

John 15:26-27

Pentecost Festival, Supplement Series C, May 15, 2016

- Theme: Jesus sends you the Holy Spirit
- I. He testifies to you about Jesus
 - II. You testify to others about Jesus

INJ This is the time of year for graduations and confirmations. We tend to think of them as the end of formal education. No more classes, tests, or homework! Yet, some people call the ceremonies “commencement” exercises because they mark the beginning of new horizons. I would say that eagerly anticipating what lies ahead serves a better purpose than merely a sigh of relief at an education completed.

Today is confirmation day in our congregation. Four eighth graders have studied God’s Word with their pastors for the last two years and are prepared to confess that they believe what they have been taught. “Confirmation” means strengthening. These young people have been strengthened (confirmed) in their Christian faith through careful study of God’s Word. It is true that the students will no longer have to come to class and memorize Bible passages for me. But is confirmation an end? Or a beginning?

For some, confirmation becomes the end. Parents and children think they don’t need God’s Word anymore. They drift away and the Christian faith that was once strong becomes weak. I don’t want that to happen to any of us! At the confirmation of any person, adult or child, we are reminded that faith needs continual strengthening by God’s Word. God encourages us to continue to build on the solid foundation that has been laid in his word.

Today is also a major festival of the Church Year. Pentecost is the Festival of the Coming of the Holy Spirit. While it doesn’t get the attention (or the distractions) of Christmas and Easter, Pentecost is very important – especially as we consider our constant need to be strengthened in the faith. At Pentecost, Jesus promises to send us the Holy Spirit. The Spirit testifies to us about Jesus so we will testify about him to others.

The disciples had spent three years walking around with Jesus, learning and listening. Soon, they would be faced with challenges: Jesus would suffer and die on the cross. After the resurrection Jesus would

only show himself for 40 days before his Ascension. Then the disciples would begin something new – no longer watching and listening, but now teaching and preaching. They needed to be strong in the faith, and they would need encouragement for the difficult times ahead. Where would the power, the wisdom, the drive, the determination come from? Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit to them. It happened that day in Jerusalem when the people gathered and the gospel was proclaimed in so many languages. The Holy Spirit filled the disciples with courage and boldness and enabled them to speak clearly. The Holy Spirit worked faith in the hearts of those who heard and were baptized.

The Holy Spirit still works faith and strengthens it. He does not use the spectacular miracles of Pentecost to do his work, but he does use the same word that was proclaimed that day. When you are feeling weak, when you are presented with a challenging situation, when you don’t know what to think or do, go back to God’s Word. Jesus sends you the Holy Spirit through his word. The Spirit testifies about Jesus. You need Jesus’ forgiveness and his powerful promises. The Spirit gives your faith strength and comfort and courage by the message you hear.

Jesus calls the Spirit the Counselor. You might call him an advisor or a consultant. He reminds and clarifies and puts things in perspective. The way he does his work is through the law and the gospel. The Counselor points out sin as the first part of what he does. He doesn’t just make other people look bad, he makes you realize your own sins. You have broken God’s laws. You have rebelled against the Almighty. You deserve to die. There is no getting out of the condemnation that you have justly earned for yourself.

The purpose of the Counselor’s use of the law is to warn you of the consequences of sin. You cannot just laugh it off. Ignoring it will not make it go away. At the end, judgment will come. Each day until then misery and guilt and fear will lurk. The Spirit’s counsel is: Watch out! There is no way you can make an escape from the fire you deserve.

The Holy Spirit Counselor doesn’t stop there. When you understand the Hell you earned and recognize your inability to pay the debt, he points you to Jesus. Jesus is the only rescue from sin and judgment and death. Jesus shouldered the weight of every sin and paid its debt completely with his blood shed on the cross. Jesus not only never sinned, he also credits his perfection to your account. God sees you as holy in Christ Jesus! There is now no condemnation for those who trust in him!

The Counselor testifies to you about Jesus for your comfort. Jesus is peace with God. In him, there is forgiveness of sins. In him is eternal life. In Jesus. Only in Jesus. The Holy Spirit testifies about Jesus so you know him and trust his deliverance.

The Counselor is also called the Spirit of Truth. What he says is true, even though people don't want to hear it or believe it. Sin is still sin even though the world lauds it. Everybody else might have no problem with it, but sin still offends Holy God. The Spirit of Truth does not change his tune after an opinion poll or as a result of political pressure. God's Law is True, and it exposes sin just as it is supposed to.

The Spirit's gospel testimony about Jesus doesn't change, either. Jesus is the only way to heaven. He is only hope for sinners – the only Savior. We are sure of the true Gospel testimony because it is written down for us. The Holy Scriptures are God's Words – words of law and gospel. You learn them and hear them and follow them because they are Truth and they are Life. God's Word is always applicable and always meaningful and always true.

The reason you come to church often, the reason you have been instructed, the reason you will still seek to hear and learn the Scriptures after this day, is that through the Gospel God strengthens your faith. Jesus sends you the Holy Spirit, the advisor, the consultant, the authority who gives you what you need – by the words you hear. You need to see clearly your sin. You need to see clearly your Savior. The Holy Spirit makes plain the truth about both in the Word.

That is not the end of it. Your faith and your spiritual growth is not just for yourself. When you are ready for challenges and have endured tests, you don't get a medal. You get the opportunity to tell others what you know and believe. Jesus sends the Holy Spirit so you testify to others about him. Jesus said to his disciples, " You also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning."

Our confirmands have been with Jesus, not in person, but by studying his words thoroughly. Each of us has been taught the truth and we trust it for our lives and for our eternity. Jesus is what matters. Without him there is no hope for life and no future to look forward to. Since Jesus is that important to us, we talk about him. Our faith is not just for this room, but for every place we go. Our confession does not stop when we leave church. Our whole life is built on what we believe. God's Word directs our choices and informs our attitudes and shapes

the words we speak to others.

Talk about Jesus the same way the Holy Spirit talks about him. Point out sin and the devastation it causes. Warn of the danger of disobedience, and the death it brings. Not in a self-important way, as if sin is not something you ever do, but with a sharp understanding of it yourself. Warn of sin's insidious corruption that seeks to devour.

Then speak about Jesus who has rescued you from your sin. Talk about his payment on the cross and his resurrection for you. Show that he changes your life because he gives peace and forgiveness. This same gift is for everyone! Your words and your actions are powerful tools that the Holy Spirit uses to accomplish his work of giving and strengthening faith. Testify about Jesus!

Of course, what you know about Jesus today isn't enough for a lifetime. What you have learned will become rusty and forgotten if it is not refreshed. Like a battery, your faith needs recharging. Keep your connection to the means of grace active! Receive the Sacrament with joy. Gladly hear and learn God's word. This is how the Holy Spirit keeps you strong and makes you bold to speak what you know and believe from God's Word.

Then go! Jesus says to let your light shine. You don't have to think about it or plan it or worry about it. Testify about Jesus. Don't be intimidated by people who are energetically opposed to Jesus and his word. Let God's word stand and work. You don't have to convince people or change their mind. That is for the Holy Spirit to accomplish when and where he pleases. You just get to speak. To show. To witness. To live in forgiveness and faithfully to use the means of grace.

The opposition is bold. It can come up with exotic and enticing viewpoints. A myriad of different opinions bombard us digitally and personally every day. Remember that, when you speak, you do not express merely an opinion, you testify to the Truth of God. Do not be afraid. Do not be silent. Rely on the forgiveness Jesus won for you for your own sins of weakness and inconsistency and failure to speak. Trust that Jesus sends the Holy Spirit as you testify about him.

Challenges in life are not unique to young confirmands. We all face fear and uncertainty. Jesus sends the Holy Spirit Counselor to empower us. He testifies about Jesus. Fill up with his words often! Then, speak freely and with conviction about Jesus. He is the only Savior. That is your confession. I ask that the Spirit make you strong to stand in the truth, and to make your words bold and clear. SDG Amen.