

As Paul proclaimed Christ, the philosophers in Athens asked, “What does this babbling man wish to say?” When they addressed Paul in person they said “You bring some strange things to our ears.” As St. Peter encouraged the saints to speak of Christ he also acknowledged that they would be slandered and reviled for their good behavior in Christ. When Jesus spoke of sending the Spirit of truth, He added, “whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him.”

Dear Christians, the Word that comforts your ears is strange to the ears of this world full of idols. The Holy Spirit, who has caused your hearts to regard Christ the Lord as holy, cannot be received by the world. And when you bear witness to others for the hope that is in you, even when you do it with gentleness and respect, you may be slandered and reviled and suffer for it. You have been born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. It all comes down to this one Man and His holy precious blood and innocent suffering and death.

If you love me, you will keep my commandments.

Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. (John 14:15-21)

The reality is that we all cannot and will not keep the commandments, that we will not keep our promises, we will not be perfect. This leaves us with quite a predicament when we read hear these words.

These are things that we hear and think, “Yeah, those sound good, this describes how a Christian lives.” But we know we are sinners, we know we cannot keep the commandments perfectly. Yet, we do love Christ, we do love God. So how is it that we have this love and yet, even though we try, we don’t perfectly keep the commandments?

This kind of thinking leaves you and I with all sorts of questions, do we really love Christ? Is it possible for us to?

“If you love me, you will keep my commandments.”

The word for “commandment” here is a rich word. Its core meaning is that which Christ gives, that which Christ sets up and establishes; His instruction, His mandates, His institutions. The word for “keep” means to have and to hold, to cherish as a treasure. To keep His commandments is therefore not so much a law, like obeying the Ten Commandments, but a promise – to value and to keep receiving what He is giving. If you love me you will keep my commandments.

There. That tastes a lot better, doesn’t it. If we’re not careful, we’re going to make Jesus sound just like Moses with his commandments. The last thing we need is more commandments to keep; we can’t even manage the original ten from Sinai.

Notice the words that Jesus uses, he says that from himself and from the Father the Holy Spirit will be given to us as our helper. So this Spirit is a complete gift, not something that we can find, not something that we earn, but is given to us.

This gift we receive in Holy Baptism – that is, water applied to us to wash away our sins, but not just water, but water with the words and promises of Christ. Baptized in the name of the one God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This water and the promise of Christ is the solution to our predicament – how can we love God even though we do not perfectly keep the commandments? By his grace, he gives us the Spirit in Holy Baptism and promises that by it we are also given faith in his words and promises of forgiveness, life, and salvation.

Why does God do this? After all, we are the ones that disobey, we are the ones that mess things up, and it should then be up to us to fix it. This is the thought that many people have. This is how our world and society and even families work. But the Holy Spirit is sent as our helper.

We hear the words and promises of Christ, and know that our sins are forgiven. Christ will be manifest in us. Christ is our helper, he does what we cannot do, and he works in us to have faith and love – faith in God in his promises and of forgiveness and love toward the neighbor.

Dear Christians, one and all, rejoice...  
with united heart and voice  
Proclaim the wonders God hath done,  
how is right are the victory won.

This is Christ in us; it is him who works in us. He works in us as an entire church. The church is the body of Christ. The church is God's house, where God's Word is proclaimed, where Baptism is given, and where his body and blood are distributed for you, for the forgiveness of sins. This is what Christ has promised to do, to dwell with us by the Holy Spirit.

He calls, gathers, and enlightens us to the Christian church that we can hear the pure Gospel message, that Christ has given us his body and blood and continually gives us this, so that we may receive forgiveness, life, and salvation.

This is what the Spirit does. But he does not come to point us to himself; the Spirit comes to us and works faith in us because he is sent by the Father and the Son to do this. He is to bring us to the cross of Christ, to bring us where we receive the gifts of grace. The Spirit is given to us to point us to the forgiveness of sins that is ours in Christ.

As sinners, we have left the Father, we are separated from Him. Jesus tells us, he will not leave us as orphans. Orphans have parents, but are removed from them. Adam and Eve were removed from God's presence in the Garden, and our death is because we are sinners. But we are not left as orphans. We are brought back to our heavenly Father. We are not left as orphans to fend for ourselves, but we have the promise of Christ. He has come to bring us back to our Father,

so that we are not left separated. We are brought back by Christ. We are given faith in him who has done this for us, and gives us forgiveness by his body and blood. And the Spirit brings us to hear his Word and receive his gifts.

He shows us and brings to us Him who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life! He takes what Jesus has and delivers it to us - the absolving Word, the water of Baptism, forgiveness, and life. The mandates He spoke of us treasuring and keeping He purchased just a few hours later on the cross. There He tasted death for us. There He suffered God's real wrath against our real sin! It's that wrath that Peter spoke of in recounting the destruction and eternal punishment wrought by the flood.

Amid all that destruction, Peter also recounted the eight who were brought safely through water. Then He made an amazing connection to another mandate of the risen Christ. Baptism, which corresponds to this now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God.

Jesus has gone anywhere in His ascension. As He said, "I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you." So He's gone nowhere. He's disappeared from our sight, yes. Yet He comes to you under the Word, the water, the Bread and Wine. And He sends the Spirit from the Father to be your Helper and Comforter in this in-between time of not-seeing yet believing.

We must never doubt that the Spirit is at work. Where the Word is there the Spirit is. You hear people say sometimes, "I could just feel the Spirit of God at work in this place." They probably weren't in a Lutheran church, especially one of a traditional bent. No feeling the spirit around here. Oh, maybe once and a while a tickle when something is said that hits you a certain way, or a favorite hymn gets dialed in. But that's not the point. Where the Word is preached and heard, where the Supper is being given out, there the Spirit is at work.

The Holy Spirit is busy making us holy - calling us, gathering us, opening the eyes and ears of faith, delivering forgiveness to our ears, the Body and Blood of Christ to our mouths, the fruits of Him who suffered and died, now risen and ascended, and has now saved you. The Man Jesus is the way to the Father! The Man Jesus is life in the midst of death! The Man Jesus makes the unknown God known because He is God in the flesh, one with the Father and the Holy Spirit.

Dear Christians, one and all rejoice – for Christ has arisen. You are not left as orphans, your sins are forgiven, you are restored to the Father.

And may the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord.  
Amen.