

Text: John 15:26-27

Theme: I Believe in the Holy Spirit

• Pentecost Sunday •

May 20, 2018

How many of you know something so well that you can do it without thinking? Within the Christian faith, there's always the danger of doing without thinking. The Apostles' Creed, spoken so frequently in our services, has the potential to become words that fail to engage the brain. On this Pentecost Sunday, our readings focus on the Holy Spirit, so we engage our minds for the next few minutes as we consider the statement, "I believe in the Holy Spirit."

I. As we speak those familiar words, what do we believe? 1. We believe the Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity. To most of us, that seems obvious, so obvious that we find ourselves saying, "Doesn't every Christian believe that?" Surprisingly, the answer to what appears to be a rhetorical question is, "No." Even more surprising, there are some Lutheran churches who do not teach that the Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity. Instead, He is defined in their Catechism as an "energizing force." Maybe it sounds a bit like Star Wars, but what's so alarming is that what we thought every Christian believed as a given isn't a given after all.

2. We believe that the Holy Spirit brought us to faith. Our kids in Catechism class know the words and so do many of us, "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." First and most important, it's not about us. We didn't do anything. The Holy Spirit did everything. As we profess these words, we believe that we contributed 0% and the Holy Spirit contributed 100%. The Holy Spirit called us; He went looking for us because we were lost. "I believe in the Holy Spirit" declares that faith is a gift offered to us because of the work of the Holy Spirit.

3. We believe the Holy Spirit keeps us in the faith. Not only does the Holy Spirit do the amazing work of bringing us to faith, He also chooses to keep us in the faith, to protect our faith so the the devil, the world, and our sinful self doesn't destroy His precious gift. As we look at it, it's easy to think, "Surely I can do that myself." Yet, every person who has ever tried to protect their faith on their own has always failed. Not one person in all of history has ever managed to keep the faith by their own efforts. We believe in the Holy Spirit because we know in our hearts that if the Holy Spirit doesn't live within us, faith will soon be gone and so will eternal life in heaven.

4. We believe that the Holy Spirit lives in our hearts. In our reading from Acts, Luke writes, "And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit." Was that a temporary filling, like filling a bucket with water only to pour it out a few minutes later? As they were filled with the Holy Spirit, it was permanent. As the Holy Spirit entered our hearts at Baptism, that, too, was a permanent event. You see, the Holy Spirit doesn't rent a place in our hearts or go south for the winter. As the Holy Spirit moves in, He says, "I have chosen to live in your heart, to guide, to strengthen, to protect your faith. Rely on Me and I will empower you to accomplish your God-directed mission."

5. We believe that the Holy Spirit is our Helper. As our Gospel lesson began, Jesus said, "When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, He will bear witness about Me." Before we downplay the significance of our Helper, we

need to understand what it means when we say that the Holy Spirit is our Helper. This isn't helper in the sense of a friend who is there when you need them. Our Helper does what we cannot do, provides strength we do not have, empowers us for tasks that could only be done with His help. Because He is our Helper, we acknowledge that all we need is available to us through our Helper, the Holy Spirit.

6. We believe the Holy Spirit continually gives us new insights into the mind and will of God. Jesus says of the Holy Spirit, "He will bear witness about Me." Bear witness - this isn't like grandma telling us stories about Jesus when we were little kids, although that was the Holy Spirit at work as well. This is the Holy Spirit opening our eyes to new thoughts, to new information. Each time you open God's Word, the Holy Spirit is ready to provide new information. You can read the same verse at six different times and the Holy Spirit will give you different insights, each specific to your situation at the moment, provided you are willing to accept what He offers.

7. We believe the Holy Spirit guides us down the proper path. Living in Wisconsin where hunting and fishing are big events, most of us know something about hunting guides and fishing guides. Their purpose? To do what you can't do as effectively yourself. Better than a hunting or fishing guide, the Holy Spirit guides us down the path that leads to heaven. But why do we need Him? Can't we find our way on our own? Because we live in a world that has no interest in eternity, a world where the devil likes to play his little games, we need the Holy Spirit; we need our Helper to get us through the maze of this life so that we can enjoy eternity with God.

8. We believe the Holy Spirit empowers us to do the incredible. How did God's people in the New Testament do such amazing things? Were they just more talented than we are? They did the incredible because they allowed the Holy Spirit to do the incredible through them. As the Holy Spirit lives in us, the Holy Spirit is at work. Part of that work is empowering us, enabling us to do what we could have never done on our own. Maybe we aren't able or don't make the effort to sort His work from our meager work, but if we did or when we do, we realize that the Holy Spirit in us enables us to do the amazing, to do what could never be done without Him.

9. We believe the Holy Spirit prepares us for our next God-directed mission. What does God have planned for you in the next six months, in the next five years, in the next twenty years? Do any of us have the answer? As we believe in the power of the Holy Spirit, we believe He is preparing us for tomorrow, for what we will face next month, next year, ten years from now. Maybe it doesn't make sense to us, yet we believe He is preparing us, that God has a mission, a task with your name on it, with my name on it, and we will each accomplish our tasks purely because the Holy Spirit did His amazing work of preparing the unprepared to do the incredible.

10. Some things we can do without thinking, but speaking the Creed requires our full attention, our total concentration because God has incredible things planned for all those who profess and proclaim, "I believe in the Holy Spirit." Amen.