

**+ John 15:26-27 + The Spirit Connects Us¹ +
+ The Day of Pentecost: The Coming of the Holy Spirit + 19 May 2013 +**

You would think we were more connected. Next time you go out to eat or go out shopping, you'll see what I mean. People walk around with their heads down staring at their smartphones while their thumbs work away at another text message. Maybe they're sitting at a table in a restaurant across from each other doing the same thing, not even daring to turn it off when the food arrives just in case another important text message comes in. Others are checking the internet or updating their social media or playing a game or scanning one of those square, black-and-white QR codes.

You'd think we were more connected, when in reality, we're becoming more isolated. People seem to be living more and more in their own self-made bubble. Oh, they actively engage people online, and they may even send thousands of text messages a month, but there's no real connection with other people.

With fewer real connections to people outside of "the bubble", people naturally become more and more isolated. Marketing experts play on this increasing isolation by analyzing people to pigeonhole you into a very select category. They separate you out by age, race, gender, income bracket, music tastes, relationship status, political preferences, even pet ownership, until finally you're left with a group of only twelve people who are just like you, at least according to your marketing potential. By playing off that increasing isolation, they market to what you want, what you prefer.

When it comes to our spiritual lives, have we bought into that same mentality? Even as Christians, we tend to expect that everything should be tailored to my preferences, my likes, my opinions. In a sense, we become self-centered, spiritual consumers who approach our Christian lives like we're looking for car insurance or buying a pair of shoes. Unfortunately that approach only leaves you more isolated and disconnected from your fellow believers and above all, from your God.

You and I and every other human being desperately need to get connected. Thankfully, on this Pentecost morning, Jesus has a solution to that problem. **THE SPIRIT CONNECTS US**. He connects us to Jesus through the Gospel to our purpose in the world making us part of a greater whole.

It shouldn't really surprise us why Christians like you and me can feel disconnected or isolated in our faith. Yes, you know what you believe. Maybe you've even known it for years. You're relatively familiar with the Bible, and can even find some important verses if necessary. You know you're a Christian and you know that Jesus is your Savior, but that connection to your Savior can get pretty weak, so weak that it feels like you're hanging on by a thread, and that thread's about to break.

How do you and I even get to that point? Shouldn't your connection to Christ always be strong? It should be, but often it isn't, because we keep sliding back into that self-centered bubble of being spiritual consumers.

Look at it this way. Inside your wallet or purse are all kinds of cards. You've got credit cards and debit cards and maybe some business cards. You probably also have some other cards that you pay, for like a gym membership or a zoo pass or an Empire Pass. You don't use them all the time. In fact, most times you don't even think about them and your connection to those businesses, but they're nice to have when you need them. It's nice to have them when you have some time or you're near the place or you want to have easy access through the front gates.

Sadly that's how you and I often treat our membership in the Holy Christian Church, the body of all believers in Christ. You don't always think about it, but it's nice to have when you need it. No wonder you and I feel so disconnected, so isolated in our lives as Christians because so often we treat our connection to Jesus as carelessly as a gym membership.

Thankfully we have a Savior who did something about it. When Jesus spoke the words of John 15, he was just hours away from his betrayal, from trial and torture and finally his death. Jesus knew all that was coming. He knew he still had to die, still had to rise from the grave, and still had to ascend physically into heaven, but he wanted to prepare his disciples. So he opened their eyes with sobering reality and hope-filled peace.

"When the Counselor 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 promises to send the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, to his followers. Like those disciples, we need the Holy Spirit. Without that gift from our Savior, we'd have no

¹ Some of the thoughts and language of this sermon were received with thanks from a 2010 Pentecost sermon by Pr. Jeff Enderle.

connection to Jesus. We need the Holy Spirit, because **“no one can say ‘Jesus is Lord,’ except by the Holy Spirit.”** (1 Corinthians 12:3) Jesus sends his Spirit because even though we believe in Jesus, our lives show little evidence that a connection with Jesus even exists.

Isn't that the difference the Holy Spirit made when he first visited the disciples on Pentecost? The disciples were together at home, when all of a sudden the sound of a rushing wind filled the house. Odd shapes, like flames, appeared above their heads. Just then the Holy Spirit filled them and energized them to share the good news of Jesus miraculously in the language of every person gathered in Jerusalem for that festival.

Sometimes you feel like you have a weak connection with Jesus. You don't feel energized in your faith. You could use a miracle or two to give you and every other believer something around which to rally. So does that mean we should just wait for the next Pentecost? Should we just hang out together with other believers? Should we huddle together at home waiting for something spectacular to motivate us to get out into our world?

Jesus says, **“When the Counselor 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 says the Holy Spirit will testify about him. That's why he's **“the Spirit of truth.”** St. Paul explains why. **“God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth.”** (2 Thessalonians 2:13) God sends the Holy Spirit to give us saving faith in Jesus.

When Jesus promises the Holy Spirit, he calls him the Counselor. That Holy Spirit is our helper, supporter, comforter, even our advocate. He comes to give us ongoing help and support. The Holy Spirit has powerful tools to accomplish his work. He uses God's Word to bring us to faith. He continues to use the Bible to strengthen our faith. He energizes us by calling us back to our baptisms when he cleansed us with the water and the Word, and made us children of God. He refreshes us regularly through the body and blood of Jesus in his Holy Supper.

So how are our lives changed when the Holy Spirit connects us to Jesus through the Gospel in Word and Sacrament? Jesus himself tells us: **“You also testify.”** Testifying about Jesus isn't something we will do or might do or must do. It's simply something Christians do.

Do you ever worry that you won't be able to pull off an impressive testimony like Peter did on that first Pentecost when 3,000 people came to faith in a single day? God doesn't ask you to be like Peter. God wants you to be a witness. All you have to do is say what you've seen and heard. You don't have to invent or embellish. You don't have to be somebody you're not.

Simply tell what Jesus has done for you. Express how the Holy Spirit took you, a lost and isolated sinner, and connected you with a Savior who loved you enough to die for you. Simply retell how the Spirit uses ordinary tools to bring you to faith in Jesus—not only to convict you of your guilt, but to guarantee that all your guilt has been removed by the blood of Jesus. You don't even have to take a witness stand, place your hand on the Bible, and raise your right hand. In your own way and at your own comfort level you can tell how the Holy Spirit keeps working in your heart to connect you with something bigger than your age group or income bracket. Through the Gospel, the Spirit connects you by faith with all living believers all over the world and all who are now enjoying heavenly glory.

Take a look again at all those people wrapped up in their own technological bubbles of isolation, wired but not connected. They're all loosely aware of others around them, but still wrapped up in their own little worlds.

Yet when you look around the church or around other churches in our synod, you see something you won't find anywhere else. You see people of all different ages, from varied backgrounds, with assorted tastes and yearning for specific needs coming together for the same reason. It's not normal. It's not natural, but it is the work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit connects us with Jesus through the Gospel for the beautiful purpose of testifying to our world. Enjoy and celebrate this blessed connection! Amen.