

Pentecost
June 8, 2014
Peace Lutheran Church, Grass Valley
John 20:19-23

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.

What does this mean? I believe that by my own understanding or strength I cannot believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to him, but instead the Holy Spirit has called me through the gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, made me holy and kept me in the true faith, just as he calls, gathers, enlightens, and makes holy the whole Christian church on earth and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one common, true faith. Daily in this Christian church the Holy Spirit abundantly forgives all sins—mine and those of all believers. On the last day the Holy Spirit will raise me and all the dead and will give to me and all believers in Christ eternal life. This is most certainly true.

Luther's explanation gives all the credit to the Holy Spirit: faith, forgiveness, the church itself—all are the work of the Spirit. We are recipients of boundless love.

And what does that mean for us if we think our mission as the church: possibly this: “ the most difficult part of this Easter/Pentecost story concerns [just] what Jesus commissions the faith community to do. [The bit about forgiving sins or not forgiving sins is not about moralistic judgments on others, but rather] in John's gospel it involves bearing witness to the identity of God as revealed in Jesus. If [we combine] combine vv. 22-23 with Jesus' commandment to love one another in 13:34-35, a picture of the church's mission emerges. By loving one another as Jesus loves us, the faith community reveals God to the world; by revealing God to the world, the church makes it possible for the world to choose to enter into relationship with this God of limitless love [by choosing to join the community of faith]. It is in choosing or rejecting this relationship with God via the faith community that sins are forgiven or retained. The faith community's mission, therefore, is not to be the arbiter of right or wrong, but to bear unceasing witness to the love of God in Jesus.” [O'Day' (*John*, NIB) page 848]

And it is the Holy Spirit who opens our hearts and minds to do just that. Come, Holy Spirit, and renew in us the joy of our salvation so that we become an invitation to the world to discover the living truth of God's boundless love. Amen.