

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our Gospel lesson today opens with Jesus filled with the Holy Spirit and returning to Galilee. We also hear today that the Holy Spirit is the work and presence of God:

¹⁸ "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. (Luke 4:18)

In Luke's Gospel, the Holy Spirit is presented as a central and vital presence, empowering Jesus throughout his ministry, guiding him, and signifying that his mission is directly connected to God's will. In this Gospel it is very obvious that Jesus does nothing without prayer and what he does, he does through the Holy Spirit. The Gospel of Luke tells us that Jesus is conceived by the Holy Spirit – the angel Gabriel tells Mary that the Holy Spirit will come upon her. The Holy Spirit descends on Jesus at his baptism. It is the Holy Spirit who leads him out into the wilderness and strengthens him against the temptations he faces there and of course today the Holy Spirit leads Jesus to Galilee. The Holy Spirit or the power of the Lord as it is referred to at times, is a crucial element not just for Jesus but also for the disciples, enabling them to be faithful witnesses and spread the Gospel message to all nations after the ascension of Jesus. And today, within this gathering, that very same Holy Spirit is at work among us enabling us as well to be faithful witnesses.

During certain seasons throughout the church's liturgical year...I begin our worship with these words before evoking the Holy Spirit, "It is through God's mercy and grace that we are able to gather¹..." of course I then say "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Before we evoke the Holy Spirit in what we call the "*in-voke-ca-tion*," I feel it is necessary to remember that it is by God's grace that we are able to do so. The words that I use before the invocation are not mine, I "borrowed" them from Dietrich Bonhoeffer's book, *Life Together*. The words are Bonhoeffer's but the sentiment behind my doing this is from Luther's explanation of the Third Article of the Creed in the Small Catechism when he states:

I believe that by my own understanding or strength I cannot believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to him, but instead the Holy Spirit has called me through the gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, made me holy and kept me in the true faith, just as he calls, gathers, enlightens, and makes holy the whole Christian church on earth and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one common, true faith. Daily in this Christian church the Holy Spirit abundantly forgives all sins—mine and those of all believers. On the Last Day the Holy Spirit will raise me and all the dead and will give to me and all believers in Christ eternal life. This is most certainly true.²

Once again in Luther's explanation we can hear that the Holy Spirit is the crucial element that works not just for Jesus but also for us today, by enabling us to simply believe, and to be effective witnesses and spread the Gospel message. The words spoken and heard, along with the Sacraments that are administered according to these words, within this gather go way beyond NOT just this gathering...but they also go beyond our comprehension. In doing this, I am not just evoking the

¹ Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *Life Together, A Discussion of Christian Fellowship*. San Francisco: Harper & Row Pub, 1954. This is not a direct quote, Bonhoeffer says this on page 18, "It is by the grace of God that a congregation is permitted to gather visibly in this world to share God's Word and Sacrament."

² Robert Kolb, Timothy J. Wengert, and Charles P. Arand, *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000, 355–356 par 6.

Holy Spirit for guidance, I am evoking the Holy Spirit with gratitude and appreciation to what God is doing for us through the Holy Spirit. I am evoking the Holy Spirit so that we may follow and be receptive to the Holy Spirit as it guides us and enables us to recognize that the grace given is given within this gathering through that same Holy Spirit. And in turn, to be gracious receivers of the ability to be honest witnesses of the Gospel in order to continue the work of the Holy Spirit through our mission that is this Holy Apostolic Church.

I am reflecting on all of this because of what we hear Jesus say today in our Gospel lesson: "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing," (Luke 4:21b). Today this passage before us is fulfilled in our hearing just as it was fulfilled when Jesus said it. Look at the passage again, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." Today as we listen to this verse, the "YOUR" in this sentence, "in your hearing," is not just the folks gathered around Jesus, this hearing is continued in *our* hearing today. And what is fulfilled is this:

...release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free,¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." (Luke 4:18b-19)

Today in this gathering, the very words that are spoken by Jesus are being spoken again, and they are fulfilled as we hear them just as those gathered in the synagogue listening to Jesus hear them. The words spoken by Jesus are not distant, they are not just heard in another era of time, they are present and active right now as we hear them. Likewise, God's grace administered and proclaimed to us in Word and in Sacrament continue today from the time when they were first lifted up in an assembly, they too are no longer distant, they are present and active. We are not separated by the distance of time; this Holy Word and this Holy Meal are active and continue to be active in the gathering today. In other words, hearing these words from Isaiah within our Gospel...participating in this Holy Eucharist are an active continuation of the work of the Holy Spirit administering God's grace and mercy to us.

Today, scripture is fulfilled in our hearing...likewise, this is my body, this is my blood, given for you, do this...is also a continuation of that blessed meal that takes place on the night that Jesus is betrayed. By the very words said in this gathering, they become a continuation of the Lord saying these things to us...these are not just some nice words to make us feel good or to make our gathering official, these words and these elements are the very presence of God with us...nonetheless it is the continuing work of the Holy Spirit leading us, guiding us, reminding us that this worship like any worship is directly connected to God's will for us.

The one most important reason for my gratitude at the opening of the service is because the grace given us in Word and Sacrament are given to us from outside us or we can say, they come to us...*extra nos*. This Latin phrase *extra nos* literally means "outside of ourselves". This term or phrase is often used in the context of salvation, describing it as something that comes from outside of a person.

We cannot produce this righteousness that comes to us in these Words and this Holy Meal. We may see ourselves differently...but like it or not we are dead to our sin. So, Christ had to obtain this grace and righteousness for us. And this grace and righteousness comes to us through the Holy Spirit making us all on with God. In other words, if someone were to ask you or me, "Where is your salvation, or Where is your righteousness," we can never point to ourselves...they come

from Christ...when asked, we can only point to the Word of God, or this bread and cup that is Jesus Christ.³ And of course our connection to this all is the work of the Holy Spirit.

We hear in verse 18 of the Gospel that:

¹⁸ "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor.

Jesus may be saying this to us today within this Gospel lesson, but as you look at these words, listen to what is being said to us...the Spirit of the Lord is upon *ME*...we have been anointed through the waters of our Baptism and sent to be bearers of the Good News of Jesus Christ to be merciful for all. In our hearing of this Gospel lesson, we are also participating in it. And our participation continues as we are sent into this world to go in peace to love and serve the Lord, we are Gospel bearers with not just our words but with our actions. And just as the body is broken and given to each of us as we gather around this table of our Holy Eucharist, may we see also that as this gathering, this church, that is the body of Christ...may we see that we too are broken and faithfully sent into the world as the body of Jesus Christ...that is the Good News of grace and mercy, but may we also remember and take to heart the words of Saint Paul,

“For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord.” (2 Corinthians 4:5)

And that which makes our witness to the Good News effective is not the goodness of ourselves but rather the goodness and mercy that is outside ourselves, the grace and truthfulness of the Good News of Jesus Christ that is shared through our words and our deeds, along with the energizing breath of the Holy Spirit.

From this point forward in our Gospel lesson before us today, we will see that all Jesus does occurs by the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus teaches, preaches, heals, and casts out demons...he shows mercy to the poor, eats with sinners, associates with the outcasts, the sick, and the blind. It is in these actions that are guided by the Holy Spirit, that reveal God, and most of all, fulfill Holy Scripture. In this, we can see that there are *NO* historical, socioeconomic, ethnic, boundaries that contain or limit the mercy of God...as well as what God does through Jesus Christ within the writings of Luke’s Gospel.

Today as we sit here in the presence of our Lord, may we look deep within ourselves and see the need of grace that comes NOT from our sinful brokenness from within, but comes from the outside, and comes to us anew each time we hear the Word of Jesus Christ and partake of the bread and wine of this Holy Meal. In the fulfillment of our hearing today, there is a release to those who are captive to sin...upon hearing, may we then see the grace for all that the hatred and divisiveness of our world blinds us to, may we see that suffering is NOT God’s will but that life in the face of suffering is God’s will without conditions or strings. Today this Good News of Jesus Christ is our redemption, our righteousness, and the blessed promise of new life...to all who hear...

in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

³ *Extra nos*, comes from: Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *Life Together, A Discussion of Christian Fellowship*. San Francisco: Harper & Row Pub, 1954 under the heading, “Through and In Jesus Christ” pages 21-22.