

**Rev. Seth D. Bode †† Sermon 427, 05-23-2021 †† Pentecost**

“Lord God, you have appointed me as Pastor in your Church, but you see how unsuited I am to meet so great and difficult a task. If I had lacked your help, I would have ruined everything long ago. Therefore, I call upon you: I wish to devote my mouth and my heart to you; I shall teach the people. I myself will learn and ponder diligently upon your Word. Use me as your instrument – but do not forsake me, for if ever I should be on my own, I would easily wreck it all.”

“Sir, we would see Jesus.”

**JOHN 14**

*25 “I have told you these things while staying with you. 26 But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and remind you of everything I told you. 27 “Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, and do not let it be afraid.*



What does it mean to be a spiritual church? Is it a good thing? More often than not, when people talk about being spiritual, they intend to mean the mindfulness of spirituality. Spirituality is “the quality of being concerned with the human spirit or soul as opposed to material or physical things.” But that is a Google definition.

It is also a focus on me and myself. It is a navel-gazing, self-introspective view of who I am. In a way, worship is the Church finding its trust. This spiritual thinking may come at the cost of thinking about ourselves so much, that our attention is focused away from God. We discover our attention is on the wrong thing. Thus spiritualism comes at a cost if we attempt it without focusing on the God of the Bible.

Today our God reveals Himself as a very spiritual God. We have a very spiritual Father, because, as the Son tells us, the Father will send the Holy Spirit. But sending the Holy Spirit does not mean sending good thoughts and strong urges. It literally means sending a personal Being, true God, in the name of Jesus. We see that that name of Jesus is closely connected to teaching His friends all things and reminding His friends what He told them.

## **How To Achieve The Spiritual Church**

## 1. Look into the New Testament

One trial a Bible interpreter has is to determine whether it was authored by God. This is interesting with the New Testament, because there we learn that “*all Scripture is God-breathed,*” and “*no prophet ever spoke by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.*” Yet the Bible wasn’t yet finished when those words were written. It could be rightly asked, “Are Peter and Paul simply referring to the Old Testament Scriptures?” The next query is, “Is the New Testament inspired?”

The beauty of our unbroken Bible is that Jesus answers that in today’s text. He tells His friends that they will receive the Holy Spirit to learn all the New Testament Church needs and to “remind” them “of all” He told them. The fact that Jesus said, “*everything I told you*” indicates that not some, but all things the apostles wrote, were given by the Spirit. The Bible doesn’t know the difference between certain chapters written as if by divine inspiration and revelation, as opposed to other chapters as if merely “divine approval” and “assistance.” All of the Bible, Old Testament and New, is indiscriminately called the “Word of God.”

Throughout time, even in the last century of Lutheranism, the inspiration of Scripture was challenged. Roughly 80 years ago, some were trying to say that the Bible contains the Word of God. Roughly 50 years ago, some said that we must differentiate between the Bible and the Word of God. Some say that only the important matters of the Bible were given by inspiration of the Holy Spirit. If so, the interpreter of Scripture is faced with the impossible task of trying to decide either a) what was sufficiently important enough to warrant divine inspiration or b) precisely what we want to think belongs in the Bible. Each of these theories is unworkable. All things in the Bible are God’s Word. If it ends up that you are on the hunt for what is human versus what is spiritual in the Bible, in order that you might find only what is spiritual, you will never be sure about anything. Thank the Lord that we are in a church body that accepts the Bible, the whole Bible, and nothing but the Bible as God’s Word. It is what makes us spiritual. And inside the Bible tells us to ...

## 2. Seek peace outside of this world

According to today’s reading, what is the first good possessed by all those who love Christ and keep His Word; that is, the members of His Church?

It is peace.

In verse 27, Christ mentions none of the things man usually regards as great. He says nothing about royal honor; nothing about celebrity status; nothing about wealth and riches; nothing about pleasure and enjoyment; nothing about being spared suffering, poverty, dishonor, and death. Instead, He expressly says, “*Not as the world gives do I give to you.*” Far be it from Christ that He should promise the glories of this world to those who belong to His Church. Rather, He assures them that they will face problems because of the One in whom they believe.

But is the guarantee of Christ in this verse any less? Do those who love Him and keep His Word something less than glorious, desirable, and enticing?

Not at all. In fact, it is inexpressibly great. When He says, “*Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you,*” He declares that God has resolved an eternal peace within the person who loves Him, keeps His Word, and belongs to His Church. God has eternally forgiven that person all sins. God sees everything that is done to such a person, good or bad, as if it were done to Himself. God considers that person His dear, elect child, and therefore God involves Himself as our genuine Father with all His love and care.

So along with peace that comes from beyond—peace from God Himself—wells up an inner peace of the heart and conscience. There is knowledge that we now have nothing to fear. There is no verdict against the believing sinner. There is hope for good.

Since only those who love Christ and keep His Word belong to the Christian Church, that Church is made up of a host of people who are known only to God.

For only the Lord, the One who knows the heart, knows His own. No person can see into the heart of another—or can behold the living love of Christ in the soul of someone else. No one can discern the motives or actions of another, which alone can determine whether that individual truly—or only apparently—keeps the Word of Christ. Therefore, the Church, although it is made up of visible people, remains an invisible multitude, because no one can tell them apart. No one can see the emotion that is love or the abstract attachment that is faith. Although the Church stretches over the face of the whole earth, it seems impossible to tell where it can be found.

### 3. Gather around the Gospel

Nevertheless, there is one sign that can make the location of the Church unmistakable. The Lord Himself declares that sign in today's text. He would become invisible in the lives of His disciples, but He would send the Holy Spirit to teach them everything. The Holy Spirit must remind them of all the words of Jesus Christ. So by the work of the Holy Spirit, something that would never be taken away from the Church was God's Gospel. This is the certain sign by which the Church can be recognized.

The Church is the fellowship of all true believers and the body of Christ. Nothing except the Word of Gospel makes a person a true believer and member of that fellowship. Therefore, the Church of true believers can be found only where the Word of Gospel is also found. As one can look for stalks of wheat to spring up—but only where wheat seeds have been sown—so also can one seek the sprouting of invisible true Christians only where the heavenly seeds of grain from the Gospel have been sown.

God's Word is never preached in vain. Wherever He allows His Word to be preached, some will certainly be converted. Wherever He gives His means of grace, there sinners will be pardoned. Wherever people are called by God's Word, we can be certain they include a number who are elected to everlasting salvation. Wherever the candle of the Gospel burns, there the Lord has a number of His own. In short, wherever there is a visible congregation around God's Word, taught in its truth and purity, there can be found an invisible Church of true believers.

Everything else that the world thinks of outwardly as "church"—outward holiness, good works of its members, fancy hoods, top-of-the-line sneakers, long duration of existence, claiming direct succession from the holy apostles—all that can deceive. But the mark of preaching the pure Word is infallible. Wherever it is found, we can be confident that is the workplace of the Holy Spirit. That is the mighty, rushing wind blown here and there. Through the preaching of the Word of Christ, the Spirit continues to call, gather, enlighten, and sanctify, and preserve the One Holy Church with Jesus Christ in the one true faith. Amen.

Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope, through the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.