

One of the great dangers that we have in our world today especially as Christians is to make the Gospel into something less than what it is. I think the way that we do this fairly frequently is by making the Gospel basically about one Person of the Trinity, so that the other two have virtually nothing to do with regard to it. And this can happen in any number of ways. We could make a Gospel of the Father only, so to speak, by making it only about believing in God in some vague sense. That as long as you believe in God, that's all that really matters, and it doesn't matter what you believe beyond that. We don't need Jesus to get to heaven. It just becomes a matter of faith. But that's obviously not the Gospel, is it? Because we're missing something. We're missing what the Son has done, and we're also missing what the Holy Spirit does as well. But we can also have a Gospel of the Son only. I think this is a real temptation for us as Lutherans, to have a gospel which is only about Jesus and what he has done and making him do absolutely everything, so that he has to twist the Father's arm to forgive us and so that the Holy Spirit ends up doing, well, nothing at all. And then we start to wonder when we get to a passage like John chapter 16 what Jesus is talking about when he talks about the coming of the Helper, the coming of the Holy Spirit. So it's not just about the Son either. Now of course, there is another danger of making it only about the Holy Spirit, a Gospel that's all about power and miracles, but I don't think that's our danger for today. Our danger, I think, is making too much of the other ones, so that the Holy Spirit is left with nothing to do. And so to understand the Gospel, Christians, we have to understand how all three of the Persons of the Trinity are involved in the Gospel: the Father who so loved us that he sent his only Son; the Son who has given himself so that we would be saved; and also the Holy Spirit who speaks to us, who gives us life, and who keeps us in that life. When we understand all three of them together, then we will understand the Gospel of God.

But when we come to try to understand how the Spirit works in the Gospel, we first have to understand something about who he is. And I think that's the most important thing to say right off the bat. He is a "who." He is a "he." He is the third Person of the Trinity. Sometimes we get this weird notion that the Holy Spirit is just God's life or some vague notion that we have of God, but he is more than that. He is the third Person of the Trinity as much God as the Father and the Son, because we meet him throughout all of Scripture. Right from the very beginning when he was there at the creation, hovering over the face of the deep like a bird hovering in the sky. We also meet the Holy Spirit throughout all of the Old Testament when he spoke through the prophets, giving them the very words of God so that they could bring it to God's people. And we meet the Holy Spirit also in the New Testament. The things that he does like descending like a dove at Jesus's baptism, driving Jesus out into the wilderness, or even when he comes down at Pentecost like fire to begin the work of the Church. Yes, Christians, the Holy Spirit, the third Person of the Trinity, is fully God, and he is fully involved with our salvation. He is coming to us even today in the Word and in the sacraments to bring us that new life.

And so when we come here in John chapter 16, we have a small glimpse of the Holy Spirit's work. Because Jesus says he speaks to us and tells us the things that he has heard, heard from the Son and heard from the Father so that whenever we hear the voice of God in the Scriptures, we are hearing the voice of the Holy Spirit. The Scriptures themselves were written by the Spirit. As Peter says that men did not speak of their own accord or having their own interpretations, but they were carried along by the Holy Spirit, so that every word that we hear in the Scriptures is in fact his voice.

But what is that message that the Holy Spirit is proclaiming to us? What is it that he has to say? The first thing that he says to us is a word of judgment, because if we did not have that word of judgment, we would not know what it means to sin. This is why Jesus says that "When the Helper comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment. Concerning sin, because they do not believe in me." The Holy Spirit teaches us that we are sinners. The Holy Spirit teaches us through the Word that we need to be saved. And he also shows the whole world that they have fallen short of the

glory of God. If we are here today, Christians, believing in God, it is because the Spirit has first shown us our need for God and shown the world of their need for God. But the Holy Spirit also convicts the world concerning righteousness, because Jesus goes to the Father and you will see him no longer. To understand this, we have to understand what Jesus is talking about. This is what Paul says, that he is being vindicated by the Spirit. By which he means, the world had said all kinds of nasty things against Jesus, calling him a liar, calling him a sinner, saying that he was not the Son of God. But when Jesus rose on the third day, the Holy Spirit proved that he was in fact telling the truth. He proved that Jesus was the Son of God, because only God could rise from the dead. And therefore, because the Holy Spirit has proven this to the world, it shows the world that they were wrong about Jesus to their everlasting shame. But Jesus also says that he will convict the world concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged. By which he means, the Holy Spirit speaks the great message of the Gospel, the message that Satan has been defeated, that death has been crushed underfoot. The ruler of this world has been judged. His judgment is sure, and he can never go back. Jesus has won, and that is the message that the Holy Spirit proclaims to you this day.

But the Holy Spirit does not only speak a word of judgment. The Holy Spirit also speaks to you this day the word of life. That's why we call him the Giver of life in the creed, the one who has brought you to faith in the first place. We have the Word of God, the living voice of the Holy Spirit, and that Word is life and truth. So you are here today, Christians, you are here because of the Holy Spirit, because he has spoken to you and given you that life. As we know from our catechism days in the book of Titus, the Holy Spirit is also involved in our baptism, because when we have put on Christ, we were washed in that Holy Spirit. You have been made holy in the Holy Spirit. He is the one who has made you a Christian in the first place. He's not just there, hanging off in the distance, wondering what he's supposed to do! He is the one who has made you a Christian this day, and he is the one who will keep you being a Christian as well.

Because that's also what the Holy Spirit does for us. He keeps us in that faith so that we continue to believe in Christ. As Paul says in Romans, the Holy Spirit prays with us in our hearts so that we are able to cry "Abba! Father!" The very reason that you continue in faith is because of his work and because of the things that he has done for you. Yes, dear Christians, the Holy Spirit is active in the Gospel, because we live in the age of the Spirit, the great joyful age when all who call on the name of the Lord will be saved. The work of the Spirit goes on even now in his Church, so that we are here today receiving his Word, receiving his gifts, and being built up in that same Spirit.

So dear Christians, remember: the Gospel is not just about one person of the Trinity at the expense of the other two. It's not just the Gospel of the Father. It's not just the Gospel of the Son. Nor is it just the Gospel of the Spirit. But the Father who loves you has sent his Son and his Spirit to save you. The Son who loves you has become one of us so that we would be delivered from sin. And the Holy Spirit who also loves you has spoken to you a word of life and made you a Christian so that you are in him forever. The Gospel of God is the work of God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Now to the Holy Spirit, the active and living fire of Pentecost, together with the Father and the Son, be all glory, honor, and worship, now and forever. Amen.