

**Day of Pentecost**  
**“THE ON-GOING WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT”**

**May 26-27, 2007**

**TEXTS: Acts 2:43-47; John 15:26-27; 16:4b-11**

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**Introduction**

Back in 1965, that world-famous gasser, Ol' Blue Eyes himself, first crooned the hit tune *My Way* (and if I were Frank Sinatra, I'd actually sing it, but I'm not so I won't):

“And now, the end is here

And so I face the final curtain.

My friend, I'll say it clear.

I'll state my case, of which I'm certain.

I've lived a life that's full. I traveled each and ev'ry highway.

And more, much more than this, I did it my way!”

Each verse of this popular song punctuates with pride the achievements of a man who's lived life according to his own standards. “I did it my way!” he repeats over and over again. And if it's all the same to you, “Wow-ee wow wow, baby!” I'd be standing right up there with the Chairman of the Board singing these words with great gusto, but not for the same reasons that he did. Frank Sinatra was the essence of cool, not taking anything from anyone. I, on the other hand, recognize that when I hail the greatness of doing things my way, I'm simply trying to justify my sinful behavior.

And the same is true for all of you as well, because that's what our sinful nature does. It turns us in on ourselves so that first and foremost we selfishly consider what's best for us no matter what anybody else says. We make our own rules. We set our standards. We determine what is good and what is bad. I'm doing it my way! It may not work for you, but deal with it buck-o! My way is *my way* and my way is okay!

Truthfully, we need someone to stop us in our tracks and tell us what a sorry state we're really in, “Look Harvey, your

headin' for bombsville! Your way is not the best way! Your life hangs in the balance and ignorance is no excuse for breaking the law.”

And so sets the stage for the Holy Spirit as Christ describes His work in our Gospel reading this morning. Jesus said, “I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment.” The word which is translated “Counselor” here in this text, is of course another word for the Holy Spirit. But in this sense, Jesus suggests legal proceedings!

It's as if the world is on trial for a capital offense. And not just the world in general, but you in particular. You are the defendant! Your life hangs in the balance. A *guilty* verdict will mean death, a *not guilty* verdict will mean freedom and life.

It's interesting, because normally when Jesus speaks of the Holy Spirit as the Counselor, it denotes someone who is pleading your case for you, a counselor for the defense. But in this instance, we understand that the Holy Spirit acts also as prosecutor. His work is to convict you, to refute your claim that “my way is okay,” and to convince you that your sinful heart needs to change. This is the work that the Holy Spirit began in you starting at your baptism and continues to work in you each day.

**IN REGARD TO SIN, IN REGARD TO RIGHTEOUSNESS,  
AND IN REGARD TO JUDGMENT, THE WORK OF THE  
HOLY SPIRIT IS ON-GOING IN OUR LIVES.**

I.

Jesus said that the Holy Spirit will convict the world “in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me.” It is sin that separated us from God in the first place. And it is also sin that prevents us from recognizing our guilt before God because it

blinds us from the truth. Unbelief. A denial of Christ allows sinful man to continue living in this dreadful state of ignorance and bliss.

Because when we rely upon our own reason and strength to gauge truth, we can come up with all sorts of crazy reasons to justify our sinful behavior. "Oh well, God understands that nobody's perfect." "He doesn't expect me to treat so-and-so kindly after what he did to me. God understands, I had no other choice!" "Sin is nothing major, it's really just little mistakes that we all make in life. God is gracious and overlooks those minor faults in our personality." "You've just got to do your best and that's all God asks of you."

Whether or not we have a correct and honest understanding of our sin depends directly upon our belief in God's Son and His role as the Savior of the world. Which is precisely why we need the Holy Spirit to come to us as well. As we learned in Luther's 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 Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith."

It is the Holy Spirit who convicts you of your sin, just as He worked through Peter and the other apostles on the day of Pentecost and convicted those people of their sin. When these crowds of people heard the Word of God (being spoken in their own native language) "they were cut to the heart."

We, too, are cut to the heart when the Holy Spirit speaks to us through His Word. And when the Holy Spirit does this work in us, showing us our sin through God's Law, by the grace of God, we can make the confession which we frequently use in our services here at Trinity, "Most merciful God, we confess that we are by nature sinful and unclean. We have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed . . . We justly deserve your present and eternal punishment."

These are not just words on a page. These are words of faith which can be confessed only by tongues of faith which we've received from the Holy Spirit. The truth is the world cannot make such a confession, because apart from the Holy Spirit Godly sorrow and contrition for sins and iniquities doesn't exist.

## II.

But contrition for sin and repentance is not enough to bridge the gap that our sin has created between us and God because the standard for righteous living is Jesus Christ. He alone is sinless. He alone lived a perfectly pleasing life before God in Heaven. He alone was flawlessly obedient to His Father's will. And so Jesus also said that the Holy Spirit will convict the world "in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer." When putting ourselves up against Christ, we realize once again that we fall far short of fulfilling God's good and perfect Law.

I once heard the story of an elderly man who was on his deathbed. As his life on earth was drawing to a close, he seriously contemplated his lifetime of failings before God, his continual disobedience to God's commands and a great numbers of sins that he regretted even many years later. The man's pastor came to see the dying man and he asked the question, "Pastor, do you think that a deathbed repentance does away with a whole life of sin?" The pastor responded with the words, "No, but the cross of Christ does!"

What comfort the Holy Spirit gives through the cross of Christ. Our sins may be ever so great and horrible in our eyes and in the eyes of other people and when we think about standing before God in the filthy rags of our sins our faces may even turn red with shame. It's during these times, especially, when the Holy Spirit shows you that your righteousness before God depends not upon your own efforts but upon Christ's atoning work for you!

By the grace of God, we poor sinful creatures can point to the promises that God made to us thorough Baptism and remember that it was through this gift of the Holy Spirit that we are clothed in the righteousness of Christ. God made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. By the obedience of this One Man, you have been made righteous.

The Holy Spirit convicts us of Christ's righteousness. After all, how else can you explain the trust that you have in this man, Jesus. What *convinces* you to believe that this simple, crucified Jewish criminal is really the Son of God? It is only by the Holy Spirit. He has who worked faith into your heart and convinces you day after day of Christ's righteousness and the place that you have in His eternal kingdom.

### III.

Lastly, Jesus said that the Holy Spirit convicts the world "in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned." The "prince of this world" is no one else but Satan. These words of Christ remind us of the third stanza of a little hymn called, "A Mighty Fortress." Perhaps you've heard of it?

"Though devils all the world should fill, All eager to devour us,  
We tremble not we fear no ill, They shall not overpower us.  
This world's prince may still Scowl fierce as he will, He can harm us none,  
He judged; the deed I done; One little word can fell him."

But when was the prince of this world judged and his power destroyed? It was on the cross where Jesus sacrificed Himself for you. We know from the epistle to the Hebrews that Jesus "shared in (our) humanity so that by His death He might destroy him who holds the power of death - that is, the devil - and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death" (Hebrews 2:14 & 15).

This is Good News indeed, but we must be cautious. Though Christ has rendered Satan powerless, He is still very active in this world. Peter warns us, "Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith" (1 Peter 5:8-9a). Whether he tempts you to trust in yourself more than Christ or to question your faith and doubt your place in God's kingdom, his goal is the same: to pull you away from faith in Christ in order that he might gain you for himself and take you with him to that place of eternal torment. It is again at these times, especially, when we appreciate the quiet work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. He continually drives us away from ourselves and draws us ever closer to Christ.

### Conclusion

On this Day of Pentecost, may we remember all that the Holy Spirit has done and continues to do to make us God's children through faith in Jesus Christ, the crucified, risen and living Savior and Redeemer. Though I am continually tempted to do it *my way*, the Holy Spirit is continually working in my life and in yours. In regard to sin, righteousness, and judgment, the Holy Spirit points us to Christ, our Savior, enlightens us with His gifts, sanctifies and keeps us in the true faith so that on that Last Day when we stand before the throne of our Lord that verdict of guilty will be overturned for the sake of Christ. By God's grace, you will enjoy freedom and life for all eternity. In Name of Jesus. Amen.

May the peace of God which surpasses all human understanding guard and keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.