

**MINISTRY BY MAIL**  
**Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship**  
[www.lutheranlccf.org](http://www.lutheranlccf.org)  
**Fourth Sunday in Lent, March 18, 2012**

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 234, 226:1, 236, 229, 235:1-2.

Lessons: Genesis 15:1-6, 1 John 2:1-17, John 14:10-31a.

Sermon Text: John 14:15-17, John 14:26, John 15:26, John 16:7.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

We would not be here if it were not for the work of the Holy Spirit, also called the Holy Ghost. In the creed we confessed that we believe in the Holy Ghost.

We know, as Luther teaches us from the Scriptures, that “I cannot by my own thinking or choosing believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to him. But The Holy Ghost has called me by the Gospel.” It is in the Gospel that we learn of God’s grace, that is, his undeserved love and mercy.

The means by which God brings his grace to us is the Gospel as it is found in the Word and in the Sacraments. People hear that Word of God and that works faith. ***“Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.”*** (Romans 10:17) Infants are brought to God by believing parents to receive the sacrament of holy baptism. Baptism works faith, also by power of the Word of God.

We also learn from Luther’s Small Catechism that “Baptism is not just plain water, but it is water used by God’s command and connected with God’s Word. **Which is that Word of God?** Christ Our Lord says in the last chapter of Matthew, ***“Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit!”***

We also learned: **“WHAT DOES BAPTISM DO FOR US?** Baptism works forgiveness of sin, delivers from death and the devil and gives eternal salvation to all who believe this, as the words and promises of God declare. **What is God’s promise?** Christ our Lord says in the last chapter of Mark, ***“Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.”***

We also know that “It is certainly not the water that does such things, but God’s Word which is in and with the water, and faith which trusts this Word used with the water. For without God’s Word the water is just plain water and not Baptism. But with the Word it is Baptism. God’s Word makes it a washing through which God graciously forgives our sin and grants us rebirth and a new life through the Holy Spirit.”

The Holy Spirit is the one responsible. Today let’s review what the Holy Scriptures have to say about

**THE “COUNSELOR”, THE “COMFORTER”, THE HOLY GHOST, THE HOLY SPIRIT**

- 1. How does the Holy Ghost come to men?**
- 2. Jesus promised to send Him.**
- 3. He has come – and still comes to us**

How does God come to you? How does God come to anyone today, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

On the same night in which he was betrayed, the evening we call Maundy Thursday, Jesus was gathered with his apostles in the Upper Room. After Judas Iscariot left to fulfill the terrible prophecy of Jesus’ betrayal, Jesus talked at length to his disciples and prayed fervently for them in their presence. This is recorded in John chapters 13 through 17. Among the words he left with them was a promise, repeated three more times, to send the “Counselor”, called the “Comforter” in the King James Version of the Bible, that is, the Holy Ghost or the Holy Spirit.

Here is the first of those promises: *"If you love me, you will obey what I command. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever – the Spirit of truth."* (John 14:15-16)

Love is an essential idea in the words of Jesus recorded in these chapters. He speaks of God loving us and giving us the command to love one another and to show that love. Those who believe in Jesus will love him, and that love will show itself. Believers pay careful attention to Jesus' commands and observe them. If we love Jesus, we will do the things he has told us to do. Our works will be the evidence of our faith and love for Jesus. God's love for us and our fulfilling God's command of love is repeated throughout John's Gospel and his three epistles.

Jesus makes it clear that he will ask the Father and the Father will do what he asks – to give another Counselor besides Christ himself, a Comforter to be with his disciples on earth until the end of time.

This Counselor, the Helper, the Comforter, is the Holy Spirit. He made his presence known in a very public way on Pentecost, when the disciples of Jesus heard the sound of a mighty rushing wind – but there was no wind. The disciples saw tongues like fire resting on their heads – but they were not burned. Many believers were given the special gift of speaking in languages they had never learned so that they could tell foreigners the good news about Jesus Christ. This gift was apparently given more than once in the early days of what we call the New Testament church. But the same Holy Spirit also caused the Word of God to be written down by the apostles and evangelists so that direct intervention of the Holy Spirit to bring someone to faith is not necessary today. Through the written Word of God, the Holy Spirit is on earth until the end of time.

And most importantly, the Holy Ghost entered into the hearts of believers, working faith in them, sanctifying them, and leading them into God's truth. In this way every believer still receives the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

To talk about the work of the Holy Ghost today, we look to Luther's explanation of the Third Article of the Apostles' Creed in which we confess "the Holy Spirit has called me by the gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith." He does that for everyone who believes, that is, for everyone who through faith then becomes a member of the Holy Christian Church, the Communion of Saints. We call that the invisible church on earth, for all those and only those who believe are members of that invisible Holy Christian Church.

But the Holy Ghost does more for us: "In this Christian church he daily and fully forgives all sins to me and all believers. On the Last Day he will raise me and all the dead and give eternal life to me and all believers in Christ." Daily, as we search the Scriptures, we are reminded of the forgiveness of our sins. And the Holy Spirit is with us forever – along with the eternal life he gives us.

Jesus tells us this about the Holy Spirit: *"The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you."* (John 14:17)

The Holy Spirit is unknown to the unbelieving world. He comes to mankind through the Word of God, the Bible. This idea fulfills the second mention of the Holy Spirit in our sermon texts: *"But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you."* (John 14:26) In the written Word of God, we are reminded of everything God wants us to know, and we can read it again and again.

How is it that the Holy Spirit will be with us forever? The Holy Ghost not only teaches us once, but he wrote down what he wants to teach us. In doing this, the Holy Ghost gave us the Bible, as explained in 2 Peter 1:21 (King James Version) *"For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost."* Hear that passage again in its context, this time from the New International Version: *"And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit."* (2 Peter 1:19-21 NIV) This is an explanation of what we call verbal inspiration.

And it is that Word of God which works faith. Paul write this to Timothy: *"But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it,*

*and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:14-16).*

The Scriptures, the Word of God, given through the Holy Spirit, are the only way mankind can be made wise unto salvation, as we heard previously from Romans 10:17: **"Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ."** The Holy Ghost works faith through the word of Christ in baptism.

What happens if an infant isn't fed? He will die. What will happen to an infant who is baptized but isn't fed spiritual food? He will starve and die spiritually. If someone's faith is not fed, that faith will wither and die. And the result of that is eternal death in hell.

Jesus also said: **"But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you."** (John 16:7) Jesus had to go away – in the next 24 hours he must be put on trial, mocked, spit on, beaten, scorned, and crucified. Then he will die, and be buried. That is the first time he goes away. He went away – he was dead, in the tomb for three days.

But of course, you know that wasn't the end for Jesus. The third day he rose again from the dead, ascended into heaven and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From thence – from there – he shall come to judge the quick – that is, the living – and the dead.

Forty days after he rose from the dead he left earth permanently, to ascend bodily into heaven. During that time he was teaching his followers – even more than 500 at one time, Saint Paul says. But after those forty days he was no longer physically, bodily with his followers on earth. And that is where his promise of the Holy Spirit is so essential. The Holy Spirit gave many special gifts ten days later, on Pentecost.

It is because Jesus did all these things that we have any hope at all. It is because he did these things that we have the hope and assurance of eternal life. Baptism works faith because it is water used by God's command and connected with God's Word. Hearing the Word of God works faith. In all that we see the gracious working of the Holy Spirit.

May the Word of God – all the words the Holy Spirit gave us – not only assure us of eternal life, but may it feed us every day! Amen.