

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod

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Festival of Pentecost

Sermon by Pastor Jon D. Buchholz

Come, Holy Spirit! Comfort your people

—John 16:5-11

“I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you,” Jesus told his disciples in the upper room. The Passover was a special feast for any observant Jew. Roasted lamb, bitter herbs, unleavened bread took those feasting back to God’s great deliverance from slavery in Egypt and made them look forward to the coming of the Messiah. It was a time to reflect on God’s salvation in a great celebration and a time of great joy. But on this night in this upper room this Passover that Jesus ate with his disciples took a strange turn. First Jesus did something very strange—even unheard of. He got up from the table, wrapped a towel around his waist, and went around the table and washed the feet of each of his disciples to teach these proud and ambitious men a lesson in servanthood and humility. Then Jesus brought the old covenant to its conclusion as he instituted a new covenant: “This is my body, this is my blood,” he said, “given and poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins.” And then, as the disciples were reflecting on this deeply meaningful experience the evening took a tragic turn, as Jesus dropped a huge bombshell on these bewildered men: “One of you will betray me.” They learned that the time of Jesus’ suffering was close at hand. Jesus would be leaving them, returning to his Father. It was time for him to suffer and to die, and in only a few short hours their teacher, their Rabbi, their Master, their friend would be bound and tried, condemned and crucified. What had moments earlier been a joyful Passover meal now filled the disciples’ hearts with grief.

As they grieved, Jesus comforted his dear friends. “Because I have said these things, you are filled with grief. But 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.”

Fast forward seven weeks and see how things have changed for the disciples. What had happened? The disciples had seen their Lord Jesus risen from the grave, glorified, exalted, and very much alive. Jesus met with them, ate with them, and taught them about the kingdom of God. Then on the fortieth day after Jesus’ resurrection they watched as Jesus ascended into heaven right before their eyes. Now on the fiftieth day Jesus did exactly as he promised he would do for them: He sent them the Holy Spirit. There was a sound like a violent wind, tongues of fire rested on the apostles’ heads. They spoke in tongues; the Spirit enabled them to share the gospel with the people who were there in languages that they had never studied or known. The same disciples who had once scattered into the darkness now boldly spoke out in the open. The same Peter who had denied Jesus now preached the sermon. These men were changed because of the gift of the Spirit. Their Passover evening grief gave way to Pentecost joy.

Jesus promised to send the Counselor. Sometimes the Holy Spirit is called the Comforter. Sometimes the Advocate. The word used in John’s Gospel is *Paraclete*. Jesus promised and sent the *Paraclete*. The name in Greek pictures someone who walks alongside us, guides us, counsels us, encourages us, comforts us. It’s a beautiful, descriptive name for the Spirit of God who is always with us. God gives us his Spirit. He lives in us. He makes our bodies his home, his holy temple. He is called the deposit guaranteeing the gift of our salvation. He has been given to you as your constant companion, the Holy Spirit of God, your Comforter and Friend.

It was the Holy Spirit who enabled those men to speak in tongues on Pentecost. It was the Holy Spirit who made them fearless proclaimers of the Name of Jesus for the salvation of many souls. It was the Holy Spirit who worked repentance and faith in the hearts of 3,000 people on that Pentecost Day and gave them new birth and new life through Baptism. It is still the Holy Spirit who works repentance and faith today, who connects sinners to Jesus, and daily forgives the sins of all believers in Christ.

Jesus said that when the Holy Spirit came he would convict the world of sin, righteousness and judgment. The Holy Spirit convicts the world of sin, because people do not believe in Jesus. Jesus is the only Savior this world has ever seen. He is the only Savior who has purchased our forgiveness with his own blood. He gives eternal life only to those who believe in him. The Spirit convicts those who do not believe in Jesus. There is no forgiveness for them; they remain in their sin. The Holy Spirit convicts the world (or shows the world is wrong) of righteousness. The worldly way is for human beings to be righteous on our own, through our good works. The

Holy Spirit makes it clear that the only righteous person is Jesus, and the only righteousness that counts is Jesus' perfect obedience under the law, the righteousness that God credits only to those who trust Jesus. The Holy Spirit convicts the world of judgment. The Last Day is coming when Jesus will return to judge the living and the dead and all people will have to answer for our personal deeds. For you there is comfort, but for the prince of this world, for Satan and for all who reject Jesus along with him, there is only judgment, eternal condemnation, cast away from God into outer darkness and eternal fire. Jesus has won. His followers win with him. Those who stand against him will perish.

You are connected to your Savior Jesus because of the Holy Spirit. There is no other way that you could be connected to Jesus, since Scripture tells us no one can say Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit. The person without the Spirit does not accept the things of God, for without the Spirit they seem like foolishness. The Holy Spirit has called you by the gospel, opened your eyes to see Jesus as your Savior, planted faith in your heart to trust in him, given you the gift of everlasting life. Now he lives in you, walks with you, guides you, encourages you. He strengthens you in the face of temptation, so you can resist the devil and flee from him. When you need comfort he is by your side to comfort you.

In some cultures, including our own, people may be taught that needing comfort makes us weak. People are taught not to mourn. Grieving is forbidden. Men are told they're not supposed to cry. Men are supposed to be tough, suck it up, roll with the punches. Men and women alike are told: "Don't let things get you down. If you're feeling blue, go buy yourself something to make yourself happy. Treat yourself to a vacation. Immerse yourself in your work. Take a pill. Have a drink." But Jesus said, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted." Going through life in perpetual Happyland is fake. It's not real. The reality is we need comfort. A mother comforts her son when blood is running down his knee. A son comforts his mother when he's standing with her next to his father's casket. We need comfort because of the world we live in. This is not our home. We hurt. We become afraid. We suffer loss. We live in a valley of tears. All the "stiff upper lip" in the world that we show on the outside doesn't take away the pain we feel on the inside. So comfort is for the weak? Yes, for the weak, who live in a broken and dying world, whose happiness has been marred by our own sin and the sin of others. We need comfort when we know that we have sinned, and our conscience tells us we stand guilty and condemned before the judgment seat of God. We need comfort when we're faced with the reality of our own mortality, the fact that we are subject to death as the just wages for our sin. We need comfort when we suffer pain, betrayal, heartache. We need comfort when it hits us that fame and fortune, status and recognition, all that we can achieve and all that we can accumulate mean nothing in the eternal picture. We need comfort when we reflect soberly on the truth that our life is a mist, that we are like the grass of the field—here today and gone tomorrow—that our human condition is one of trouble and sorrow, and we quickly fly away.

So Jesus sends us the Comforter. He gives us his Holy Spirit. The Comforter doesn't pump us up with empty platitudes. He speaks to the deepest cravings of our soul, and he comforts us in our time of deepest trial and need. He comforts us by telling us that our sins are forgiven. He comforts us by pointing us back to Jesus, showing us the price of our sin, showing us the blood that Jesus spilled on the cross as the payment for sinners. He comforts us by telling us mortal creatures that death has been swallowed up in death by Jesus' resurrection. Death is a shadow, the believer's portal to heaven, and it's nothing to fear. He comforts us in times of pain, betrayal and heartache by telling us how much he loves us, by calling us his friends, by promising us that no matter what happens in this life he will never leave us. He comforts us when we face the emptiness of this material life by telling us that this life is not all there is. There is waiting for all God's family an eternal paradise, the everlasting kingdom of God, glory forever with our victorious Savior—just on the other side of death's door.

Today the Spirit fills you with Pentecost joy. The Comforter fills your heart with his presence. He speaks to you through God's Word and says, "You are a precious child of God. You are dearly loved by Jesus. Take heart! Your sins are forgiven! You have the gift of eternal life!" On this Pentecost we rejoice and pray, "Come, Holy Spirit! Comfort your people! Fill our hearts, and kindle in us the fire of your love!" Amen.