



+From Bishop Jon Anderson:

We have prepared this sermon this year without any explicit linkage to the 2019 assembly. That, we hope, might make it possible to use this sermon on a Sunday when your congregation might need it.

It is one of three sermons I will be doing on the three articles of the Apostles' Creed.

The Gospel lesson this sermon is based on is from Pentecost. This could be read by a reader on a Sunday when this text is not in the lectionary, if it is used at another time.

John 14:8-17, [25-27]

⁸ Philip said to him, "Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied." ⁹ Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? ¹⁰ Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the Father who dwells in me does his works. ¹¹ Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; but if you do not, then believe me because of the works themselves. ¹² Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. ¹³ I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. ¹⁴ If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it. ¹⁵ If you love me, you will keep my commandments. ¹⁶ And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. ¹⁷ This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you."

[²⁵ "I have said these things to you while I am still with you. ²⁶ But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. ²⁷ Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid."]

Sermon by Bishop Jon Anderson

Grace to you and peace, sisters and brothers called, gathered, enlightened, and sanctified by the work of God's Holy Spirit. Grace to you and peace. Amen.

Where have you seen the presence and work of God's Holy Spirit in your life? I remember something that happened in a hospital in Houston, Texas, some thirty years ago. Before I tell you about it, I want to set the stage.

How you think about God...and life...really matters. It's like how you mat and frame a painting determines what you see first and how you see the same painting. If you mat with blue, you see the blues in the painting, and dark colors. If you mat with white, you see the light colors first and the painting's meaning changes.

How you frame or mat your life matters. I want to encourage you to look for and see the presence and work of God's Spirit at work in your life, your congregations, your church body, and our world. What has God been up to in your life? What has God been up to in your congregation and community? The question gets you looking for God's presence and noticing new things.

If we imagine God to be the foundation of the world, then everything that is in this world somehow is God's will. That theology worked until the holocaust and other genocides of this last century unfolded. How can we blame God for those human actions, and those in our world now, or our life? If you imagine God is out in front of history pulling us toward God's future, that changes everything. If you imagine God's Spirit to be active in the midst of life, inspiring, turning us around, stopping us in our tracks, that is different than imagining God is the "unmoved mover" god of the ancient philosophy.

If we imagine God willing to create and continuing to create in our lives and in God's world, it changes how we live. If we imagine Jesus' Spirit being present and guiding us...guiding everything...it changes how we act. If we understand God through our encounters with Jesus in scripture, then we know God wants to heal and not destroy. Then we know God longs to redeem those who are lost. Then we know God longs to set loose the Gospel that God is for us and with us. Because of Jesus and the ongoing work of God's Spirit through Christian history, we know we have a resurrecting, forgiving, and healing God who will never let us go from God's baptismal claim that we are one of God's children. We believe God has sent "**the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, [who] will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you.**"

Today we celebrate the work and presence of God's Spirit. God is not stuck back in history, but living. God is moving us and calling us into God's future. Our lesson today contains Jesus' promise to send an advocate to walk with us as a counselor. In the ancient language it is a paraclete, one called to stand at the side and advise us. We know this also as the Holy Spirit. Jesus keeps this promise. The Spirit helps us understand when Jesus suffers, dies, and is raised to new life. The Holy Spirit reminds us of the deep truth that God is not against us, but rather for us.

God is with us. Because we know this, life itself or the life of our congregation is more than a Darwinian battle for the survival of fittest. Life is more than a seething struggle to get to the top of the mountain and stay there until you are dragged down by someone else. Because of Jesus, we don't think about life that way. We don't live that story. Instead, we live in the Story of Jesus. God sent Jesus to live in our midst and teach us what we need to know about God and about our self. God sent Jesus to share what we need to know about our mysterious and amazing God. God sent Jesus to give us the gifts of the sacraments and to call us to follow Jesus.

While we want to slide into thinking that God wants to primarily relate to us personally or our congregation, God's work and vision for this world are bigger than being our household idol or our community's ATM. God is at work throughout creation, redeeming people and working throughout God's Church in a great network that sustains life and shares Christ's message. The Spirit guides our work to teach everything Christ has commanded. God's Holy Spirit is at work in our life, our church, and in it all growing gracious disciples who live out their sacramental everyday spirituality.

Your congregation serves as a tool of God to support God's work of growing gracious sacramental disciples. It may not live forever, but its impact goes way beyond its life.

There are a lots of forces impacting congregations and our synod. Like glaciers, they are changing how we do church. God's Holy Spirit is working in the midst of our lives and our life together calling people to live out their everyday callings and deepen their spirituality. Instead of imagining church to be a herd of people who get together to be able to afford to pay a pastor to do our ministry, God creates churches to equip the disciples to live out their faith and lives of ministry every day. Instead of having a spectator spirituality...a performative spirituality depending on your pastors...we are being called by God into a participatory, everyday spirituality that we take on our daily mission trips and live out the ministry to which our baptism calls each of us.

There are beautiful stories I could share from across your synod. I love it when I hear about things like what Pastor Jeff Greathouse does as part of your campus ministry at Southwest State. He has a weekly "Question Post." He posts a question on the post and invites people to share their responses. He is flipping the model from pastor as expert to pastor as curious participant in the journey of life. He wants to hear questions of young adults to better know his mission field and to build relationships. See how that positions the pastor as a theological coach and equipper...a player coach in the midst of the community and work of sharing the Good News of God's Spirit and Christ's resurrecting love?

It is a challenging time to be the church. While we forget to look for God's tracks and hands at work, God does not forget you and me. Because our living God can redeem broken and messed-up people through the work of the Spirit, there is hope. If our living God can raise Jesus from the dead after his tortured and crushed body was buried, there is hope. Because God's Holy Spirit is working in our lives, congregations, communities, and world, we have continued to be surprised by God's gifts of grace.

The Third Article of the Apostles' Creed begins, "*I believe in the Holy Spirit...*" Do you remember its meaning in the Small Catechism? Did you get to memorize it? What is this? Or what does this mean? *I believe that by my own understanding or strength I cannot believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to*

him, but instead the Holy Spirit has called me through the gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, made me holy and kept me in the true faith, just as he calls, gathers, enlightens, and makes holy the whole Christian church on earth and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one common, true faith."

As our Gospel points out, the problem is that we want to make our own commandments and do what we want to do. The Good News is that God sends the Holy Spirit to be at our side, like a lawyer when we are in trouble. God's Spirit shows up like a coach who can help us become what we are meant to be. God is our parent who will never give up on us. An advocate...counselor...the Holy Spirit is like the person who ran alongside you as you learned to ride a bike. The Holy Spirit is like the nurses, aides, and doctors who walked with us as Robyn was treated for breast cancer and my father recently died.

What is your favorite image for the work of the Holy Spirit?

God works like the nurses who walked with us during the birth of our three children. I especially remember the first ones. They were strong, courageous, wise people who knew the path we did not know. They cared for us and they coached Robyn on when to push and when to rest. They stood alongside her.

But my favorite image of the presence and work of the Spirit of God was the sudden urge Robyn had to push that was so primal and powerful on the day our first child, Laura, was born. God's living Holy Spirit called her to bring a new life into this world with a power and urgency that was beyond my understanding. God's Holy Spirit is at our side as individuals and communities doing the same thing. God's Holy Spirit calls us to push, pull, work, and rest. God guides us as we live out our many callings and practice our everyday spirituality. God's Holy Spirit is encouraging us in the midst of pain and the labor of God bringing God's future into our life and our lives together even when we don't think we can handle anything more. God's Spirit calls forth the new creations we cannot imagine and guides our faithful innovations that transform patterns and practices to serve the gospel in our time and in the days to come.

Luther said the Holy Spirit calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies us...and so much more. Keep your eyes open today for the ongoing work of the Christ's Holy Spirit. The Spirit is at your side...our side. Keep your eyes open to see what God is bringing to life in our midst.



Southwestern Minnesota Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.