



Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church
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December 17, 2008
3rd Midweek Advent Worship Service
John 15:26
Pastor Randy Ott

Lesson: John 16:5-15
Psalm of the Day: Psalm 1

The Power of the Holy Spirit

Last week they had a pretty good-sized ice storm out in the northeast. Did you see that on the news or read about it or hear about it on the radio? I saw a news report with all kinds of utility trucks lined up from across the country, they said, and Canada, out there trying to restore power to all these people that were without power. Can you imagine what it would be like to be without power now? Just think how many more of your brain cells you would have to use as you sat in the candlelit room and watched television and tried to actually imagine something instead of just sitting there passively.

Power—think of how dependent we are on it for heat, for light, for entertainment, for all the different things that we do. To be without power, especially at this time of the year, would be a frightening proposition, wouldn't it? You might have turned down the thermostat a little bit to save a little money on fuel, but I don't think any of you got up this morning and said, "You know what? Let's shut the furnace off completely to save a little power and a little money." I don't think that's even crossing your mind, right? You realize how much you need that power.

As we worship this evening, God is leading us into the truth to see how much we need the Holy Spirit's power as he comes to us through Word and Sacrament. You and I face a lot of things in life that get downright scary at times. If we try to face them in our own power, we are going to be in trouble. So we are reminded about how much we need the Holy Spirit, the Counselor, the Comforter, to come to us and to testify about the Gospel, because he brings to us a truth that isn't just a truth. He brings to us a truth that goes beyond $2 \times 2 = 4$. He brings us a truth that changes us, that changes eternity, which changes the whole direction of our life, the outcome of our life, and the purpose of our life. As he testifies about Jesus, a power is unleashed so that you and I are never, ever the same as long as that power continues to course through us through Word and through Sacrament.

See, the Comforter comes and he shows us through the Word what sinners we are and what wretches we are and how desperately we need to learn of Jesus. Because no matter how much we might find others to compare ourselves to, no matter how often we might see the good in ourselves and think somehow someone owes us something because we've tried pretty hard—the Holy Spirit lays it bare. He divides bone from marrow and shows us our sins and exactly what our sins deserve. As he does that, it brings about this deep yearning, this deep need to be right with God.

Then he testifies to us about Jesus, the power of the Gospel that is there for our salvation, the only power there is to bring about salvation, the only name given under heaven by which we must be saved. The Spirit knows just how likely you and I are to get distracted. We are kind of like that dog that sits there and the fly goes by and all of a sudden we are chasing it or we are chasing our tail or we're chasing something else. We forget about what else we were doing. That's what we are like.

The Spirit brings the Gospel to us in so many different ways. He gives us the Word. He gives us the water and the Word in baptism, something more visual, and something that we can see. He gives us the wine and the wafer, the bread, the body and the blood of Christ so that it touches all of our senses to show us what God has done to take away our sins, to actually give the Gospel to us in a tangible way. He longs to come to us again and again.

You and I live in an era where we have the Gospel available to us in so many more ways than the people that have gone before us. We can sit down in front of that TV and let our minds go into neutral and watch the Bible on DVD or VHS or if you've still got it, maybe you can find Beta yet. I'm sure it's out there some place. We can listen to it on MP3 players, on cassette players, on CDs. We can read it in large print and small print. We can carry it in our shirt pocket or in our back pocket. We can carry a Study Bible that has enough helps that it makes it hard to lift. We can get a Women's Devotional Bible and a Men's Devotional Bible, or a Daily Reading Bible. We can get every kind of Bible you can come up with, which makes it all the more fascinating when I read these studies that say that our generation is one of the most Biblically illiterate.

I've read studies where people have been asked to identify phrases and say what part of the Bible they come from, what book of the Bible. I've seen these surveys with the phrase, I'm sure you've all heard it, "God helps those who help themselves." Do you know which book of the Bible that's from, Old or New Testament—how about if we just break it down to that? Which is it? Do you know?

It's neither. It's not in the Bible. It's the antithesis of the Gospel, isn't it? God helps those who help themselves—didn't we just talk about how God helps you and me, those who are helpless, those who cannot come closer to him? And yet, in our generation, people have a place for that in the Bible because we don't know our Bibles that well.

We are not the trees planted by streams of water that we sang about this evening, not always. But this is the power that is in the Gospel. Even though you and I can find all kinds of things to distract us and keep us from being in the Word and Sacrament like we should be, and I know we can all do it because I am not in the Word as much as I would like. I'm in it a lot for getting ready for things, but just my private devotional time? I'm not as good at it as I should be. I'm not as good at it as I want to be. I'm right there next to Paul when he says, "The good that I want to do, that I do not do."

But here's the power that we find when we get in there—we find a God who says to us, "I love you, not because you try hard to do the things I've told you to do. I love you because I am love. I love you because I loved you before the world was created. I loved you before your great, great grandfather was a gleam in the eye of his father. I love you before anything happens, before you can do anything and give anything to me. I have loved you and planned to take away your sins. And I know when you have turned your back on me. But I will never turn my back on you."

Our God says to us that he has taken away our sins because he is good, gracious and merciful. That is the power that the Spirit comes to us with. Not the power of a club, not the power of threats, but the power of his love that exceeds anything you and I could imagine. And then, when you and I start to let that love of God in the Gospel wash over us like the warm rays of the sun, it doesn't just melt hearts of stones. It enables you and me to do more than we could ever ask for or imagine and to serve our God, not because we have to, but now because we want to. We want to know him better. We want to grow in that Gospel. We want to have that power turned on. We want to be plugged in as we face the frightening things of this life.

By God's grace, he sends the Spirit to come to us day after day after day, whether we are appreciating his efforts or not. He continues to long to come to us and wrap us in the arms of his Gospel.

Hymns: Gathering Rite, 32, 5:5-6 **Psalm of the Day:** Psalm 1 (page 64)

Psalm Prayer: Lord God, you have planted us like trees beside streams of water. Grant that we may ever delight in your Word and yield abundant fruit in our lives; through Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord.

Lesson: John 16:5-15

"Now I am going to him who sent me, yet none of you asks me, 'Where are you going?' Because I have said these things, you are filled with grief. 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. When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment: in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me; in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; and in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.

"I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you. All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you.

Sermon: John 15:26

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.