

The Holy Spirit

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Spirit who still calls and gathers us into God's people, amen.

Today's scripture is usually read on the Sunday when we celebrate Pentecost or the outpouring of the Holy Spirit onto the Apostles allowing them to spread the Good News of the mighty acts of God to all the visitors in Jerusalem in their own native languages. Today we're reading it because it fits so nicely into our third and final Sermon in the series focusing on the creeds or our confession of the articles of faith. Article One focuses on God our Father, Article Two on God's Son, Jesus Christ, and now Article Three, the Holy Spirit.

For a lot of us Lutherans, the Holy Spirit isn't our favorite person of the Trinity. To be honest, talking about the Holy Spirit makes me a bit nervous. All the stories of the Spirit taking over and people speaking in tongues, ecstatic prophecy, and other miracles sort of makes me feel left out of all the fun. I don't speak in tongues, at least not in the way most modern tongue speaking churches go about it. When we were first married PJ attended a women's group at my sister's Roman Catholic Church in Illinois. The group was called Women Aglow. They prided themselves on almost every member being able to speak in tongues. When PJ was not able to do so, she was made to feel inadequate or like a second class or not a real Christian. From that experience I decided I needed to learn more about Speaking in Tongues. I found out Saint Paul actually addressed this issue in 1st

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Corinthians, chapter 14. Saint Paul talks a lot about speaking in tongues. His assessment was that all the gifts of the spirit, speaking in tongues is just one, were given for the building up of the faith of the Community of believers, which is the Church. Clearly the way PJ was treated was not building up of the community, but rather a competition to see who could babble incoherently with the utmost sincerity. Building up the community would have involved helping people like PJ discover what gifts the Holy Spirit had given to them rather than degrading the ones who were not moved by the Spirit to speak in tongues.

Also, several years ago, I read an article about modern day speaking in tongues. That article helped me understand the use of traditional “Church” language was not effective in reaching our younger generations. Perhaps the modern-day version of what happened on that first day of Pentecost nearly 2000 years ago would involve changing the way we talk about God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit using words and language young people understand and can relate to. This week my son, Trevor introduced me a series of Tic Tok videos that translate some of our favorite Bible stories into the language used by our own Gen Zers.

Generation Z are people born between 1999 and 2015. They would be between 9 and 24 years old right now. There are over 68 million of them! They are our own children and grandchildren. If you ever listen to the way they talk to each other, not how they talk to us, but to their peers, you’ll soon realize they actually do have

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their own language. These Gen Z videos tell classic stories from the Bible in internet slang and Memes. For the most part, they replace the old, stuffy language that can be hard to understand or just make people tune out to the whole story of God working in creation. Instead, they use terms like “vibe check” and “main character.” A “Vibe Check” seems to be when you do or say something that is compared to God’s will or plan. Passing the vibe check is a good thing. The Gen Z videos also refer to Jesus as the “Main Character.” I think that’s enough introduction. Now let’s watch one of these Gen Z Bible videos. This one should sound familiar even if you don’t speak the lingo of Gen Z. **(SHOW VIDEO)**

That was from the first chapter of the Gospel of John... Here’s another Gen Z video with another familiar Bible passage. This one is from the Sermon on the Mount. We know these sayings of Jesus as the Beatitudes. Listen carefully and you might be able to figure out what Jesus is saying... **(SHOW Video)**

Well, I figured out God the Father is the G of gees and L is sin or anything bad that happens to you and W is blessing. I find these videos hilarious. Some of you might find them less funny and more blasphemous. No matter what you think of them, no one can deny they are reaching the intended audience. The first one of these has only been out about 2 weeks and has already reached over 2.7 million viewers. They’re so popular because they are able to tell the Bible stories in language that our young people can understand and relate to. I mean who doesn’t

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love the idea that Jesus is the “Divine Bro?” I’m still working on some of the other Gen Z jargon, but from what I’ve seen so far these videos are crushing it! I wish someone would publish a Gen Z Bible dictionary...

I’m not quite sure what the next step is for Gen Z and these Bible videos... I mean if all they do is fill up the chat rooms without creating a means for more in depth teaching about the Divine Bro, then my prediction is they will fall flat sooner rather than later. One possibility might be for parents and grandparents to watch these with their Gen Z families. After seeing one of them together what a great discussion you could have learning each other’s language and maybe seeing the Bible stories from a new perspective. Afterwards you can decide for yourselves if they pass the divine vibe check...

Ultimately, today isn’t about speaking in different tongues, but about what we believe regarding the Holy Spirit. The third article of the Apostle’s Creed says, “I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. I always thought this was a list of things we believe in, but as I thought about it this week I realized that entire sentence is all about the Holy Spirit. I should have known that truth all along, but I’m a little slow to pick up on these things. If you read Martin Luther’s explanation of the third article you can see what I mean... Luther wrote, “I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in

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Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith. In the same way He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith. In this Christian church He daily and richly forgives all my sins and the sins of all believers. On the Last Day He will raise me and all the dead, and give eternal life to me and all believers in Christ.” The entire thing describes what the holy spirit is up to. Without the Spirit of the living God we can’t even come to Jesus or recognize Jesus as the Lord God. Without the Holy Spirit there would be no Church, no forgiveness, and no everlasting life. Without the Holy Spirit everything in this world would be lost and God forsaken. Everything would be suspect or just sus as the Gen Z folks say... Thanks to God’s Spirit blowing over and through us our dead bones have life, and our world has truth and meaning.

I may never learn to speak in tongues like our Pentecostal Church siblings, but I will try to learn how to communicate to our young people whether they’re Gen X, Gen Z or Millennial because what’s at stake is the Gospel message of Good News for all people and that message must be handed down from generation to generation until Jesus finally returns to set all things right.

May the spirit of the living God dwell in each of you and live in your hearts and minds, rent free. May God the Father continue the creative works in and

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through the Church, and may Jesus Christ be made real for every generation to discover all the Ws God has prepared especially for you. Amen.