

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, and from the Holy Spirit, our Comforter, Helper, and witness of the Truth. Amen.

As many of you know, my wife and I will be traveling back to Ghana this coming Tuesday. After being back here for 14 months, we will have to reacquaint ourselves with the surroundings especially in light of the Covid Pandemic. There is one thing that we will never forget, no matter how long we are away. That is the large colorful signs advertising "Prophetic Healing Services." It is true that these services randomly take place throughout the year but, it seems that every Reformed church has them on Easter Friday, as the Ghanaians refer to it, or as we commonly refer to it – Good Friday. On the billboard there is always some sharply dressed man or woman designated as a prophet or prophetess pictured with a caption, such as "*Don't miss the Miracle Night of Wonder, Spirit and Blessings!*" Unfortunately, many Ghanaians are always in search of the Wonder of the Spirit, who will bestow upon them the blessings that will shower their lives with wealth and wash away their poverty. The prophets and prophetesses are always eager to welcome the crowds and, for a mere 20 Cedes, they can walk away with a blessed bottle of water that will bring them worldly blessings and peace beyond their expectations.

It appears that those "Prophetic Healing Services" desire to recreate that which took place in Jerusalem when the disciples "*were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.*" (Acts 2:1-4)

On that first Pentecost day, there were truly miraculous signs at which the people wondered. Peter stood up, gave a sermon, 3,000 people of different languages believed and were baptized. These events were truly eye-catching, but no one has ever been able to recreate it.

There are Christians in all parts of the world that are like the many Ghanaians, who are misled by teachers and self-proclaimed prophets who say they can recapture the wonders of that first Pentecost. They will even argue that, unless you have received the Holy Spirit in a dramatic and visible way, like the apostles, your faith is not genuine, or at least incomplete. This goes against the testimony of God's Word and turns the reception of faith into a self-centered competition of sorts. It becomes a game of "Can-You-Top-This?" among believers, each seeking to have the most spectacular of Spirit-given experiences.

Now, none of us can say with certainty that the Holy Spirit cannot bestow faith upon people in incredible ways, for He is not bound by our thoughts or feelings. Consider Ezekiel's vision in the valley of dry bones, a vision of resurrection from death to new life through the work of the Holy Spirit (Ezek 37:1-14). We know that the Holy Spirit can work when and where He wills—and we confess that biblical doctrine which attributes all this sort of activity to the third person of the

Holy Trinity, *“the Lord and giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son”* (Nicene Creed) culminating in *“the resurrection of the body”* and *“the life everlasting”* (Apostles Creed).

In the days of the apostles, and in the centuries following, the Christian church realized that the power of the Holy Spirit to bring people and keep people in faith did not depend on dramatic outward signs. It depends solely on the power of God, usually working in quiet, humble, and perhaps even in what some would consider boring ways. The power of God is at work in the telling of the story of God’s faithfulness and love in giving His only Son as the sacrifice for our sins, while also in the giving of His grace in water and Word, confession and Word, bread and wine and Word.

Do you see the commonality here? The Word – the **logos** – Christ Himself, made flesh by the Spirit in His mother Mary’s womb. Made visible and available to us in the Scriptures through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Pentecost itself is the fulfillment of a promise from God, a specific promise, one of many made by Jesus to His disciples on the night when He was betrayed. As we see in John’s gospel this morning, Jesus is speaking to those who have been with Him since the beginning of His ministry. He gives them, once again, the promise of the coming of the Holy Spirit and reveals that, part of, the Spirit’s work will be to *“convict the world.”*

We hear this word, *“convict,”* quite often in our national news. Its usage is to declare someone to be guilty of a criminal offense by the verdict of a jury or the decision of a judge in a court of law. Jesus uses the word *“convict”* differently in connection with the work of the Holy Spirit. He says in verse 8, the Holy Spirit, *“will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgement.”* The usage here means the Holy Spirit will show everyone in the world their sin and summon each individual to repentance and guide them *“into all the truth”* (v. 13b).

The Holy Spirit does convict the world of sin, because on account of sin the world does not believe in Jesus. He works through the Law of God, in the Word, as the Law shows us our sin; convincing people that they are guilty of sin before God. Only the Holy Spirit can convict us that we are indeed sinners.

The Holy Spirit convicts the world of righteousness because Jesus goes to His Father. He convinces us that the righteous, sinless Son of God went to His Father by way of the cross. He convinces us that the righteous Savior has suffered for our sins, and now gives us forgiveness and clothes us in His righteousness so that we might be acceptable to God. For it is by the work of the Holy Spirit that the Gospel is proclaimed, forgiveness is given, and faith is strengthened.

The Holy Spirit convicts the world of judgment because the ruler of this world is judged. The devil, the ruler of this world, is already defeated at the cross and sentenced to death-eternal death. All those who refuse the forgiveness won by Christ face the same condemnation. However, those who hear Christ’s message of sin and righteousness and, by the Spirit’s work, believe in Jesus, to them, the Holy Spirit announces forgiveness for the sake of Jesus Christ.

By the grace of God, the Holy Spirit is at work here at Zion, in Ghana, and around the world! He works as we proclaim God's Word, preaching and teaching His Law and His Gospel. The Holy Spirit is at work, here and around the world, working forgiveness of sins, creating and strengthening faith in the Savior, Jesus, in Baptism and the Lord's Supper.

There is no doubt that the Holy Spirit can do incredible and wonderful things like tongues of fire or languages if He desires, but His foremost work is to glorify Jesus and point to Him (16:14).

Thanks be to God, who for the sake of His Son sends His Holy Spirit. For on this day, and each day, the Holy Spirit is at work to convict you that, for Jesus' sake, you are forgiven for all your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

Rev. Dr. S. R. Schumacher