

Is not everything possible with God and Through the power of the Holy Spirit?
(Ascension of Our Lord)

Deacon Jeff Monroe, May 23, 2004

Texts:

Acts 1:1-11, Eph. 1: 16-23, Luke 24: 44-53

How often do you think of those in your lives that are no longer with you? I was taking a moment from a busy day to take a walk to the road along the shore where not more than a few miles off the coast I had scattered the ashes of my mother and father. I hear their voices in my mind, my mother's accent which had become second nature to understanding. My father's laughter and his deep concern when he gave me advice. I see their faces and for a moment I am in their midst, in times when they were part of my life everyday and only a phone call away. There was comfort in that, knowing that when something came up I needed advice on I could just pick up the phone and call. Seems they were always there to listen-hi Pop, gonna paint the house trim, what do you think holds up better, latex or oil? Morning mama, what do you with me when I talked back as a kid? Sometimes more profound-I miss my family and I am thinking about not going to sea anymore.

Its funny but I don't remember many of the answers they gave me but I notice something else that is part of my life-their spirits, their manners, their strengths and weaknesses, their compassion, their love. The imprint they left on me has become a part of my persona, my being. When I laugh I hear my father, when I embrace my daughter or son, I express the unconditional love of my mother, and when I am confronted about my faith, I see the strength of their conviction and believe in our Savior.

Imagine for a moment spending three years with our Lord as He walked among us, preached to the few and the many, healed the sick, raised the dead, confronted the religious leaders and challenged all who heard what he had to say. Yet in the midst of all of that, His disciples still had trouble with their faith, in understanding who He truly was or why He was there. They watched Him suffer and die, they saw Him come back among them after He rose. Even then they struggled with their faith and their understanding of why He was among them and what everything meant.

They were anxious-what's next they asked themselves? Our Lord spoke to them and told them to be patient because He was going to leave them a gift that would open their eyes, give them strength and give them courage.

Ever have those moments when you just don't get something and then the light comes on? My navigation instructor at college used to say to me that he hoped every ship I was ever on came equipped with wheels. "You would be a great navigator if you could only add!" he would comment. "You're the reason God gave us erasers." For hours and days I would listen to lectures, do problems, check and double check answers only to discover my navigation had placed my ship in a cornfield in Iowa.

I remember going to my first ship, sextant in hand, notebooks by the bag full. I could see the smiles on the faces of the officers. Another kid hoping to be captain someday. Without my professor to lean on and all alone under the close scrutiny of the officers on the ship, I began to practice what I thought I had been taught-in most cases still navigating through Iowa.

And then one day I got it-the light came on, like Paul, the scales fell from my eyes and I was Magellan! Fixes on the chart right on course and in the right ocean! What I had been taught finally bore fruit and there I was “Master and Commander of the Universe!” Which lasted by the way all of thirty seconds until the mate pointed out that the line on the mast I had secured had come undone and wrapped itself in the radar. As the Roman’s used to say-all glory is fleeting.

So there are the disciples, in awe of what had happened and for forty days they spent time with the Lord as He prepared to leave them. He had taught them, they had listened and seem His miracles and He knew what was in store for them as they carried on our Lord’s work here on earth. And then as He was about to depart, He gives them one last, great gift-he turns the light on.

He tells them “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you and you will be my witnesses..... even unto the ends of the earth. (Acts 1:8). In our Gospel today, our Lord says “Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms. Then He opened their minds so they could understand the scriptures (Luke 24:44-45).

It is in that moment that our Lord provides them with the revelation of Himself, the knowledge and wisdom that will carry them forward and the charge to use those things to preach to all nations the gospel.

Here for the disciples is the gift that keeps on giving. The power of the Holy Spirit.

We are given the power of the Holy spirit at our baptism. It is our Lord’s gift to us, which guides us, helps us grow in faith and strengthens us in time of adversity. It is the Holy Spirit that works in us to develop our relationship with God. In our Epistle, Paul tells the church at Ephesus that they are in his prayers and that he hopes they will receive the “spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know Him better.” Paul also talks of the rich inheritance we receive in that. But he also says another thing that helps us understand just how significant the working of the Holy Spirit in us really is. He says that we receive “His incomparable great power for us who believe. That power is the working of His mighty strength”.

The mighty power of the Holy Spirit raised Christ from the dead and sat Christ at the right hand of God. No magic, no fairy dust, no abracadabra just the pure strength of the Holy Spirit. Imagine-power to raise from the dead-and present in all of us.

It is the Holy Spirit that inspires our hearts, causes us to do good works, to witness to Christ's glory. It is the same power that raised our Lord from the dead and is God's incomparable power! It is the Holy Spirit, which speaks through our pastors in their preaching, through our hearts in the study of scripture, through our hands in the expression of our faith in our good works, through our witness to those who do not believe or whose faith is being challenged. Christ sent His disciples into the world with the power of the Holy Spirit burning brightly in each of them. They were fully equipped- had everything they needed and they went forth, into persecution, and for all but one, eventual death for their faith.

What is so powerful that it can cause someone to face death, adversity, pain and suffering with joy and peace? What is so powerful that it can set the course for a person to impending death with the joyous proclamation "I am a Christian-I am one of His followers-He is my savior and the face of the devil himself shall not shake me from my faith."

Is not everything possible with God? Is not anything possible through the power of the Holy Spirit? "Lord, I will stand by you even unto death." proclaims St. Peter. "Peter, before the cocks crows, ye shall deny me three times."

Our Lord warns us that the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak. In that, we are challenged every day by something contrary to our faith. We accept the ways of the world, be it pre-marital sex, homosexuality, prejudice, arrogance, self-worth, murder, abortion, and the ever increasing and continuous assault on our faith.

Let me ask a question. How many of us have the courage through the power of the Holy Spirit to stand up and say no matter how politically incorrect it is that "There is one true church, one true God and that is in Jesus Christ and all other religions, all other faiths, all other beliefs ARE FALSE!

NO ONE COMES TO THE FATHER EXCEPT BY ME, proclaims our Lord. How much clearer can it get? How many times have we wanted to say something, speak out, felt the urge to proclaim our belief and felt the urge pulling at us to witness? That was the Holy Spirit fighting to get out. Wanting to speak through you.

And what do we do? We keep our mouths shut, we fail to witness-"What will they think of me, maybe it will affect my job, maybe they will gang up on me and think less of me, all I want to do is fit in."

What a great gift God has given us through baptism. Imagine the talented artist who chooses never to left a brush, or the voice of a singer never raised in song, or the poet who chooses never to speak. Imagine the Christian given the most powerful gift in creation who never chooses to witness.

You all understand what I am talking about. We are called upon but too often we fail to act. The spirit moves in us but we struggle to keep it contained. In our sin and our

unworthiness, we fail to use the gift given us by our Lord. Are we any better than Peter-not I Lord, I will always stand with you.

It is our failure to act, our negligence to the call issued by our Lord to bring the gospel to all that condemns us, and shows us who we truly are. We separate ourselves from God's love by denying what has been given us, by failing to act, by keeping the gift of the Holy Spirit contained. It is our nature to turn away from Him because we are too busy, too wrapped up in our own lives and we choose to ignore the power that is striving to work within us. Yet God continues to call us, to love us and to forgive us.

The spirit that is in each of us, that wonderful gift from our Lord in our baptism, burns often too low because of our sinful nature. Each of us must allow the spirit to be nourished and allowed to grow and work in us. It must be strengthened through Scripture and Sacraments through our participation in the offerings of the church. Dr. Luther points out that God does not deal with us except through His external word and sacrament. He writes that "Whatever is attributed to the spirit apart from such word and sacrament is of the devil." (Smalcald Articles of Christian Doctrine-1537). The spirit cannot work in us without our connection to scripture and sacrament. The Body and Blood of Christ we receive in Holy Communion, our acknowledgement and confession of sins, the study of His word-these things cleanse and strengthen us.

In scripture, God helps us understand our relationship with Him and what He expects of us through His law and gospel. When I went to sea I spent many hours reading scripture. As I read and study it again and again, it continues to reveal to me new and wonderful things. It helps me understand the path God places me on in my relationship with Him, it strengthens me and when I faulted and failed, it lifts me up. You can feel the power of the Holy Spirit working in you, fighting to get out, opening your mind and your heart. It changes you, it molds you, it helps you grow and it strengthens you in time of peril.

To be born anew, to receive inwardly a new heart, mind and spirit, is solely the work of the Holy Spirit. He opens the intellect and the heart to understand the scriptures and to heed the word (Formula of Concord 526.26). The Holy Spirit is a Spirit of regeneration and renewal (Titus 3:5,6). God removes the hard, stony, heart and bestows a new and tender heart of flesh that we may walk in His commandments. This is our hope. It is one of the greatest blessings we have received and it is in every one of us here. Every good gift comes from God (James 1:17).

Again, Dr. Luther says-I believe that by my own reason or strength I cannot believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord or come to Him. But the Holy Spirit has called me through the Gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, and sanctified and preserved me in true faith, just as he calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth and preserves it in union with Jesus Christ in the one true faith.

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We must allow the Holy Spirit to work within us to strengthen our relationship with God. Through prayer and our church, and through the power of the Holy Spirit can strive to be draw closer to our Lord each day. We know that because of sin we will mostly fail but we also know that God loves us and that nothing separates us from that love. We know our lord and Savior Jesus Christ died for our sins and stands as our only mediator and advocate with the Father. Yet we struggle with the power of the Holy Spirit that resides in each of us. "Men of Galilee, why do you look to the sky?" God has placed in each of us this wonderful power, His revelation in the Word, and his nourishment in the sacraments. In all that you do, in all that you say, Glorify God and let the spirit shine in you. Let it be as much a part of your life as the love imparted from those who are your own. Be a radiant torch of the truth and have the courage to stand in the faith. And when you fall, lift yourselves up and keep going, when you face trial, face it with courage-for "I am always with you, even unto the ends of the earth."

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Let us pray: My Lord and My God-what a great gift you have given all of us, what a wonderful joy that you are within each of us through the Holy Spirit. Let, we pray, that spirit shine in each of us, may it burn brightly in our lives as an example to others in our witness. Let it be our guide and our revelation of you. Continue to strengthen us through your word and sacrament and when we fail, lift us up, when we face trial, give us courage. For in you all things are possible. In Jesus Name we pray. Amen.