

God's Spirit Lives in Me!
Sermon for Pentecost
Sermon Text: John 14:15-27



"If you love me, you will keep My commandments. ¹⁶And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, ¹⁷even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him. You know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. ¹⁸I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. ¹⁹Yet a little while and the world will see Me no more, but you will see Me. Because I live, you also will live. ²⁰In that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you. ²¹Whoever has My commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him." ²²Judas (not Iscariot) said to Him, "Lord, how is it that You will manifest Yourself to us, and not to the world?" ²³Jesus answered him, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word, and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him. ²⁴Whoever does not love Me does not keep My words. And the word that you hear is not Mine but the Father's who sent Me. ²⁵"These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. ²⁶But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. ²⁷Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid."

A father had two daughters whom he loved more than anything. Their names were Gretchen and Fiona. But sometimes it made the father sad that his daughters were always arguing with each other. One day, the father had to leave. But before he left, he wanted to give his daughters something to take with them so that they would behave well in his absence. He gave them a little talk and explained to them what they had to do in his absence. He ended it with a very important addition: "The most important thing is that you are nice to each other!" The father continued, "I have a little surprise for you. It's on the kitchen table. When I'm gone, you can unwrap your presents." When the father left, the two daughters ran curiously into the kitchen to see what their father had prepared for them. There they found new sparkling pots and pans. The daughters were delighted. And Fiona immediately started cleaning the pots and wrapping them in tissue paper. Gretchen was unsure and had another idea, "When Dad gave us this present, he surely meant that we should use it to cook each other something good to eat, right?" Fiona froze in shock. "No, that's not possible! We must never stain these beautiful new pots with dirty water and food!" Fiona was furious and grabbed the pots and put them in the highest place in a cupboard so that Gretchen wouldn't think of cooking food with them. When Jesus Christ left His disciples, He left them the gift of the Holy Spirit. However, the Holy Spirit would not be placed in the cupboard wrapped in tissue paper like Fiona and Gretchen's pots and pans, but would be active in people's lives in love: "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him." When the Holy Spirit works in love, He is not ashamed to be defiled by us. Speaking in the image of the pots and pans of the two daughters, the Holy Spirit is not ashamed to deal with your everyday dirt so that He can reach His goal. How can I understand that?

I go to church and experience a wonderful service. The music fit the style, the pastor preached intelligently, and we had nice conversations after the service. And then the service was over. When I got home, my children's dirty socks and underwear were lying around in the bathroom and the kitchen was a mess. No sign of the children... I have to prepare myself for next week and feel the anger rising. This is followed by a heated argument with my spouse and later with the children... And at the end of the day I ask myself: "What has happened to the peace that was so present in me at the church service this morning?" That is exactly where the Holy Spirit is not afraid to be active and work in your life. Even if your life is not perfect and there are many things that need to be worked on. The Holy Spirit is not afraid to be in our dirty, contradictory and sin-laden everyday lives. The question is, how do we bring together this nasty divide between the soothing feelings of peace and real life? How can we bring theory and practice together? How can the Holy Spirit be effective in my life? I have to go back to the little story of the

sisters whose father left a gift for them. Just as the father in the story left a bit of himself behind by giving the gift, Jesus is not really going away either. He doesn't just leave us a gift to work with but is Himself present. Jesus not only gives us a Christian culture and His commandments as a gift and a purpose, but He is Himself with us and in us. The New Testament exegete, Rudolf Bultmann, once asked: "Can a child whose father died before it was born really love its father? And his answer was clearly "No!" That is not possible. At best, the child can only know and respect the stories and tales of the father or follow his will. But love is not possible because there was no personal relationship with the Father! And so Bultmann concludes that Jesus' subsequent disciples could not really love Jesus, as they did not know Him personally. According to Bultmann, love in Christians can only consist of respecting Jesus' commandments and following His will. We can confidently reply to this Bultmann: "But there is a direct personal relationship with Jesus!" Jesus Himself promises us this. He does not leave us as orphans, but the Holy Spirit comes to us. And through the Holy Spirit, Jesus Himself is in us. The Holy Spirit does not remain wrapped in tissue paper on the shelf, but does exactly what Jesus did. He seeks a personal relationship with us. This means that Jesus goes out of the soothing worship service into everyday life and wants to be with you there too. And He wants to be close to you. He looks exactly where things are going wrong. He calls us to repentance when we have once again lost our way and He is also there where we are ashamed. Exactly where we feel lonely and abandoned, He supports us. Jesus says: "The Comforter, the Holy Spirit, whom My Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things and remind you of everything I have said to you." Luther translates the word Paraclete as Comforter. The original Greek word is more complex and, in addition to comforting, also means something like counselor or advocate. The Holy Spirit is therefore particularly active in times of crisis and not just when everything is wonderful. He is with me and helps me precisely when I am contaminated by the hectic pace of everyday life.

God's Spirit is so closely connected with humans that it seems impossible for us to distinguish between "Where is God at work?" and where is man's involvement required? Surely this is exactly what Jesus meant when He explained to Nicodemus: "The Spirit of God is like the wind. You hear it and you see how the trees bend, but you can't tell where it comes from or where it goes." The whole Christian life is rooted in God from beginning to end. The fact that we believe in Jesus, read the Bible, and go to church services is made possible by the love of the Holy Spirit. Just as all the gifts of the Holy Spirit are effective in our lives. Since Pentecost, we can't encounter God and our fellow human beings in any other way than out of this love for God. We must not make ourselves into little gods. That is why it is important to distinguish between the work of man and the work of God. Martin Luther describes this in the third article of the Creed about the Holy Spirit. "I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith." And Jesus promises us that it is this same Holy Spirit who is at work in us. The Holy Spirit frees us from ourselves. We therefore never need to be alone. We are not like orphans who are without parents. We know that Jesus is with us through the Holy Spirit. We also know that Jesus gives us faith from day to day. Everything we do is dependent on this Spirit of God. When our Lord Jesus tells us that we are saved through baptism, it means that we are implanted in this love and closely united with Jesus. It means then that you are His children, it means that you will have His peace, it means that you have a peace that is far above anything the world can ever comprehend. Therefore, do not let your hearts be troubled.

When Jesus promises the Holy Spirit, He promises God Himself. God Himself becomes present and effective in our lives. And our confidence and comfort come solely from the belief that it is God Himself. We would remain a poor church if it were only a matter of meeting the religious standards of our Lord. We would be like those who seek the living among the dead. But it is not like that. Through Jesus' Word, Jesus Himself is present. In the initial example that I gave of the two daughters, Gretchen and Fiona, it is clear what is missing from the story. The father Himself. We have it better in the church – we have the Father. And it is He who enlightens, comforts and strengthens us again and again, so that we can know that when we say Sunday after Sunday: "The Lord be with you!" then He really is with you. Especially when your children, husband, or colleagues have annoyed you again. And if that is the case, we can call out silently not just here, but there: Kyrie Eleison. Lord, have mercy. And that is exactly what the Holy Spirit does: He comforts you and stands by you! Amen.