They may have done some pretty terrible and wicked things. If anyone ever tells you they don’t regret anything from their youth and wouldn’t do anything different, I would be skeptical. But for some, Satan attempts to use those past sins to weaken our faith and get us to doubt God. Could God really forgive everything I did? Could He really forgive, “that”? Kretzmann in his commentary puts it this way, *“those (sins) committed in youthful folly often resting heavily upon the conscience throughout all the years of maturity, and the assurance of their being forgiven wielding great comfort to a harassed heart.”* When you are tormented by your past, remind the devil of his future, it has been said. Better yet, go to the Lord in prayer. Ask Him to send the Spirit to you. He is the “Comforter” after all. We have assurance that Jesus has taken all of our sins, from all the ages of our life to the cross. And the penalty for them died there with Him on the cross. When we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us of all unrighteousness (1 John 1). This is the promise of God. In Absolution our sins are forgiven. In Baptism our sins are

washed away and we become a child of God. In the Lord's Supper, God delivers His forgiveness to us in body and blood. None of this can happen without the work of the Holy Spirit as He is the "delivery man" of the three persons of the Trinity.

Verse 8 reminds us that God is good and indeed instructs sinners. We have already heard that, and it is good to hear it again. God is a good and gracious God who rejoices at repentance and desires sinners to come to a knowledge of the truth. Verse 9 reminds us that it is the humble that receive. Law to the proud, grace to the humble. When we acknowledge our sins in humble repentance with no excuses, the Holy Spirit goes to work. We should not resist the work of the Spirit but embrace it as He covers and fills us with the grace of God.

Verse 10 tells us that path of the Lord. It is one of steadfast love and faithfulness. Faith does not earn the blessings of God, but rather receives them. And how do we receive faith in Jesus? By the work of the Spirit. 1 Corinthians 2:14, *"But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned."* In receiving the Holy Spirit, we receive the benefits of the work of Jesus on our behalf. As I said earlier, we cannot even be Christians but by the work of the Holy Ghost. Our guilt is great, but the grace of God is greater. The Holy Spirit brings the precious, holy blood of Jesus to us and thus brings the forgiveness worked by Christ to reconcile us to the Father.

Verses 12-15 continue to tell us things that can only happen with the work of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit enters us and indwells us, creating saving faith. And when the Spirit is in us, we live by the Spirit. As 1 Corinthians tells us there are gifts of the Spirit. As Galatians tells us there are fruits of the Spirit. We live the

Christian life not by our own power or abilities, but by the power of the Spirit. Who is the man who fears the Lord? He is the one that is instructed by the Lord. In this we are made well and live well. God promised the people of Israel a physical land that they would inherit when they followed Him. God assures us of the eternal promised land of heaven being our final destination as our inheritance as His children. God is a friend to those that have reverent fear of Him. Those that know and are part of His covenant. We must be reconciled to the Father, by the blood of Jesus, brought to us by the work of the Holy Spirit. God's grace comes to us in faith, faith that is worked by the Spirit. We live by the Spirit when He guides us. As verse 15 said, *"My eyes are ever toward the Lord, for he will pluck my feet out of the net."* This is a reference that is used multiple times in Scripture. It is as if we are a helpless animal caught in snare, a trap. We can't free ourselves, but the Lord can, and does.

On this Day of Pentecost reflect deeply on the work of the Holy Spirit. And don't limit it to this one day on the Church Calendar. Live in and by the Spirit all 365 days of the year. Because it is in living in and by the Spirit that we are saved from death, hell, and the power of the devil. The Holy Ghost delivers the gifts of God's mercy, faithfulness, and steadfast love right to us. And He indwells us, empowering us to live for the Lord. The saving work of Jesus and the eternal life He brings is ours by, and literally in us, by the Spirit.

Amen.