

Immanuel (Augsburg) Lutheran Church
Shobonier, Illinois
Pentecost C
June 5, 2022
Genesis 11:1-9; Acts 2:1-21; John 14:23-31

The Spirit Is No Narcissist

26 But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. 27 Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid. (John 14:26-27 ESV)

Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Narcissism runs rampant among us. Who can deny it? We live in an age where “egotism, vanity, pride, [and] selfishness” run wild. We’re surrounded by it—in the world, in the culture, at school, at work, at home, even at church. So often it’s all about me and only me. We have Self magazine and many books, magazines, and blogs, about self-improvement. And, of course, there are the never-ending selfies. And while it’s easy to see it in others, we need to be aware that each of us suffers the same affliction. Each of us is full of ego, vanity, pride, and selfishness. Though we may deny it, we, too, often think, speak, and act as though we are, or should be, the center of things. We think our opinions are right and beyond dispute. We want our own way and say and do whatever we want not caring about others. We want what we want, how we want it, when we want it, and we don’t care what anyone else needs or wants or thinks, or what the consequences or effects may be.

And yet, this is nothing new. Listen again to the beginning of the Old Testament reading: Now the whole earth had one language and the same words. And as people migrated from the east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. And they said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly." . . . Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth." (Gen. 11:1-4)

“Let us make a name for ourselves.” That’s narcissism. Not satisfied with what God had given them, ignoring His Word, they wanted to be the center of their universe and they wanted to be famous, “to make a name” for themselves. And the result was what they did not want to happen. They were “dispersed over the face of all the whole earth.” Because of their arrogance and evil desire, God confounded their language so they couldn’t complete their plan. The One who created all things is still in charge.

Even the disciples can’t get away unscathed. Loving Jesus means keeping, treasuring, guarding His Word. Evidently, the disciples didn’t rejoice that Jesus was going to the Father. They didn’t want Jesus to go away, even though He told them He was and that it would be for their good.

As on another occasion when some of them desired favored positions in the kingdom, they, too, showed their narcissism.

And yet, as we celebrate this feast of Pentecost, we see how God is at work to save us from our self-centeredness and narcissism. As we read in the account from Acts 2, we see God reversing the curse of Babel. He had drawn people from all over the world to Jerusalem. He enabled the disciples to speak languages they didn't know and He enabled people to hear the Gospel in their own tongues. God thus brings a great blessing upon all who hear and believe.

Still, there are many today who pervert the work of the Holy Spirit. They so emphasize the Spirit that they miss what the Spirit really does. They emphasize speaking in tongues or doing miraculous signs as an end in themselves. They may speak of the Holy Spirit, but with no regard to Word and Sacrament. Those false teachers become the center, or at least the measure of all things.

But the Holy Spirit is no narcissist or egotist. He does nothing to draw attention to Himself. Instead, He always directs us to Jesus. Thus, when the "sound like a mighty rushing wind [...] filled the entire house where [the disciples] were sitting," and "tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them," it was not to draw attention to the Spirit, but to the preaching of the Gospel. It was all about proclaiming Jesus Christ as the only Savior of the world. It was to make abundantly clear to all "that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." (Acts. 2:21).

So the Spirit comes to you because the Father sends Him in Jesus' name. And what does He do? He calls you to repentance and points you to Jesus. He "teaches you all things and brings to your remembrance all that I [Jesus] have said to you." The Spirit does nothing for Himself. He doesn't need to make a name for Himself. But He does proclaim Jesus and all that *He* has done for you and for your salvation. He brings you to faith in Christ, and keeps you in that faith, through the means He has appointed – the Word and the Sacraments. Thus we give the Holy Spirit His due when we receive His gifts where He delivers them.

And as the Holy Spirit directs us to Jesus, we need to see that Jesus is not self-centered either. Jesus did and does nothing for His own sake. Even as He dwelt among us on earth, nothing about Him was for Himself. His conception, His birth, His teaching, His miracles, His healing, His passion, suffering, and death, His resurrection, His ascension, His eternal reign, is not for Him, but for you. Everything about Jesus, even His drawing all people to Himself, is not to be the center of things, but to deliver life and salvation to you.

So when Jesus says we should listen to Him, He also says, "The word that you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me." You see, Jesus did not become incarnate for Himself. He came in obedience to His Father to save you from your sins and from death. And He says what the Father has given Him to say.

For “though he was in the form of God, [He] did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.” (Phil. 2:6-8). He humbled Himself to be born of a virgin. He didn’t turn stones into bread when He was hungry. He didn’t jump when the devil said He should to prove the Father’s love. He didn’t fight back when He was betrayed, arrested, tried, convicted, and crucified. He didn’t refuse or avoid the cross. And He certainly didn’t do this for Himself – but for you. Jesus, the very Son of God in the flesh, did everything for your salvation.

Thus, He gives you peace. Peace with God through the forgiveness of sins, even your sins of narcissism and selfishness. Peace as the sacrifice for you and your sin has been made by the Lamb of God. Peace as Jesus intercedes on your behalf. Peace in the certainty that you are God’s dear child and heir and that nothing can separate you from His love in Christ Jesus. Peace as the Holy Spirit works in you through this Gospel of Christ. Peace as you hear the absolution and the benediction. Peace as it is delivered to you in Jesus’ Body and Blood of the Sacrament.

The Holy Spirit is no narcissist and neither is Jesus. Rather, they are totally focused on saving you, forgiving you, and giving you peace. To God be the glory, now and forever. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Rev. Timothy J. Landskroener