

COMMUNICATING IN THE SPIRIT.

TEXT: JOHN 20: 19-23.

(from New International Version)

THEME:

Communication in the Spirit from the Spirit.

Grace, peace and mercy, from God the Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Today on the religious calendar is Pentecost Day when the Holy Spirit descended the people of the early church. The sermon is primarily about the Holy Spirit and I want to start off by asking you the question of 'how do you actually communicate in the Spirit'? I ask this as part of the ongoing theme of Discipleship/Fellowship that we have been putting into our sermons this year.

This might be a funny question to ask because most of the times in our Lutheran circles, we tend to leave out the Holy Spirit as he is the quiet one in the Trinity of God. We acknowledge that he is there and that he is the Comforter and the mover of the inner spirits within people, but we don't forget or ignore Him all together. We all tend to concentrate more on Jesus and God the Father as we go about our worship and remember the Holy Spirit when we make a deeper time of worship.

So when you think of the Holy Spirit been given to people, where do your thoughts immediately go; do you chiefly think of Pentecostal Christians because I always do and so do a lot of others. After all, they are quite open about the Holy Spirit moving in their lives and they openly show it by the way they involve him in their church services by talking in tongues, raising their hands, dancing and such. And I'm not knocking it; I'm just making a point because I know that some Lutherans do attend these meetings and enjoy this way of worship. But

how about the rest of us; what do we really think about having the Holy Spirit in us?

One thing about having the Holy Spirit is that we do know this much for sure; all those who have been baptized into God's kingdom at the Baptismal font or some other place or way of baptism, is that we received the Holy Spirit then, through the water and the Word. That's what makes our baptisms special and holy, the water and God's holy word.

And yes we do have the Holy Spirit; and from time to time there will always be a refreshing and a renewal of his Spirit coming into us to lift our flagging spirits when we need him in time of doubt and crisis. And I'm sure we have all felt this need at some time or another; he is the only one who can give the inner soul a thorough cleansing. Sometimes we can do things or have things happen to us, which can leave us feeling dirty and unclean on the inside; so how do we get clean?

We can wash and scrub ourselves on the outside and come up alright; but that doesn't hide what we feel on the inside; so how do we wash away the rubbish from the inside? Only through deep prayer and meditation, repentance and forgiveness can we get anywhere near cleansing with the help of the Holy Spirit. We have been given the Holy Spirit because this promise comes from Jesus himself.

In today's gospel lesson, the disciples were frightened sitting behind locked doors in fear of the Jews because Jesus had just been crucified and they were in fear of their lives, that they would be next to lose their lives like Christ did. They seemed to be leaderless and didn't know what to do. Most of all, they seemed to have forgotten the promise that Jesus had made to them that he would not leave them on their own in this world but that he would send the Comforter to be with them, and now we

read in this gospel lesson, that Jesus has breathed on them and said, 'receive the Holy Spirit.'

This same Holy Spirit is now moving all over the world working in people's lives and bringing comfort and strength to those who are seeking to have God in their lives. He is forever pointing the way to Jesus and to God the Father; he never makes a big deal about himself. And in verse 23, the disciples have also given the authority to forgive or retain anyone's sins. That's quite a big gift they've been given and it's also a big responsibility to have in their possession. A gift like that can be used or abused and even to what has been given to us.

But overall, the gift of the Holy Spirit is given to people to help them live a life that is pleasing to God. He convicts us in our hearts when we do wrong and we feel uplifted, euphoric and elated when we are in tune with God and our spirits are raised to him in worship and

praise. That's a time to treasure when we are put in sync with God; it's a lovely feeling and emotion to have.

The Spirit also makes us feel very special. No one should feel more or less superior than the other fellow Christians: because we have all been given the same spirit. We are all equal because the spirit is the same in all of us. Others may be more gifted in how they use their gifts of the spirit than others. I liken it to this; if we given five dollars each and compared them with each other of who had the best five dollars, who would win? The answer would be no one, and if you take it into the shop they would all still have exactly the same value of five dollars! How you use it or spend it makes the difference of how you are using your gift.

Use it or lose it: should we put our feelings of high spirits on display for others to see when we are in tune with God and want to express that physically: or should we keep our selves in check and subdue our emotions? To

answer that question, I guess it can go both ways, but there was a time when everything had its place and strict rules were observed. Some Lutherans like to show how they feel and that's okay; yet others may think otherwise. Enough on that!

I want to take a different approach now in regards to the Holy Spirit. As we know and are aware; God moves in mysterious ways, and I'm sure that most of us have had an experience of a spiritual kind that cannot be explained away so easily. The big thing about having spiritual experiences is that you keep it to yourself unless you know how to express your experience so that it doesn't offend or detract from God. As Lutherans we acknowledge that we do have them but we are encouraged not to talk about it openly because it may detract from God.

But we can talk and communicate with each other about what we experienced as long as it is kept in context.

Nothing too fantastic though [although people do have them], but some experience that has edified and glorified God where he has revealed himself through someone or some thing or some event.

Sometimes people can and do put on a show and that can be straight out dangerous, because if God isn't glorified then there may be a different spirit at work. I've had a few things happen to me, especially when I used to doubt where I stood in regards to being in God's kingdom; where was he leading me and I wanted reassurance from Him; and he has let me know through some spiritual experiences, but those things are between God and me.

You may have similar stories to tell about yourselves and you may be able to share them through the confidence of close and trusted friends. Not that you can get into trouble about speaking out about them; it's just that most people struggle with other people's spiritual experiences and most people are happy to worship as they are and

with what they know. And for those who do have experiences and want to share them, then you know what I'm talking about.

God has given his Spirit to all of those who are his. And this Holy Spirit is what we have in common with all other followers who belong to God. The Spirit also enables us to communicate other than from within ourselves. The Bible says the Spirit will give us utterance when we don't know what to say when our lives are under threat or under duress from other people. The Spirit will give us voice and what to say to explain to others why we believe in Christ and why we are his followers.

The Holy Spirit also makes us bold when we think we are alone or when we get frightened like the disciples and we need God's presence and reassurance to be near and with us. The Holy Spirit is also there when we pray for understanding when opening and reading the Bible. He is

also there in explaining the scriptures to us when we are puzzled at some verses or parts of the Bible that confuse us.

Just to conclude, the Holy Spirit is present in our baptism and he is present when we partake of Holy Communion; he is moving our hearts and minds as we remember the sacrifice our Lord and Saviour Jesus made in atoning for the sins of the world and doing his Father's will. The Holy Spirit is God who is pointing us to God the Son and to God the Father and he lives within our hearts. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.