

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

We are Lutherans and not Pentecostals. Some might even say that we are not Pentecost people at all. Yet here we are today celebrating Pentecost, the coming of the Holy Spirit fifty days after Jesus' resurrection. Today we celebrate the "*sending [of] the promise of [the] Father upon*" the disciples, arraying them "*with power from on high*" (Luke 24:49). Today we rejoice at the establishment of the New Testament church.

Still the accusation is common. After all, we Lutherans don't talk about the baptism of the Holy Spirit; we don't speak in tongues; we don't handle snakes; we don't use poison as a sign of our faith (Mark 16:17). "*For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified ... Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.*" (1 Cor. 1:22-24). Again, "*I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified*" (1 Cor. 2:2).

That's not to say that we have a Spirit-less theology. Not at all. In fact, I claim that our Reformation theology is a Spirit theology. You've heard about the three "*Solas*" of the Reformation: *Sola Scriptura*, *Sola Gratia*, *Sola Fide*. These three encapsulate much of the Reformation emphasis. And although they weren't grouped together as "The Three Principles of the Reformation" (Prof. Theodore Engelder) until the 20th century, they do reflect its theology, and it is a Spirit theology. In fact, noticing what seems to be a lack of Christ in these principles, people who followed added to them, adding "*Solus Christus*," Christ alone, and even later the "*Soli Deo Gloria*" that J. S. Bach appended to his works, To God alone be glory. Unnecessary. The three *Solas* are Spirit theology, but they are plenty Christ-centered.

So, let's consider these three: first *Sola Scriptura* — Scripture alone. Scripture itself bears witness to its Spiritual character. St. Peter says, "*men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit*" (2 Pet. 1:21). And St. Paul teaches us that "*All Scripture is breathed out by God*" (2 Tim. 3:16) — they're inspired. Moreover, there is a Spiritual purpose in mind for Scripture. St. John the Evangelist testifies: "*these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name*" (John 20:31). Again St. Paul says, "*the sacred writings ... are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus*" (2 Tim. 3:15).

Of course, if Scripture alone is a Reformation principle, what is it seeking to reform? What does it stand in opposition to? Anything and everything that tries to add to it: tradition, natural law, human reason — all useful things of themselves, but things that can be set above Scripture or used against the Word of God. Jesus warns us: "*why do you break the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition? ... for the sake of your tradition you have made void the word of God*"

(Matt. 15:3, 6). St. Paul similarly warns: “*See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ*” (Col. 2:8).

These Scriptures point us to Jesus for our salvation, and they point us to the fact that our salvation is *Sola Fide* — by faith alone. And as a Reformation principle, *Sola Fide* stands in opposition to our own works as a contributor to salvation. You know the passages: at Reformation time we often rehearse them. From Romans 3(:28): “*we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law.*” Or from Ephesians 2(:8-9): “*For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.*” This is how we confess it as Lutherans: “Our churches teach that people cannot be justified before God by their own strength, merits, or works. People are freely justified for Christ’s sake, through faith, when they believe that they are received into favor and that their sins are forgiven for Christ’s sake” (Augsburg Confession, IV:1-2). This is Lutheran theology.

And it is a Spiritual theology for the Holy Spirit is at work in bringing forth faith. For the Augsburg Confession goes on to say, “So that we may obtain this faith, the ministry of teaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments was instituted. Through the Word and Sacraments, as through instruments, the Holy Spirit is given [John 20:22]. He works faith, when and where it pleases God [John 3:8], in those who hear the good news” (AC, V, 1-2). Or you remember how we confess it in Luther’s explanation to the 3rd Article of the Creed: “I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me ..., enlightened me ..., sanctified and kept me in the true faith.” For St. Paul says as he preached Christ crucified: “*my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God*” (1 Cor. 2:4-5). And again, “*no one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except in the Holy Spirit*” (1 Cor. 12:3).

The Scriptures and our Confessions also bear witness that this faith comes as a gift through means. Against this Reformation principle is the idea that we’re not all that bad, that we in some ways deserve eternal life, that we, in fact, can keep the law and save ourselves. What a delusion, for the Spirit bears witness through the law that we are unrighteous sinners, every one (Rom. 3:10ff); the Spirit bears witness that “*the wages of sin is death,*” and eternal life is “*the free gift of God ... in Christ Jesus our Lord*” (Rom. 6:23); the Spirit bears witness that regardless how good we might think we are, we fall short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23). Our salvation depends totally on God’s grace: we are “*justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith*” (Rom. 3:24-25). *Sola Gratia*, Grace alone!

Moreover, the Scriptures bear witness that since we are born “*dead in our trespasses,*” we must be “*made ... alive together with Christ—by grace [we] have been saved.*” This is the work of the Spirit, the Lord and Giver of Life. This is the work of the Spirit, the Helper, the One sent from the Father to “*teach [us] all things and bring to [our] remembrance all that [He has] said to [us]*” through the Evangelists and Apostles. Our theology is a Spirit theology. As we confess, “we should be certain about and agree with the promise that God’s Word preached and heard is *truly* an office and work of the Holy Spirit. He is certainly effective and works in our hearts by [that Word]” (Formula of Concord, SD, II, 56).

In this way, the Spirit worked on the hearts of the people gathered in Jerusalem and heard Peter’s preaching on Pentecost: “*Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, ... this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. [But] God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it*” (Acts 2:22-24). “*Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified*” (Acts 2:36). And “*they were cut to the heart*” (Acts 2:37). They were called to repentance and baptism. They received forgiveness of sins.

In Holy Baptism, too, that rebirth “*of water and the Spirit*” (John 3:5), the Holy Spirit is at work, as Peter proclaims: “*Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit*” (Acts. 2:38). And in the Lord’s Supper, as the “*Spirit-recalled*” words of institution are spoken over bread and wine, Christ is carried on the wind to the altar, there to unite His body and blood to bread and wine, there to convey forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation.

Indeed, we are compelled to agree with Luther. Our theology is a Spirit theology; the other theologies — our critics — are counterfeits. Luther says, “*Therefore, we must constantly maintain this point: God does not want to deal with us in any other way than through the spoken Word and the Sacraments. Whatever is praised as from the Spirit, without the Word and Sacraments, is the devil himself*” (Smalcald Articles, III, VIII, 10). And we know this is right, for the Spirit was sent to “*bear witness to [Christ]*” (John 15:26), and to “*teach us all things*” regarding Christ, our Lord. He was sent to call us by the Gospel, enlighten us with His gifts, sanctify and keep us in the true faith. That’s Reformation theology, and it’s true Spirit theology. *Sola Scriptura, Sola Gratia, Sola Fide*. That’s the Pentecost that we live out every day and all year as Christ-centered Lutheran.

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