Text: 3rd Article

**Introduction**

The Holy Spirit is both the least talked about and understood person of the Trinity, and paradoxically the one most Christians have experienced personally…if only occasionally profoundly.

My guess is that most of you think I’ve sprung a head leak saying that. Or I’ve been reading a bit too much of the desert fathers. Or maybe just lost it.

But we only think that because we just don’t listen to what the Catechism and creed say about the Work of the Holy Spirit. Maybe even worse when we used Divine Service 3 and the older word Holy Ghost. We place His work in the mystical. We pray for Him to show up, when we need miracles. When woo-woo or spooky is what we are after.

But that is never how the Scriptures speak of the Spirit.

**Text**

The three big references to the Spirit in the Scripture are probably Jesus to Nicodemus in John 3. The Spirit is like the wind. You don’t know where it comes from, but you see the leaves move. Seeing things move and change is about as down to earth as you get. Jesus calls the Spirit the comforter or the helper in John 14. What does the Spirit do that brings comfort or help? He brings remembrance of Jesus and everything that he said. This might be even more real than moving leaves. The bringing of peace. The last Spirit reference of this type is from the text we read. Paul tells us everything promised us in the cosmic Jesus: our adoption, our redemption, our inheritance, our election. And then he says that the Holy Spirit is the guarantee – the downpayment – on all of that. We all know what a down payment it. A small amount that proves the larger to come. That ensures us of the goodness of the promise to pay. Again, a very concrete thing.

So if how the Scriptures speak about the Holy Spirit is concrete, why do we attribute all things mysterious to the Spirit?

Now Part of it could be that we don’t know where it comes from, which is what Jesus says about the wind. But that isn’t true. The Spirit comes from the Father and the Son. The Spirit is sent by Jesus. If what is blowing doesn’t lead to Jesus, it isn’t the Spirit.

Here is my guess. The creed and Luther’s explanation are explicit about the very concrete things we can observe the Spirit in and through.

We can observe the Holy Spirit in and through the Holy Christian church which is the communion of saints. What does that mean? It means that faith is not possible in our natural state. If you see someone with faith, if you yourself have faith, you are witnessing the work of the Holy Spirit. The fact that we are all here tonight in the name of Jesus is a work of the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy spirit that has called us by the Gospel here. It is – hopefully – the Holy Spirit that enlightens us with his gifts here. That enlightenment is the proclamation of Jesus Christ and him crucified. Everything that we talked about last week. And it is in those words proclaimed and the sacraments administered that the Holy Spirit sanctifies us and keeps us in the faith. If the Holy Spirit were not active, there would be no churches. There would not be a communion of Saints. Because these are the work of the Spirit that we can see.

But what does the church through world and sacrament receive?

She receives or maybe better recalls the words of Jesus that her sins are forgiven. “In this Christian church he daily and richly forgives all my sins and the sins of all believers. And we can take that as the simply absolution. Our sins are truly forgiven. But we can probably all remember a few special occasions. Those things we could never imagining forgiving. And yet we witnessed forgiveness. That doesn’t come from us. We are naturally the people of an eye for an eye. It is the work of the Spirit that brings about forgiveness.

These are the concrete things we see here. And yes, a skeptic might attempt to say that these are merely human things. But c’mon. It is not like the church is such an attractive institution that there are people clamoring to join. She exists because of the power of the Spirit working through her. And if forgiveness was just words, nobody would believe it. But it is the comfort that those words brings. “I will remember you sins no more.” That’s the Spirit.

**Conclusion**

Those are the things we have until we acquire possession of our full inheritance. The same Spirit that concretely calls, gathers and enlightens – will sanctify and keep us.

We will see the resurrection of the dead and the life everlasting. The downpayment received will pay off. The one who has promised is faithful.

This is most certainly true.