

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod

Lent 4

March 27, 2022

Sermon by Pastor Christopher Pflughoeft

Live by the Spirit

So then, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. ²For in Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. ³Indeed, what the law was unable to do, because it was weakened by the flesh, God did, when he sent his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to deal with sin. God condemned sin in his flesh, ⁴so that the righteous decree of the law would be fully satisfied in us who are not walking according to the flesh, but according to the spirit.

⁵To be sure, those who are in harmony with the sinful flesh think about things the way the sinful flesh does, and those in harmony with the Spirit think about things the way the Spirit does. ⁶Now, the way the sinful flesh thinks results in death, but the way the Spirit thinks results in life and peace. ⁷For the mind-set of the sinful flesh is hostile to God, since it does not submit to God's law, and in fact, it cannot. ⁸Those who are in the sinful flesh cannot please God.

⁹But you are not in the sinful flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed God's Spirit lives in you. And if someone does not have the Spirit of Christ, that person does not belong to Christ. ¹⁰But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, but your spirit is alive because of righteousness.

—Romans 8:1-10

Have you seen the movie, *Hidden Figures*? Perhaps, you read the book upon which it was based. It is based on the true story of the black female mathematicians that helped America win the space race. The reason these women were called hidden figures is that people, for the most part, do not know their names. We know the names of Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin, the first men on the moon. Yet, we do not know well these brilliant women. These women's names are Katherine Johnson, Dorothy Vaughan, and Mary Jackson. Names for us to know.

It is common for people who play important roles and do important jobs to go largely unnoticed. You can think of many: Nurses and doctors who work every day to save lives, teachers who instruct children, and truck drivers who deliver our food and goods. You may call these people unsung heroes. We are happy for their work, but they do not get the fame and notoriety of athletes and politicians.

It is a shame that these people do not get the attention they deserve for their hard work. Yet, there is a person who sometimes does not get much attention, and this is even a bigger deal. The person of whom I speak is the third person of the Triune God, the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is not an impersonal force. No, he is a person of the Triune God. He is co-equal in majesty and co-eternal with the Father and the Son. Today, I will focus on the person and work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit works through the means of grace, giving us life. He dwells within us, enabling us to serve God. Yes, we **live by the Spirit**.

2,000 years ago, on a cross on Calvary, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, died for all people. Through this redemptive act, God justified the world freely. This is as Paul wrote earlier in this letter, "*because all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.*" (Romans 3:23-24) God declared the world not guilty in Jesus. The law was unable to give life because of people's sin. So, God the Father sent His Son to take flesh. Then, Jesus, the Son of God, did what the law was unable to do. He dealt with sin. God condemned sin in Jesus' flesh. Yes, this is the objective truth. In Christ Jesus, God declared the world not guilty. So, how does this objective truth become a subjective reality? How does this apply to an individual on a personal level? How does what Jesus accomplished 2,000 years ago on the cross become hers? Well, the Holy Spirit works through the means of grace. Through Baptism and the Word of God, the Holy Spirit creates faith in a person's heart. He connects her to Jesus. There is no more condemnation for her. She is justified through faith created in her heart by the Holy Spirit. Now, **she lives by the Spirit**; she has been freed by Christ.

How does what Jesus did outside of Jerusalem affect people thousands of miles away and thousands of years later? To help us understand this, we can think about a water tower. Up there, at the top of the water tower, is water. How does that water come down to the ground to go through pipes and eventually to homes? The hydrostatic pressure driven by gravity brings the water through the big pipe to the ground. This is a fitting illustration of God's forgiveness and righteousness coming to people. God's forgiveness and righteousness merited by Jesus on the cross are like the water. So then, the hydrostatic pressure driven by gravity with the pipe as a channel for the water is like the Holy Spirit working through the means of grace; baptism, the Lord's Supper,

and God's Word. This is how God's forgiveness and righteousness are distributed to all people. Through the means of grace, the Holy Spirit creates faith in people's hearts. This faith receives the forgiveness and righteousness. Now, they live by the Spirit; they have been freed by Christ.

Brothers and sisters, you know this. You know that Jesus died on the cross. You know that Jesus lived a perfect life for you. You know that Jesus rose from the grave triumphantly. You know this well. We talk about this often, as we should. As Christians who understand the Christocentricity of the Bible, can we ever be guilty of undervaluing the person and work of the Holy Spirit? We pray the Lord's prayer that Jesus taught us. We thank God the Father for his work in creation and provision. We focus so deeply on the Son's life and death. Perhaps, we can and should consider more often and be more thankful for what the Holy Spirit does. The Holy Spirit is God. If we fail to recognize and thank God, that is sin. So how can this happen? How could we be guilty of sinning against God by not recognizing him and giving thanks for his work? A main way that I can see us doing this is when we fail to respect the means through which the Holy Spirit works to bring us God's grace. When the Word is preached, the Holy Spirit is working. When people are baptized, the Holy Spirit is working. When the Lord's Supper is administered, the Holy Spirit is working. This is as Paul said in writing to the church in Corinth, *"My message and my preaching were not marked by persuasive words of human wisdom, but by a demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith would not rest on human wisdom, but on God's power."* (1 Corinthians 2:4-5)

Are we ever guilty of disrespecting the Holy Spirit by disrespecting the means through which he works? Have you ever had a reluctance to study God's Word or attend church? Is that okay? That is disrespectful to the Holy Spirit. Or perhaps, you have been annoyed when the readings in church are long or when there is a baptism and the Lord's Supper on the same day. Have you sinned in this way? I can tell you that I have. It's a big deal. This is disrespecting our God who works for us.

The Lord says, *"in the same way my word that goes out from my mouth will not return to me empty. Rather, it will accomplish whatever I please, and it will succeed in the purpose for which I sent it."* (Isaiah 55:11) The work of the Holy Spirit through Law that we just heard is called the alien work of the Holy Spirit. He used God's Word to convict us. Now, hear the Gospel proclaimed and experience the proper work of the Holy Spirit. You are forgiven in Christ Jesus your Lord. Even though you are a sinful person, God loves you and acts in love. The Father sent His Son to live, die, and rise for you. The Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son working through His powerful Word. The Holy Spirit created faith in your heart to believe in God's promises and receive the blessing that your God gives to you. Yes, you have been freed by Christ Jesus. Yes, you **live by the Spirit** now and forever.

Here, Paul addresses believers. Paul addresses people within whom the Holy Spirit dwells. Paul's encouragement for these people is to **live by the Spirit in harmony** with the Spirit. Those in harmony with the sinful flesh do things and think in ways that are in harmony with the sinful flesh. This is because the mindset of the sinful flesh is hostile to God. The sinful flesh does not want to please God, nor can it do so. Paul reminds the Roman Christians that they are not in the sinful flesh. Just a chapter before, he speaks about how Christians still have a sinful nature. Yes, they struggle with sin. Yet, they are not controlled and characterized by sin. They have the Holy Spirit dwelling within them. They are in Christ and Christ in them. Those who have the Holy Spirit dwelling within them will live in harmony with the Spirit. After speaking first about justification, Paul encourages Christians in their lives of sanctification. Paul's encouragement is **live by the Spirit in harmony with the Spirit**.

Those who have the Holy Spirit dwelling within them will **live by the Spirit**. You have probably heard the phrase before; the apple does not fall far from the tree. This phrase explains how often children will be very similar to their parents. They look like their parents. They act like their parents. Maybe people can tell that you are your mother's daughter. People have certainly said they can tell that my daughters are my children. Children have their parents' DNA and teachings imparted in them. Therefore, they do what is in line with what is in them. So likewise, believers have the Holy Spirit living in them. How much more obviously will this lead them to do what is in line with what is in them. They don't just have DNA and teachings, but God dwelling within them. This indeed leads to them living in harmony with the Spirit.

The Holy Spirit dwells within you. Your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit. You are not your own. (1 Corinthians 6:19) When we know that we are freed by Christ, there is the temptation to think that good works don't matter. We are tempted to think that since good works do not save, they aren't necessary. Let us not have such a foolish and sinful attitude. If we are entangling ourselves in sin and not caring about producing the fruit of the Spirit, we are fighting against the Holy Spirit's work. Again, that is disrespecting God. Being racist, lustful, and mean, are not in line with the attitude of the Spirit.

If you feel guilt over your sin or failure to produce the fruit in abundance, know the purpose and manner of producing fruit. You do not have to save yourself by doing good works. In fact, you cannot. You were declared not guilty in Christ Jesus. Your sins are all forgiven. You have the righteousness of Christ given to you. Also, you cannot try to conjure up good works on your own. The Holy Spirit produces these in you. He dwells within you. This fruit will be produced naturally. You belong to Christ. The Spirit of God works within you. The fruit is there. Look to your life as parents, students, workers, and all your vocations. The Holy Spirit is working in and through you.

You were freed by Christ. The Holy Spirit works within you. Now, you **live by the Spirit**. You will live forever in heaven because the Holy Spirit brought you to faith in Jesus. Now on earth, you live every day with him working within you. Amen.