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St. John's & Immanuel Lutheran Churches – Kimball, NE & Burns, WY

Day of Pentecost

June 5, 2022

Text: John 14:23–31

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

During the Sundays after Easter we have been considering some of the primary characteristics of Christ's Church. We have already seen that the Church is Christ's body with Christ Himself as her Head. She is a new creation born anew as a result of Christ's perfect life, death, and resurrection. We, the various members of the holy Christian Church, make up the body of Christ with all of our unique gifts, personalities, life histories, temperaments, strengths, weaknesses, and so forth. Christ's Church is wonderfully diverse yet she remains one holy Christian and apostolic Church.

Other characteristics of Christ's include that she is nourished and protected by Christ Himself, the Good Shepherd. He leads her by the Spirit of truth. Thus, we seek the truth and nothing but the truth. In the Spirit and by the Spirit, we sing our psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs in love and praise to Christ our Lord and Savior. In the name of Christ Jesus and by the Spirit we pray to our heavenly Father with the boldness and confidence children who love and trust their Father. Through our prayers, our heavenly Father works His good and gracious will of restraining evil and upholding good. Consequently, the Church is led by Christ in the way of truth while she sings and prays to our heavenly Father. All of this glorious and varied activity takes place in faith, hope, and love as we wait for the greatest event in human history: Christ's 2nd coming on the Last Day.

In summary, some of the chief characteristics of Christ's Church include: she is born anew in the death and resurrection of Jesus, she is cared for and protected by Christ Himself, the Good Shepherd, she seeks the truth in all things because she is filled with the Spirit of truth, she sings, she prays, and she waits for the 2nd coming of Jesus in faith, hope, and love.

My goal in these reflections on the nature of the Church is to increase and strengthen our understanding of who we are Christians individually and collectively as the Body of Christ. These past couple of years have revealed that the Church in America – really around the world, didn't have a very strong, Biblical understanding of what it means to be Christ's Church. Too quickly we allowed others to tell us who the Church is, what her essential activities are and how we should do them, and what her purpose in the world is, and consequently, her purpose in the the next world is. Today's service will provide further teaching to answer those questions: who the Church is, what she does, and her purpose.

Today, is the Day of Pentecost, which marks 50 days since we celebrated Christ's resurrection from the dead on Easter Sunday. As we have considered the various foundational characteristics of Christ's Church throughout the past weeks after Easter, a common feature has arisen. The Church is filled, blessed, empowered, and enlivened by the ministry of the Holy Spirit. We seek the truth because we are filled with the Spirit of truth. Our songs rejoice and celebrate the truth especially in the revelation of God's love seen in Christ Jesus. Our prayers are directed and empowered by the Spirit. And unless the Spirit strengthens our resolve to wait for Christ's 2nd coming in faithful godliness of heart, mind, and life, we would fall away from the saving faith immediately.

The Day of Pentecost reminds us that the Christian Church and every Christian believer are filled with the Holy Spirit. You cannot be a Christian without being filled with the Spirit. Thus, the Church baptizes her members in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit because through this great gift, the Holy Spirit is richly poured out upon us, as Paul described in Titus 3:5–6. All that we are, do, and seek to achieve as Christian believers and members of Christ's body happens because of the Holy Spirit. For this reason, we seek to walk by the Spirit lest we gratify the sinful desires of our flesh which do not want to hallow God's name or live in His kingdom under His gracious will.

The Lord Jesus promised the gift of the Holy Spirit in vs. 26 of today's gospel text. "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name..." Notice the beautiful Trinitarian care and love the Church receives. The

Father sends the Spirit in Christ's name. Being baptized into the name of the Triune God means we are brought into the very life and fellowship of God. The Church is where people receive and participate in the very life of God Himself. In other words, the Church is not some form of religious social club made up of voluntary members who come and go as the moments dictate. The Church is the living body of Christ who is enlivened by the Spirit to receive all of the divine gifts of the Father. The Church is holy and alive because she is filled with the Holy Spirit. Consider the apostle Peter's description of the Church in II Peter 1:3–4:

³His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him (i.e., Christ) who called us to his own glory and excellence, ⁴by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.

Christians individually and the Church collectively are participants in the divine nature through which we receive divine life and godliness. The Holy Spirit is constantly teaching us these things about our life in Christ Jesus (vs. 26). The world and worldly wisdom cannot give us this Spirit-filled life. Only the Father who sends the Spirit in Christ's precious name. Cling to these precious gifts, dear saints of God as your highest and best treasure. They are your life and your salvation.

As the Spirit-filled body of Christ, we participate in God's life and nature. What an extraordinary promise! The question of how or by what means the Spirit works this in our lives must be considered. In vs. 23–24, Jesus is answering a question from one of his disciples about how Christ will reveal Himself to believers but not the world, "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me."

The word of Christ is the means the Spirit uses to bring us into fellowship with the Father. Notice how love for Christ and His Word are inseparably linked together. “If anyone loves me, he will keep my word.” This necessarily means we must go back to the Bible time and time again to learn the truth about Christ. In the Scriptures, we hear the words of Jesus. Through those inspired, infallible words we learn the truth of God, who He is as one God in three persons and what He did to save us from sin, evil, death, and condemnation. Through those words we learn to love Jesus. The Spirit uses the Holy Scriptures to nurture our love for God. Loving God and hearing the word of Christ go together.

Practically speaking, this includes hearing the public reading of God’s Word and preaching and teaching upon the read word of God. The 4 gospels, Mathew, Mark, Luke, and John were written for this very purpose. To be read aloud and preached in Church. The epistles of Paul, Peter, John, James, and Jude were all written to congregations where Christians were gathered to hear God’s Word and receive the sacraments. Those letters were sermons! The pastoral epistles Titus and I & II Timothy were written to give instruction on how pastors should go about serving God’s people with the Word. Preach the word! Is the apostle’s Paul’s last admonition to Timothy, the young pastor. Paul would soon be executed for preaching the gospel. II Timothy 4:2, 5

²preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching....⁵As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

The Word of God is our lifeline. God’s Word is to fill every sound we hear in the Church! It is the measure and standard for all that is said, believed, and hoped. In addition to the Word filling our worship services, read and study the Scriptures at home with your spouse and children. Pray and sing together. Remember those are foundational characteristics of the Church! We pray the Scripture. We sing the Scriptures. We serve Christ and our neighbor by hearing, believing, and living according to the Scriptures. The Holy Spirit uses Christ’s Word to strengthen our love for the Father and His beloved Son. If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him. Thus says our Savior.

One last comment as we bring today's sermon to its conclusion. We have a promise attached to hearing and believing God's Word. Vs. 23b, "...and we (the Father and the Son) will come to him (the one who loves Christ by keeping his word) and make our home with him." And so we're back to where we began. The Holy Spirit uses Christ's Word to bring into fellowship with the Father and the Son. A fellowship that is so intimate and personal that God Himself dwells within us. Blessed are you dear saints of God!

This is what it means to be a Spirit-filled Church, to be a Spirit-filled Christian. Loving God's Word. Singing and praying it. Waiting for Christ's return in the faith, hope, and love given to us by the Holy Spirit through God's Word.

✠ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. ✠ Amen.

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.