

In the gymnasium of the Seminary, there is a stained-glass window. In the middle of the window sits a picture of two men from the day of Pentecost with a small flame resting above them. As I sat there during call service I wondered for a moment if I was going to see small, faint tongues of fire over those of us who were receiving calls that day. I wonder if any of the pastors that are here today have thought the same thing. Now of course, I realized it wasn't going to be the case. Those tongues of fire that came over the people on Pentecost was a special occasion to tell the Church that Christ's promise to send the HS was fulfilled. Our reading for today is part of that promise. Today our Savior tells us that the Spirit comes: to us and through us.

Our reading comes from Jesus' last discourse with his disciples. They had just celebrated the Passover together, Jesus had instituted the Lord's supper, he had predicted Judas' betrayal and Peter's denial. This was the last time Jesus would have an opportunity to instruct his disciples before his suffering and death. And even in the face of this great suffering, Jesus takes time to instruct his disciples and offer them comfort. He was preparing them for his death. He was also preparing them for their ministries as well. Our reading comes right in between two sections where Jesus speaks of how the world is going to hate them and persecute them. As the disciples went out to teach about the good news of Jesus, they were going to face opposition: they would be hated, kicked out of the synagogues, and even killed. But Jesus gives them an assurance, he gives them a promise. **“When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father—the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father—he will testify about me.”**

Jesus promised his disciples that the HS was going to be sent to them from the Father. This promise was more than just a wish. This was something Jesus promised, stating it as something that was going to happen. And it did happen. We see it happen on Pentecost. The disciples and believers were all gathered together when the HS came down and they were filled with him. They heard the wind and saw the flames as physical indications that the gift Jesus had promised had come. The Advocate did testify to the disciples. They were reminded of everything that Jesus had spoken and done in front of them. They were convinced by the Advocate that those things were all true. That conviction is seen in Peter's speech to the crowds when he proclaimed the message of Jesus to any who could hear him.

Now the name Jesus gives the HS is very interesting. The translation that we are using translates it as “Advocate.” I'd like to give you a different meaning. If you were to pick the word apart in the Greek, you'd get a meaning like this: “someone who calls to their side.” This person is someone who calls another over to help them, whether that be to defend them, comfort them, give them support in a legal case. This person is a “helper.” No matter what kind of spot you're in, this “helper” will be there for you. That's what the HS is. But maybe I can give another illustration to talk about the HS. When I think of someone calling me over to his side, I think of a coach. And just like a coach the HS calls a person over to his side. He teaches him the things he needs to know. The HS teaches or as Jesus says, “testifies” to a person, and creates faith in the heart of a believer. The HS convinces a person of the work of Jesus and gives them the ability to testify to others.

That “cycle” if you will, started with the disciples. Jesus sent the HS, the Helper, the Spirit of Truth, to his disciples. The HS coached them, teaching them everything about Jesus and reminded them of what Jesus had said and done. They then went out and testified to others about the work of Christ. In turn, the HS came on them and so on.

That cycle has now come to you and me. The Spirit has come to you and me. He testified to you and me through the means of grace. And how thankful we are that he did. There was no way we could have come to God of our own accord. We were in a serious situation. You and I were lost in our sin. No matter which way we went, time and time again we found ourselves enveloped by our sinful nature. We kept doing wrong in every aspect of our life. And deep down we could feel it. We could feel those wrongs in our life constantly accusing us. There was nothing we could do to make up for those wrongs. Those wrongs, those sins would have earned us a terrible punishment. A punishment in which there is no relief. All that is there is constant agony and suffering. There is no rest, there is no release from pain. But the HS our Helper called us over to his side. He taught us and brought us to

faith in the one who took that punishment away from us. That Helper testified to us the sacrificial work of Christ. He testified that Christ lived a perfect life for us, he suffered for our sake and took all of our sins upon himself. He took our punishment and gave to us his reward. That reward is an eternal paradise in heaven, where there is no pain, there is no suffering. There is only joy and happiness.

The HS testifies to us that we are God's children. But now as we carry that status, the devil wants to take that away from us. He works overtime, trying to make us turn away from what has been testified to us. On the one hand, he tries to get us to doubt the Spirit's testimony. He wants you and me to think that there is no hope for us. He wants you to think that your sins are too great, that you messed up way too much for God to ever forgive someone like you. On the other hand, he tries to use pride to take us down. He wants you to become so sure that you are saved because you are such a great person, and so deserving of the grace of God. But the HS, The Spirit of Truth, reminds us and convinces us of what is true: Christ's death was done out of the love and grace of God. You and I did nothing to deserve it. You and I were unable to do anything. But Christ came down and did what we couldn't. And what he did was a one-time sacrifice. Christ's death covers over every sin. There are no if's, and's, or but's about it. Christ has made us all at peace with God. The Spirit comes to us and assures us of that.

So now, after Jesus has given a promise, he now gives a mission. The disciples were given this mission directly. Jesus said, "**And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning.**" The disciples had been with Jesus from the start of his earthly ministry. They had witnessed his miracles, they heard his teachings, they would see him die, they would see him resurrected, and they would see him ascended. The Spirit was sent to them and convinced them of everything they had seen and heard, and now Jesus tells them to testify. The disciples carried out that command. Not just because they had to, they could not help but spread the word of their Savior. That mission started on Pentecost. On that day Peter testified to the whole crowd watching him. From that witness, 3000 people came to faith. This day would mark the beginning of the New Testament Church. From there, the disciples would dedicate themselves to bringing that word to the ends of the earth.

On that day we saw a full rotation of the HS-cycle. The "Coach" had given his players all the training that they needed, then he sent them out to teach others. But the HS was still with them. He was the one that was speaking through the disciples. He gave them comfort, knowing that he was the one doing the actual talking and the working of the heart. It was not by the disciples' own power that people were converted. And so the HS came through the disciples and to the people who heard their testimony. And in turn, all of those people went to their homes and testified there.

That cycle has continued to now. The Spirit has testified to us, and now it is our turn to testify. And what a wonderful message it is. What a wonderful personal testimony we have to give to those who are still suffering under the guilt of their sin. It's now our mission to carry that testimony to others. But there are some things that get in the way of that mission. I find it quite interesting how parallel the accounts of the tower of Babel and the Day of Pentecost are. There are people all gathered together in one place, God comes down, God causes people to speak in different languages, and there is a dispersal of people. Now in the tower of Babel story, the reason the people are gathered together is because of pride and disobedience. They did not want to follow God's command to spread out over the whole earth but rather wanted to build a tower to their own greatness. In a way, don't we fall guilty to the "sin of Babel." We worry too much about what's going on in our own personal spiritual lives, we spend all our time looking upward thinking, "Well the church is here, they'll see it and they'll come in. It's their fault if they don't." Now for some of you, that may not be the case and you may say, "Well, Caleb, it's easy for you to talk about testifying, that's what you are trained to do. I'm not trained to speak, what if I mess up and say something dumb, or worse what if I am mocked or persecuted because I say something."

Now I'll give you the fact that I'm being trained to do this. But allow me to respond with a little personal memoir. Oh man, it must have been 14 or 15 years ago now. I was playing little league baseball, and I was speaking to a teammate who went to the same church. Another kid overheard us and asked me what Christian is. Now we were about to run out for the start of the game so I told him,

“Oh you’ll learn eventually.” I didn’t want to take the time to explain when we had a game to play, I also was worried because I didn’t think I could accurately describe to him what he wanted to know. And you know what. I regret that moment to this day. What if he never did learn? What if he never cared enough to look into it? How is someone supposed to believe in someone if they have not heard? God could use some other special means to spread the gospel, but he doesn’t. He’s given us the task to carry it out. I once heard a pastor explain this to me. If hell were only as half as bad as the Bible says it is, or if heaven was half as good as the Bible says it is, wouldn’t you still want to go to heaven instead of hell? Wouldn’t you still want to bring people away from hell to be with you in heaven? God has given us the mission to “**Go** and make disciples of all nations.” But you know what? We are not bringing our own message. We’re bringing God’s message. That message is the story of a loving God, who came into this world to take away our sins. He so desperately wants the people of the world to be brought to his side, that he took the punishments that we deserved and suffered it in our place. He has sent his Spirit down to convince us that this is true. And that message and conviction compel us to bring testimony to the world. The Spirit testifies through us, working faith in the hearts of those who are hearing our message. And what a comfort that is. It’s not by my power or by how well I present God’s Word to someone. It is God’s Word itself that has the power. So I can go up to someone and tell them that Jesus is their Savior, not constantly worrying about how I need to say something perfectly, but convinced of the message and convinced of the power of that message. And if in my whole lifetime of testifying, only one person comes to faith in Christ...that’s good enough for me

Our testimony does not have to be a grandiose sermon to a stadium full of people, it does not have to be a lifelong missionary journey through the Mediterranean coast. It can be a simple mention to a friend or family member. It can be the way you speak to your coworkers that get them wondering why you talk that way. It can be the way you act in your community, getting people to ask why you walk around so happy all the time, why you carry yourself the way that you do. And you can do it being confident that it is not through your power that those people are going to be brought faith, but the HS who comes through you working faith in their hearts and testifying in their hearts about the good news of Jesus.

Sometimes when I look out over a congregation as I’m standing up here or sitting in the pews, I hope that I can catch a glimpse of fire above the heads of everyone sitting here. I know it’s not going to happen. I know we won’t have tongues of fire on our heads. But what I do know is that I don’t need those tongues of fire to know that the Spirit comes. I know he comes to us giving us and convincing us of the message of Christ. And what a wonderful message that is. How wonderful it is to know that as we carry out that message to others, the Spirit comes through us, convincing others of the wonderful message of their loving Savior. Amen.