

Think about that day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came to Jesus' disciples. There was the sound of a mighty rushing wind. No wind, but the sound of the wind, a loud sound drawing the attention of lots of people. When the came to where the sound was, they saw the disciples of Jesus with flames of fire on their heads. The flames were real but they did not harm the disciples. The people also heard these disciples speaking in their own native languages about the wonders or miracles of God. Large crowds of people listen to Peter and the others talk about Jesus and his resurrection from the dead. 3,000 people came to faith that day.

What if something similar happened to our congregation, Open Bible Lutheran Church? Here we are a small group of people setting up a booth at the Polo Club in the Villages for the Women's Expo. We are handing out free bottled water, Bibles, and extra long golf tees. Suddenly there is the sound of a mighty rushing wind at our booth. Tongues of fire start dancing on our heads. Members of this church who know little Spanish, or German, or Chinese, are talking to members of the community in their own language about the wonders of God. I can guarantee that if this happened, word would get out and our church would be full of people, some just curious, but others eager to hear the truth of God's Word.

So how does the Holy Spirit operate in these last days? He comes to people and shows them the truth about Jesus. The Holy Spirit then uses the people who know about Jesus to bring this message to other people. That's the plan the Lord has established for his church. It is a quiet work as the Holy Spirit works in the hearts of people behind the scenes to draw them closer to Jesus. Yet it is a very powerful work that the Holy Spirit is carrying on all over the world in these last days. And we are the blessed recipients of the Holy Spirit's work. Today, we direct your attention to **"The Quiet but Powerful Work of the Holy Spirit."**

The Holy Spirit works with you and me every day, even every hour, to keep us focused on Jesus. Jesus said, "When the Counselor comes, whom I will send from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me." Jesus calls the Holy Spirit our Counselor or Comforter. He is also called the "Paraclete" not parakeet but Paraclete. You can say that word with me if you want. It is taken directly from the Greek word for Counselor or Comforter. The Holy Spirit is the one who walks alongside of you, counsels you and comforts you by directing your attention to Jesus. When you are feeling alone as you start a new day, the Holy Spirit points you to Jesus who says, "Lo, I will be with you always, even to the end of the world. When you are weeping at the casket of a Christian loved one, the Holy Spirit comes along side of us and points us to Jesus, who says, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me though he were dead, yet shall he live, and whosoever lives and believes in me shall never die." Because I live, you also shall live.

Have you ever enjoyed taking walks with someone and just enjoying their company as they talk with you and be there for you? Some of the best moments in our marriage have come when we take long walks together. Yet there is someone I enjoy walking with me more than my wife- sorry about that Jeanne. It is the Holy Spirit who spends every day with me and every day with you testifying to us about who Jesus is and how much he loves us.

The Holy Spirit is also there to counsel us with the truth of God's Word. Jesus called the Holy Spirit the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father. When you see the

stars at night, or a beautiful sunset, or flowers in the mountains, or just the function of your human body, the Holy Spirit reminds you that all of this came into being by the hand of your heavenly Father who loves you and cares for you. When the little bird sings joyfully in your backyard the Holy Spirit reminds you that a heavenly Father who takes care of those little birds loves you even more and takes care of you. You have the answers to where you came from, why you are here and what is going to happen to you when you die. The Holy Spirit has counseled you from the Word in these areas. In I Corinthians 2 the Apostle Paul quotes from the Old Testament, “No eye has seen, no hear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him.” Then he goes on to say, “But God has revealed it to us by Spirit.”

Jesus has more to say about this wonderful work of our Counselor in the next chapter of John. This is all part of a conversation Jesus had with his disciples before he died. They were worried about being left alone as orphans. Jesus assured them it was good he was going to the Father because that meant the Holy Spirit would come to them in a special way. He told them when the Holy Spirit comes, “He will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness.” Our Lutheran Confessions call this process of convicting people of sin the strange work of the Holy Spirit.

A few years ago I received one of these phone calls offering to sell me some product. I did not want to be rude, so when the young man at the other end of the line sensed an opportunity to nab someone, so he started peppering me with questions. “What do you do for a living?” he asked. “I am Lutheran minister,” I responded. “That’s interesting,” he said. Then there was a pause at the other end. I thought he had hung up. Then he asked, “Do you think liars will end up in the lake of fire?” Did someone share with him the words of the Revelation that speak about liars ending up in the lake of fire? Did the Holy Spirit use these words to convict him for the lying and cheating he was doing during phone solicitations? I was able to testify to him about Jesus’ death and resurrection, and encouraged him to read the Bible.

I need the Holy Spirit to convict me of sin? I need the Holy Spirit to remind me how inadequate my righteousness is before a holy and righteous God. In Romans 7 Paul confesses that he did not know what sin was until he realized the part of the law that said, “Thou shalt not covet.” He realized that even his desire to do wrong was already sin in the eyes of God. Paul shared his struggles with sin in the well known words, “I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out.... For what I do is not the good I want to do, no, the evil I do not want to do, this I keep on doing.”

The Holy Spirit who convicts also comforts. Paul begins the next chapter of Romans 8 with the words, “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through the Christ Jesus the law of Spirit of life has set me free from the law of sin and death.” He speaks in these words about the law of the Spirit of life that has set me from the law of sin and death. The Holy Spirit convicts us of sin, but then lifts our eyes to see the freedom from condemnation we have in Jesus. How many times has the Holy Spirit assured you that you have peace with God through Jesus, your sins are forgiven, and his blood cleanses you? Martin Luther in his beautiful hymn about the Holy Spirit says, “Shine in our hearts, O most precious light, That we Jesus Christ may know aright, Clinging to our Savior, whose blood has bought us, Who again to our homeland has brought us.”

We yearn and long for the Holy Spirit to help us see more of Jesus' love for us every day. In a good marriage two people never get tired of hearing how much they love and care for each other. Children never get tired of hearing their parents tell them how much they love them. We have the Holy Spirit who tells us constantly how much Jesus loves us. In Ephesians 1 the Apostle Paul prays this beautiful prayer for help from the Holy Spirit to know more about Jesus. "I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better."

The Holy Spirit who brings Jesus closer to us every day also uses us to bring Jesus close to people who do not know him, or who need to know him better in their lives. "And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning." These disciples were with Jesus from the beginning. They had seen Jesus' glory shine in the miracles he performed. They heard his words that brought life to people. They saw the nail prints in his hands after he rose from the dead. They were in a unique position to testify or tell people what they had seen and heard. Here is how John begins his first letter. "That which was from the beginning, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched- this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. This life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it."

The word of testify or witness is the Greek word *martureo* from which we get the well known word, "martyr." The early Christians who bore witness to Jesus' death and resurrection put themselves in danger of being put to death for what they believed. If you see a crime and witness to it in a court of law, that could mean trouble for you and your family if the man being put on trial is a gang member. If you witness to Jesus in a Muslim country, you could be put to prison for saying Jesus Christ is Lord and God. Even among members of your own family, bearing witness to Jesus will not always be loved and appreciated, tolerated maybe, but not appreciated. "My mom and dad are religious nuts." "My sister is a religious fanatic." "My brother is a Jesus' freak."

Where are we going to get the courage to testify to Jesus? We have the love for Jesus. We believe he is the only way back to God. We believe that God wants all people to be saved. We know that God has chosen us for this work and that he will not use angels to take over when we fail. Where will we get the courage? I think you know the answer, the same place Peter got the courage to boldly witness to Jesus on the day of Pentecost. Jesus told his beloved disciples they should not be afraid to stand up to kings and magistrates because the Holy Spirit would give them the words they were to speak. Listen to these words from Matthew 10:19-20, "But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you."

It was Jesus who told his disciples to wait for the Holy Spirit to help them. "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you: and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea and Samaria, and the ends of the earth." This wonderful testifying of the Holy Spirit to us and through us is happening all over the world, very quietly but very powerfully. Lord Jesus, open my eyes to believe what you tell me about the Holy Spirit testifying to me and through me. Amen.