

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen! Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

[Intro]

On the night He was betrayed, Jesus said to His apostles: ***"When the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all the truth"*** (John 16:13a).

Pontius Pilate famously asked Jesus: ***"What is truth?"*** (John 18:38). How would we know truth from fiction? From online fact checkers? From the "Ministry of Truth"?

All too recently, we were told to trust the science. But what happens when the science changes? Do we continually trust the shifting sands? Is truth today considered "fluid"? Is it the nature of truth to change?

So, what is Jesus telling us by saying, ***"When the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all the truth"***? Today on this Fifth Sunday of Easter, Jesus gives us the answer to the question that is still asked today: ***"What is truth?"***

[The Truth is Out There]

As I have said, there are so many questions in regard to truth. Today, truth has undertaken a new meaning: opinion. Today, opinion seems to matter more than fact. Today, opinion has taken center stage to some big questions, such as: When does life begin? Is it just a clump of cells until I say it's life? How do I know my sex or gender? Is it assigned to me, or do I choose? What is a woman? What is a man?

In a world without truth, nothing has meaning. But as the television show *X-Files* proclaims: The truth is out there. It's certainly out there, but where?

How are we to distinguish truth from lies?

To this, Jesus calls the Holy Spirit the Spirit of Truth. He does this to contrast with the spirit of lies – *the devil* – who turns everything on its head: evil is good, good is evil, and truth is exchanged for a lie. Jesus proclaims that the Holy Spirit will teach the apostles and show them that everything He told them is the truth.

Everything Jesus taught is the Truth, for He said, ***“I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Me”*** (John 14:6). Now, many men have told us the truth, but no Man ever embodied it except for Jesus Christ. You see, if a man proposes to teach moral truth, his character makes all the difference in the world. Moral truth cannot be conveyed solely in words; it must be conveyed by example. Many people could say: “I have taught you the truth.” But only Jesus says: “I am the Truth.”

But how did the unbelieving world react to Jesus? They called Him a blasphemer. They called Him a liar. They said He was crazy. They shouted, “Crucify Him!”

What did Jesus say of Paul being His chosen instrument in proclaiming the Gospel? ***“I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of My name”*** (Acts 9:16).

How is this any different from today? It is the fate of every Christian to suffer for the truth because Christ suffered as the Truth. We are to suffer whatever grief the devil and the world can inflict upon us. The question then is: why would anyone want to be a Christian? Who would want to be a Christian if there is guaranteed suffering? Human reason says, “No way!” But the Holy Spirit says otherwise. He is the Spirit of Truth because in spite of what may appear to be suffering – *when we are mocked and ridiculed for speaking God’s Word* – He strengthens and preserves our hearts in the one true faith.

Without the Holy Spirit, no one would have believed in Jesus for any length of time, or would still believe today, that Jesus is the Christ who sits at the right hand of the Father, and who was crucified as a criminal by His own people is the true God.

It is the Holy Spirit who enables us to live and to die by the truth. The Holy Spirit is the guide who leads us into all truth. The Holy Spirit occupies Himself in how to rescue men from sin and death by making them children of God, righteous and heirs of eternal life. The Holy Spirit is about building the kingdom of God and destroying the kingdom of hell. He teaches us how to fight against the devil and overcome him. He gives us comfort, strength, and support to a believing conscience. The Holy Spirit does all of this so we may remain alive in the midst of death and may be able to keep a good conscience even when we are aware of our sins, so that we confess those sins to God our Father and receive reconciliation.

It is certainly necessary to fight and grapple with the devil and sin. Here nothing but eternal things – *eternal life or eternal death* – is at issue. As Baptized Christians, Satan constantly goes after us with all his fury. He wants us to denounce our inheritance as children of the heavenly Father. So, in this life, we are faced with either gaining the victory over the devil and sin by grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone, or being their captives and lost forever.

As Christians, we are opposed by an enemy who is not interested in our temporal knowledge which we possess. No, he struggles and strives to hold our consciences bound in sin and to plague us from the eternal terrors of hell and with despair to drag us down with him from the kingdom of God and from all communion with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and into eternal damnation and the fire of hell. Such battles cannot be fought and such victories cannot be won without the Holy Spirit. Our reason and strength alone get us nowhere, as all temporal things will pass away.

Therefore, let us cling to this truth which the Holy Spirit teaches: how we can retain faith in Christ; tread the devil, sin, and death underfoot; bear and overcome the world's wrath and raging; build God's kingdom and gain eternal life. And where does the Holy Spirit work in us to retain this? It is only through His Means of Grace.

[Holy Spirit in Means of Grace]

When we hear God's Word proclaimed and preached, receive Christ's forgiveness in holy absolution and in receiving Christ's very Body and Blood under the bread and the wine, we receive forgiveness of sins, which is supplied through Christ's work of reconciliation, hence God's grace. It is through these Means of Grace that God reveals and declares to believers that he or she is fully reconciled through Christ. The efficacious power of the Means of Grace consists of this, that through Word and Sacrament, the Holy Spirit works and strengthens faith, faith in the very forgiveness, God's love and grace, which these means declare and reveal.

So, when we avoid the Means of Grace, we are depriving the Holy Spirit from awaking and strengthening our faith in Jesus Christ. For, as Martin Luther has said, "God does not wish to deal with us otherwise than through the spoken Word and Sacraments. It is the devil himself who is extolled as spirit without the Word and the Sacrament."¹

It is through the Means of Grace that the Holy Spirit works through us the preservation of the pure doctrine and of faith; victory over sin, the devil, and hell; and also love and obedience to God and our neighbor.

So, we know the truth from the Holy Spirit working within us through His Means of Grace. But does truth change with the times? Can men become women? Does life begin at conception or at birth, or even after birth?

¹ Trigl. 495, Part III, Art. VIII, 3-10

[The Guide into All Truth]

To that question, Jesus says: ***“He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak, and He will declare to you the things that are to come”*** (John 16:13b-c).

Here, Jesus defines the Holy Spirit’s office. The Holy Spirit is the guide into all truth.

There are two kinds of teachers. There are some who speak on their own authority by evolving their message from their own reasoning and judgment. And, there are those who do not speak on their own authority.

The Holy Spirit does not speak on His own authority, and His message will not be a human dream and thought like those who speak on their own authority of things which they have never seen nor experienced. The Holy Spirit’s message has substance: It is certain and absolute truth, for He proclaims what He has received from the Father and the Son.

We recognize the Holy Spirit by the fact that He does not speak on His own authority – as the spirit of lies, the devil, and his mobs do – but will proclaim what He will hear. The Holy Spirit speaks exclusively of Jesus and glorifies Jesus, so that people would believe in Jesus as their crucified and risen Savior.

In this way, Jesus sets the bounds for the message of the Holy Spirit Himself. He does not preach anything new or anything else than Christ and His Word. Thus, we have a sure guide and touchstone for judging false spirits.

Christ teaches His followers: ***“If you abide in My Word, you are truly My disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free”*** (John 8:31-32). We come to know the truth through the nature of the Scriptures. You see, the entire Scriptures – *the prophetic and apostolic writings of the Old and New Testaments* – are inspired by the Holy Spirit. Everything in the Scriptures has its origin in the Father, and in the Son, and in the Holy Spirit. These are the very words of Jesus that have been preserved by the Holy Spirit.

So, all who imagine that they have found truth elsewhere are deluding themselves, because as Psalm 119 proclaims: ***“the sum of Your word is truth, and every one of your righteous rules endures forever”*** (Psalm 119:160).

So, what does the Spirit of Truth say to some of today’s questions?

- On Life: Jeremiah 1(:5a): ***“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you”*** and Psalm 139 (:13-14a, 15-16) ***“For You formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother’s womb. I praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. ... My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them.”***
- On Sex or gender: Genesis 1(:27): ***“God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them,”*** Matthew 19(:4) ***“Have you not read that He who created them from the beginning made them male and female,”*** and Jesus Himself says in today’s Gospel lesson that only women give birth as He compares the birth of a baby to the joy of His resurrection (John 16:21).

We can only be adequately informed of the truth in God’s Means of Grace: Word and Sacrament.

Although, we aspire to be perfect in following God’s commandments, His Law is impossible for us since we are all sinners. We all do what we should not do, and we all forget from time to time on the things we ought to be doing. Thanks be to God that we have Jesus who is perfect and He gives us His perfection that He won for us upon the cross. He gives us reconciliation through repentance and the forgiveness of sins.

It is the Holy Spirit who takes all things that belong to Jesus and gives forgiveness of sins, life and salvation to us. So, do not be deceived by the spirit of lies, who is at work within the sinful hearts of humanity, who attempts to deceive us into lies. Instead, always remember that the Holy Spirit dwells in believers through their Baptism into Christ, through the Lord’s Supper, and in the Scriptures that ***“are trustworthy and true”*** (Revelation 21:5b), which reveal to us God’s love and salvation in Jesus Christ. It is the Holy Spirit who supports and comforts believers with Christ’s gift of peace! Amen.

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

✠ SOLI DEO GLORIA ✠

Portions of the Sermon cited from:

Luther, Martin. *Luther’s Works American Edition: Volume 24, Sermons on the Gospel of St. John, Chapters 14-16* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1961), 357-371.