

The Festival of Pentecost – Pr. Faugstad exordium & sermon
1 Samuel 16:14-23: “The Spirit Is Still at Work among Us.”
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In Nomine Iesu

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These were exciting and uncertain times for the Lord’s disciples. Jesus had risen from the dead and visited with them on multiple occasions, teaching them about what He had done for all people and about what was still to come. But His appearances to them were unpredictable. He was not with them like He was before. Their interactions with Jesus had changed.

They still had many questions. What was Jesus going to do now? What part would they play in His plan? How would the Israelites as a whole be affected? They seemed to hold out hope that their death-conquering Lord would usher in an earthly kingdom. Several weeks after His resurrection, the disciples asked, “*Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?*” (Act. 1:6).

Jesus’ response showed them they were thinking too small. He would establish a kingdom, but not the earthly kind. He said, “*you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth*” (v. 8). The kingdom that Jesus would rule over was a spiritual and eternal one, and the power for expanding this kingdom was from the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit came upon the disciples on Pentecost. He came with the sound of a mighty rushing wind. He caused tongues of fire to rest upon them. He gave them the ability to speak in other languages (Act. 2:2-4). Through the Word they spoke, He worked faith in thousands who were gathered in Jerusalem, and 3,000 Jews were baptized that day in the name of the Triune God.

The Holy Spirit continues His powerful work today. He still works through the holy Word to convert the hearts of unbelievers and strengthen the faith of believers. Without the Spirit’s work, no one would believe. But because of the Holy Spirit, we gather here in faith together with countless others around the world and throughout history.

We pray for the Holy Spirit’s continued work among us when we pray, “*Thy kingdom come.*” This is not a prayer for an earthly kingdom but for a spiritual and eternal one—a kingdom that comes “when our heavenly Father gives us His Holy Spirit, so that by His grace we believe His holy Word and live godly lives here in time and hereafter in eternity” (Explanation to the Second Petition).

In celebration of the Holy Spirit’s work among us, let us stand to sing our festival hymn, #399, “O Light of God’s Most Wondrous Love”:

O Light of God’s most wondrous love,
Who dost our darkness brighten,
Shed on Thy Church from heav’n above,
Our eye of faith enlighten!

As in Thy light we gather here,
Show us that Christ's own promise clear
Is Yea and Amen ever.
O risen and ascended Lord,
We wait fulfillment of Thy Word;
O bless us with Thy favor!

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Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. (Rom. 1:7, etc.)

The sermon text for today is written in the sixteenth chapter of the First Book of Samuel. We read selected verses in Jesus' name:

Now the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul, and a harmful spirit from the LORD tormented him. And Saul's servants said to him, "Behold now, a harmful spirit from God is tormenting you. Let our lord now command your servants who are before you to seek out a man who is skillful in playing the lyre, and when the harmful spirit from God is upon you, he will play it, and you will be well." So Saul said to his servants, "Provide for me a man who can play well and bring him to me." One of the young men answered, "Behold, I have seen a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite, who is skillful in playing, a man of valor, a man of war, prudent in speech, and a man of good presence, and the LORD is with him." / Therefore Saul sent messengers to Jesse and said, "Send me David your son, who is with the sheep." And Jesse took a donkey laden with bread and a skin of wine and a young goat and sent them by David his son to Saul. And David came to Saul and entered his service. And Saul loved him greatly, and he became his armor-bearer. And Saul sent to Jesse, saying, "Let David remain in my service, for he has found favor in my sight." And whenever the harmful spirit from God was upon Saul, David took the lyre and played it with his hand. So Saul was refreshed and was well, and the harmful spirit departed from him. (ESV)

These are Your words, heavenly Father. Sanctify us by Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen. (Joh. 17:17)

In Christ Jesus, who kept His promise to send the Holy Spirit to guide us into all the truth and to convey the gifts of the Father and the Son to us sinners, dear fellow redeemed:

Today we are celebrating the powerful coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost and the work He continues to do among us. But our Old Testament reading gives us an example of the opposite of the Holy Spirit's blessed work. It tells us of the Holy Spirit's departure. Not only did the Spirit of the LORD depart from Saul, but a harmful spirit also filled the void and tormented Saul.

It is no surprise that the departure of the Holy Spirit would coincide with the arrival of an evil spirit. The all-powerful Holy Spirit does not share space with demons. 1 Corinthians 6 describes the body of believers as "*a temple of the Holy Spirit within you*" (v. 19). But when the Holy Spirit is rejected and faith is lost, the door is left open for evil spirits. Jesus said that when an unclean spirit finds a "*house swept and put in order*"—a body not inhabited by the Holy Spirit—the unclean spirit "*brings seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they enter and dwell there*" (Luk. 11:25-26).

What does surprise us about our reading is that the harmful spirit that tormented Saul was *"from the LORD."* Even Saul's servants acknowledged that the evil spirit was from God. This shows us that God has power even over the demons, and that He can use them for judgment as He sees fit, like He did with Saul.

Saul had started out well as king. God had sent the Holy Spirit upon him to give him courage and to lead the people (1Sa. 10:10, 11:6). But then Saul began to go his own way. He presumed to step into the position of a priest and offered unauthorized sacrifices to God (13:8-14). Later he disobeyed God's command to completely destroy an enemy nation and all their possessions. Saul let the Israelites keep the best of the livestock and possessions and then tried to say these were kept as sacrifices for the LORD (ch. 15).

The prophet Samuel informed Saul that the LORD had taken the kingdom from him and given it to another. From this time on, Saul was troubled by the evil spirit. He had persistently rejected the Word of God. This is a warning for us that the Holy Spirit and the faith He brings can be lost. If we willfully and regularly go against what God says, the time will come when the Holy Spirit departs, and God passes the terrifying judgment that we will just get what we are asking for.

There is no blessedness apart from God. There is no love, joy, or peace. There is no patience, kindness, or goodness. There is no faithfulness, gentleness, or self-control. These are fruits of the Spirit, so they are not possible apart from the Spirit (Gal. 5:22). Saul no longer had these things because He had rejected the Holy Spirit. He became angry, paranoid, and jealous. He acted with selfishness and violence. He demanded absolute loyalty from his servants, even if what he demanded was wrong.

But it seems that some of his servants remained faithful to the LORD. They recommended that Saul employ a man who could play the lyre, an instrument like a harp but smaller in size. When he consented, they told him about David the son of Jesse. Not only was he skilled in music, they said, but he was also *"prudent in speech, and a man of good presence."* *"And,"* they added, *"the LORD is with him."* Saul was pleased with David, and his music-making was effective. *"Whenever the harmful spirit from God was upon Saul, David took the lyre and played it with his hand. So Saul was refreshed and was well, and the harmful spirit departed from him."*

This underscores the power of music. I have never met someone who doesn't like one type of music or another or have a deep emotional response to it. All music has power, but not all music is beneficial for the Christian. When music is used to convey messages or manipulate emotions for bad purposes, it is very harmful. A regular diet of music with lyrics that promote sin can eventually lead a person, like Saul, to reject the faith.

This is why our aim in the Lutheran Church is not to include music for its own sake in our worship. We don't just sing songs that make us feel good. If that were the case, we might choose pop songs that have nothing to do with God. No, we are not just looking for an emotional high. We want to have music that conveys the soul-saving message of the Gospel, the truth that God sent His Son to redeem us sinners. It is through the message of the Gospel that the Holy Spirit brings us the spiritual gifts that Jesus won for us. Jesus said, *"He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you"* (Joh. 16:14).

I expect that when David played music for Saul, he also sang God's promises, and this is especially what brought Saul refreshment and relief from the evil spirit. The Word of God is powerful. Evil spirits cannot stand the Word. David knew the Word well. When Samuel privately anointed him king to one day replace Saul, we are told that *"the Spirit of the LORD rushed upon David from that day forward"* (1Sa. 16:13).

By inspiration of the Holy Spirit, David wrote at least half the Psalms in the Bible, including Psalms like 22 (*"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"*), 23 (*"The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want."*), and 51 (*"Create in me a clean heart, O God."*). Many of these Psalms are the source for our Christian hymns, like Martin Luther's *"A Mighty Fortress Is Our God,"* which he wrote after Psalm 46. The Word of God combined with music is a powerful weapon against the devil's attacks and a powerful tool for strengthening faith.

Ephesians 5 says, *"be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ"* (vv. 18-20). This is what happens when we attend the divine service each week. We sing to each other what God has done for us, and the Holy Spirit uses these praises to unify us and build us up. This is also why it is good to fill our homes with *"psalms and hymns and spiritual songs."* The more we are connected to the singing of God's Word, the less vulnerable we are to the devil's work.

The account of Saul's affliction by a harmful spirit is a clear warning for us. No matter how faithful we have been in the past, and no matter how certainly we hold the faith today, if the Holy Spirit does not continue to move us to repentance through the Law and to comfort and strengthen us through the Gospel, we will not stand. The devil and his fellow demons are constantly looking for opportunities to get at us. They will not stop trying as long as we live here on earth.

But our merciful Lord does not give up defending and protecting us. Though we have on many occasions let down our guard and fallen into sin, He continues to call us back and forgive us. Even faithful David fell into terrible sins, but the Holy Spirit worked repentance in his heart. We join him in the words he humbly and faithfully sang in response to God's mercy, *"Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from Your presence, And take not Your Holy Spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of Your salvation, And uphold me with Your free Spirit"* (Psa. 51:10-12, NKJV).

The LORD has not taken the Holy Spirit away from us. **The Spirit Is Still at Work among Us** through His holy Word and Sacraments. He continues to build us on the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Christ Jesus as the cornerstone. He continues to join us together in the unity of faith like perfectly fitted stones in a holy temple. He continues to dwell among us and in us, bringing us all the spiritual gifts we need for this life and for the life to come.

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, forevermore. Amen.

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