

Sermon Outline

WE DON'T NEED TO FEAR THE HOLY GHOST.

- I. We might not know very much about the Holy Spirit and therefore may fear him.
- II. But the Spirit doesn't work in strange or embarrassing ways.
- III. The Spirit instead comes to us today through Word and Sacrament and leads the Church to saving faith and changed lives.

Sermon

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

My dear beloved flock, the text for our meditation today is the Epistle Lesson of Acts chapter two verses one through twenty-one.

Boys and girls are you afraid of ghosts or spirits? They can be scary as things go bump and creak in the night and we do not know where they come from. Even as we celebrate Pentecost today, and even though we believe in the triune God, some Christians—maybe some of us—are afraid of the Holy Ghost. We're afraid perhaps because we're uncertain of who the Holy Ghost is and what he does. But Pentecost, this day on which we celebrate Christ our dear Savior sending the Holy Ghost, reminds us that

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The three thousand believers on the first Pentecost didn't fear what they were witnessing, and neither should we. Why is that? Ponder that question as you hear the rest of the sermon. You may go back to your seats and those who love you.

I.

I think we sometimes fear the Holy Ghost because we don't know that much about him. We know a great deal about the Father and the Son, but we're almost ignorant of the Holy Spirit. Sometimes, the Spirit is called the "unknown or shy member of the Trinity."

Many Christians today are a little bit like that small band of isolated believers whom Paul found in Ephesus and asked, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" They answered, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit" (Acts 19:2). Even today, many Christians simply do not understand the role of the Holy Spirit in their faith and life.

The very name "Ghost" or "Spirit" suggests something eerie and spooky. Adding to our fear are the ways certain people act and speak when they claim to be under the influence of the Spirit. We can all see on TV such services where people are screaming, waving their hands, or passing out. We fear that the Spirit might cause us to act in these strange ways.

We see this every Halloween when people dress up as ghosts, what is the reaction of little kids? They run away absolutely terrified. In their minds, a ghost is an evil thing that hurts people and is to be avoided. Unfortunately, some Christians carry that same fear over to the Holy Spirit. They think of him more as some kind of Holy—maybe, but still—Ghost. They fear what he might do to them or how he might force them to act in out-of-control and embarrassing ways.

Out of such false fear, we at times may wish to ignore the Spirit or downplay his significance in our lives. Ignoring the Spirit would be tragic, because the Church needs the Holy Spirit as much today as it did on that first Pentecost. Each of us needs his power and work in our lives.

II.

If we look at who the Holy Spirit really is and what he does for us, we'll no longer fear him.

The way the Holy Spirit worked on that first Pentecost is the same way he's working today. On that first Pentecost, "[t]hey were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language" (Acts 2:4–6).

The disciples, when they were filled with the Spirit, were not babbling incoherently. They were speaking sensibly in recognizable languages. The Holy Spirit did not cause them to lose control or to hop about. Rather, he filled them with courage, conviction, and joy, empowering these formerly fearful men to stand up and tell the crowds about Jesus—to announce that Jesus, whom they had killed, was risen and forgave them unto eternal life. Three thousand heard, believed, and were baptized.

The Holy Spirit does the same thing for us today. We don't have to be afraid he'll cause us to weep uncontrollably, babble incoherently, or lose bodily control. Emotionalism isn't the work of the Spirit. The Spirit won't embarrass us or cause us to do something silly or obnoxious. The Spirit simply tells people about Jesus. Talks about Jesus. Tells us, tells others through us. About Jesus.

III.

The other day I heard on my car radio an old country song by Ronnie Milsap, "What a Difference You've Made in My Life." As I listened, I thought I wonder who the You is. I thought about what a difference the Holy Spirit makes in the life of a Christian. It's the Holy Spirit who brings us to faith in Jesus and an

understanding of all that he's done for us. Jesus has died for our sins, risen from the grave, and now lives eternally. He loves us, forgives us our sins, and has prepared an eternal home for us in heaven. But were it not for the work of the Spirit, we would not believe, be saved, or see heaven.

If we ignore the Spirit by staying away from God's Word and Sacraments, there's a detrimental ripple effect. We not only weaken our own faith, but we also weaken our churches. Rather, we should invite the Spirit into our hearts, homes, and churches. Luke, the author of Acts, in later verses of ch 2, describes the work of the Spirit in the church.

First, the Spirit-filled church is dedicated to the study of God's Word. Luke wrote, "And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching" (2:42). These early Christians devoted themselves to the apostles', or biblical, teaching—the Word about Jesus' saving work. This was a learning and studying church. People of God today should likewise be in the Word. Each Christian needs to study the Word alone and in the company of other Christians.

The second mark of the Spirit-filled church mentioned in Acts 2 is fellowship. Our word "fellowship" translates the Greek word *koinōnia*, based on the word for common. What we share in common is our faith in the one true and triune God. We have the same God as our Father, the same Jesus as our Savior, and the same Spirit as our Teacher and Comforter. Our common faith brings us together in mutual concern and care for one another.

The third mark of the Spirit's presence is worship. The early believers were devoted "to the breaking of bread [that is, the Lord's Supper] and the prayers" (2:42). The spirit-filled church is a worshiping, praying church. I picture that in worship, the people smiled, sang out, listened attentively, and participated actively.

They were happy to be there to hear the Word and receive the Sacraments.

A final mark of the Spirit's presence in that Acts 2 early church was evangelism, or outreach. Acts 2:47: "The Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved." Since God desires all people to be saved, we are commanded to go into all the world with the Gospel message. The Spirit empowers us for witness.

Therefore, you and I don't have to be afraid of the Holy Ghost. He will not embarrass us or cause us to do anything outrageous or shocking. Rather, he will lead us to apostolic doctrine—the teaching of our Savior Jesus Christ, his cross and resurrection—to loving fellowship, to authentic worship, and to compassionate outreach. We pray for the Spirit to come to us now and make us into that kind of a Christian and that kind of a church.

The peace of God which surpasses all understanding, guard and keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.