

John 15:26-27 *“When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father—the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father—he will testify about me. And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning.*”

Dear friends in Christ our Savior,

It's hard to take people at their word today. A person's word is not the bond that it used to be. A contractor will tell you he will be there by 9:00 a.m. on Tuesday, but that doesn't mean he actually is going to be there then. He might not get there until 10 or even 11 without a phone call to let you know he's running behind. A politician will make great promises during the campaign to influence you to vote for her, but that doesn't mean she's actually going to push to keep those promises once she is elected. An insurance company promises they will cover you in certain situations...until you actually get into that situation and then they are looking for reasons to deny your claim and not pay out what they promised. A financial advisor who also sells insurance encourages you toward a policy, but you can't help but wonder is he pushing me toward this because it's best for me or because he gets a bigger commission on this for himself. Who's telling the truth now days? Who do you trust? Who can you take at their word and trust that they are looking out for your best interest and not their own? I read a book a few years back that offered the encouragement: “Don't trust anyone who has a vested personal interest in your decision or in lying to you.” Interestingly enough, this quote is used in the context of choosing which college to attend and is applied to high school guidance counselors, college admission counselors, and financial aid officers. High School counselors who get kick-backs and perks from different universities may be encouraging students to attend those universities not because they are best for the student but because the counselor will get more perks. Some financial aid officers actually receive money from banks or loan institutions for helping students apply for loans through them. Just because someone tells you they are looking out for your best interest doesn't mean you can take them at their word. At the very least we are skeptical and suspect about the advice and want to look further into the subject for ourselves.

We might find the same reaction to the promises which our God makes to us. We have such a hard time trusting people and taking them at their word when they make promises to us, that we take the same approach to the promises that Jesus makes. What we celebrate at Pentecost is Jesus keeping his promise to send the Holy Spirit to his people to be an Advocate and guide them into the truth of his word. The wonderful news about Pentecost is that this was not just an isolated act of God's grace, initiated and carried to completion on that one day long ago. It is a continual act of giving that will go on to the end of time. Through the prophet Joel, God promised he would pour out his Spirit not only on the disciples, but on all people—you and me included. Our joy today is in knowing that when God makes this promise, we can **Take Him At His Word.**

Jesus spoke the words of our text to his disciples on the night before his death shortly before his arrest. Earlier, Jesus had told his disciples to not let their hearts be troubled and to not be afraid. Yet, right before our text, he told them the world was going to hate them because of him. He told them as they carried out the work he was going to give them, they would be persecuted and mistreated because of him. It would have been easy for those disciples to think, “How can you say don't be troubled or afraid and then in the same breath tell us we are going to be hated, mistreated and persecuted?” They didn't understand what was happening.

So to encourage and comfort them, Jesus made a promise to them. There was no reason for them to be afraid. He was going to send them a powerful counselor who would guide them into all truth: the Holy Spirit. What a promise from Jesus! He was going to send them a counselor who would give them understanding and aid them in their work. Our text translates the word “counselor” as “Advocate”. An advocate is literally someone who walks alongside of you. It is someone who is looking out for your welfare alone. It is someone who is on your side and cares about what is truly best for you. The Holy Spirit would come alongside of them as they carried out the ministry to which Jesus would commission them and would guide them into all truth. He would help them understand the truth of all Jesus had done for them. He would remind them of everything they had learned from Jesus. He would remind them of everything they saw Jesus do. He would give them the words to say as they carried out their mission and the strength and courage to do so. What a promise!

What a difficult time these disciples had in taking Jesus at his word. Do you remember where they were when he appeared to them on the first Easter evening as well as the next Sunday a week later? They were hiding in the upper room out of fear of being killed the same way Jesus was. They didn't take Jesus at his word that they would be alive for him to send the Holy Spirit as he promised. They were unsure of what was happening. They didn't understand anything. Even at Jesus' ascension they asked the unbelievable question: “Lord, at this time are you going to establish your kingdom”—as if his kingdom were an earthly kingdom he would establish here. They were confused and afraid. They didn't understand and they lost sight of Jesus' promise. They didn't take God at his word. Instead of wrapping themselves up in the safety of Jesus' promise and the certainty that he would give them understanding, they allowed themselves to stand exposed in doubting God's promises and fearing God's enemies.

Yet despite this, Jesus kept his Word and sent the Spirit as he promised. Our second lesson recorded this miracle for us as the Holy Spirit was poured out on the disciples in such a special way. The sound like a rushing wind and the tongues of fire were miracles which drew everyone's attention on the fact that something special was happening. But the greatest miracle that took place that day was God filling the believers in Christ with the Holy Spirit. In this, we see exactly what the work of the Holy Spirit is. He guided them into all truth. We can see the change that took place in these disciples. Suddenly men who were timid and afraid stood bold and courageous. We see Peter boldly stand up and preach in the

Temple courts and the other men speaking in tongues, that is, translating his words into languages everyone there could understand. We see men who were confused and lacked understanding suddenly get it. This Jesus whom the Pharisees had killed was indeed the Christ promised from the beginning. Though they had acted from wicked motives, God used their actions to bring about salvation. Jesus' kingdom wasn't an earthly kingdom to bring earthly peace. His kingdom was a spiritual kingdom to bring salvation to everyone who believes in him. This is the power of the Holy Spirit. This is the truth into which he guides God's people for their good. He convicts the world of the truth in regard to sin: all are sinful and deserve God's punishment of death. But then he shares with the world the truth concerning righteousness: the perfection which Christ achieved has been credited to our account and because of that we will live with him forever.

Jesus kept his promise to send the Holy Spirit to his disciples to guide them into all truth so that they could go out and testify about him. We can take Jesus at his word that he will do the same for you and me. The attitude of the world today towards God's people is no different from the day of Pentecost. The world will hate you because of Jesus. You can take him at his word. You will experience hatred and hostility in the world for testifying to your faith in Jesus. The world wants you to join it in living for yourself and following your own sinful passions. We are tempted to follow this counsel. Rather than taking God at his word we are tempted to want to live for ourselves. The devil seeks to ally himself with your sinful heart to make you too tired to go to church, too bored to listen to a sermon, too busy to go to Bible Class, too distracted to read your Bible at home. The world wants you to join in and follow their subjective reason in founding their moral and religious beliefs on their own feelings, experiences and opinions rather than on what God expresses in his word. They want you to fall in line with them where all knowledge and truths are subject to an individual's interpretation and experience. In this line of thinking, "factual statements" just relay the attitude a speaker holds on an issue. There is no objective truth. It's only relative to the individual. In other words, if I say that lying is wrong, subjectivism says it's only wrong for me; that I disapprove of lying not that it's objectively wrong for everyone. What people consider are facts about God are only based on what the person thinks or feels or wants to be true. You hear this when people say, "I don't think God would punish someone for expressing their sexuality the way they feel is best." Or "I feel God will love me regardless of what I think or do." Or "It doesn't seem to me that God will banish anyone to such a nasty place as hell."

The truth is, none of these thoughts take God at his word. If we look closely at God's word, he tells us that while all of these sound well and good, they are not the truth before him. These thoughts remind us that the world is not looking out for our best interests with their ideas and philosophies. They are only looking out for themselves. These may sound like truth, but they are not truth before God. They are thoughts guided by a counselor, but one who looks for our eternal damnation. Jesus promised to send a counselor who would look out for our best interest in all things. It is the Holy Spirit who helps us to understand what lies these are. The Holy Spirit guides us into what is truth before God. It is the Holy Spirit who helps us to take God at his word that he is serious about punishing sin and sending people to hell who do not repent of their sin. It is the Holy Spirit who helps us to see how serious God is about sin because he sent his only Son into this world to suffer the punishment of hell in our place to rescue us from our sin. You can take God at his word that while he is serious about sin, he accepted the sacrifice which Jesus made on our behalf as payment for our sin. Because of that, your sin has been wiped away from his sight forever. You are his own dear child who has the promise of eternal life. Jesus sent the Holy Spirit into your heart just as he promised. The fact that you are here today is proof of this. He alone is the one who awakens our hearts to faith and guides us into the truth of our relationship with God—both the relationship we had with him by nature and the relationship that we now have with him through Jesus. It is the Holy Spirit who has helped us see and understand the need we have for a Savior who paid the punishment for our sin and washes our sin away. We have become dwelling places of the Holy Spirit. Through Word and Sacrament, he continues operating in our hearts with great power. He instills in us daily the desire and strength to live lives that are grateful to our Savior. Daily he renews us in our ability to live for our Savior and to serve him and our fellow humans. Daily, he enables us to engage in warfare against our Old Adam, that sinful nature that sticks deep in us until death, and to come out victorious. This is the fire that the Holy Spirit ignites in our hearts!

You can take God at his word. It's a difficult world we live in as God's people. It was difficult for the disciples then and it is difficult for us today. There certainly is much to be troubled about. We can wonder who do we trust and what is the truth. Take God at his word. He will continue to remain faithful to his promise to send the Holy Spirit through Word and Sacrament to work in your heart. The Holy Spirit will give you understanding into the truth of God's Word. He will give you strength to stand firm as you rely on the promises which God has given you as you face the hostility and hatred of the world around you. He will keep your eyes focused on the eternity that awaits to help you persevere and endure the challenges of today. God gives to you exactly what you need. He sent Jesus to win your salvation. He sent the Holy Spirit to work faith. Now he sends you to be a blessing to others as you testify about him with the promise that the Holy Spirit will go with you to guide and counsel you into all truth. God will be faithful to this promise. You can take him at his word. Amen.