

Acts 2:36-42

“Then all the people of Israel should know it’s true that God made Him Lord and Christ — this Jesus Whom you crucified.”

³⁷ When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart. They asked Peter and the other apostles, “Fellow Jews, what should we do?”

³⁸ Peter answered them, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will be given the Holy Spirit. ³⁹ What is promised belongs to you, to your children, and to all *who are far away, all whom the Lord our God will call.*”

⁴⁰ He said much more to warn them. “Be saved from these crooked people,” he urged them. ⁴¹ Those who accepted what he said were baptized. And that day about 3,000 persons were added.

⁴² They were loyal to what the apostles taught in their fellowship, in breaking of bread, and in the prayers.

St. Peter preached a persuasive sermon on Pentecost. He pointed out the promise of the Holy Spirit given through the prophet Joel. He laid out for the people what the Scriptures say about who Jesus was and what he would do. He gave a powerful argument, showing that Christ’s resurrection was prophesied by David in the sixteenth Psalm. And then he ended his address with these words, “Then all the people of Israel should know it’s true that God made him Lord and Christ—this Jesus whom you crucified.” Here is Peter, the same Peter who just over fifty days prior was cowering before a slave girl, denying his Lord while he was being arrested. Now he is calling his own people out. He says, “This Jesus, whom *you crucified*, God has made both Lord and Christ.” Such a sermon – such a confession – takes courage. It takes tremendous courage. It takes a boldness that only the Holy Spirit can give. And this is exactly what the Holy Spirit does. He gives us tongues of fire. He gives us courage to speak the truth.

How does the Holy Spirit give us courage and boldness? He does so by teaching us about Christ. Jesus says that if you love him then you will keep his Word. It is his Word that causes the Father himself to come and live with us. It is his Word by which the Holy Spirit comforts us and encourages us. That’s exactly what he does. He “in-courages” us. He gives us the courage to speak what is true. And he does it precisely by teaching us this truth. Jesus promised that he would do this. He would teach the apostles and bring to mind everything Jesus taught them from the beginning. It is therefore by this apostolic teaching that the Holy Spirit gives us courage and boldness to face this world with the truth of our Savior.

The Holy Spirit came upon Peter with fire, making him bold to teach and bold to confess. It certainly took courage to teach and confess like that. This is especially true when you consider whom Peter is instructing and calling to repentance. These are his own kinsmen, his own relatives, his own brethren. Of course, it can be intimidating to talk to strangers. But there is something especially jarring about calling your own family and relatives to repentance. Pointing out the elephant in the room, looking them in the eye, and telling them that they crucified the very Lord Christ – this is not your everyday conversation. Peter is kind yet firm that Jesus is the Christ, that

he died and rose exactly how the Scriptures said he would, and that his own relatives, his own brethren, his own fellow Israelites were guilty of killing him and needed to repent.

Being courageous involves being at peace. It involves being content and confident that no matter what happens God will be faithful to you. He will be faithful to his Word. Just as he raised his Son from the dead, he will give life to all who trust and confess his precious doctrine. To know and believe this is to have peace. And this is no worldly peace. It's peace with God. It's the peace that surpasses all understanding, the very peace that Jesus established by his own blood, turning God's anger away, reconciling sinners to the Father. As St. Paul says, since we have been justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. We therefore have boldness to approach God, and we have access into his grace by which we stand righteous in his sight.

All teaching of Scripture – all biblical doctrine – is taught by the Holy Spirit. As St. Peter writes in his second epistle, holy men of God spoke as they were carried by the Holy Spirit. All biblical doctrine comes from the Holy Spirit. It is breathed out by him. And it all centers on this one truth, that Jesus is the Christ and Lord of all, that he has died for our sins and been raised again for our justification, and that all who believe in him have forgiveness of sins through his name. All Scripture testifies to the peace Christ has made between God and man by his own blood. So when the Holy Spirit teaches us the Bible, whether he is teaching us about creation, the fall into sin, original sin, the great works of God throughout history, or even the judgment, his teaching continues to direct us to Jesus Christ our righteousness and salvation. His teaching therefore serves to give us a good conscience at rest and peace with God. And the more he teaches us the truth, the more boldness he gives us to confess it.

Being courageous also involves hope. The reason a lot of people don't speak up for the truth is because they don't think it will do any good. They get cynical. Perhaps they have tried to tell people the truth before, but it always gets thrown back in their face. They notice how much the wider culture is rejecting even the most basic details of the truth. Satan so often comes and snatches the Word out of people's hearts before they believe it. So those who confess the Word get discouraged. They literally lose courage, tired of always being disappointed. But the Holy Spirit fills our hearts with God's love so that we would not be discouraged or ashamed of what he teaches us. As St. Paul says, love bears all things, believes all things, and hopes all things. So if you love Jesus, you will keep his Word. You will hold onto his Word. You will hope in his Word, not ashamed if people reject it, but always believing that it will continue to bring you and others to repentance. It will continue to strengthen your faith. So why shouldn't it give faith to others?

When you listen to Peter's sermon on Pentecost, you might expect the crowd to react with anger and hostility. You might expect them to string Peter up or crucify him as they did to Jesus. But their reaction may be somewhat surprising. They are cut to the heart by what Peter says. They are remorseful. They refer to Peter and the other apostles as brethren, and they ask, "What should we do now?" They are persuaded by Peter's preaching. They have been won over. They are repentant.

Of course, there were plenty of harsh, angry, and hostile reactions in store for Peter and his fellow disciples. He would be thrown in prison not long after this day of Pentecost. All the apostles

would be severely persecuted throughout their ministry. Jesus warned them of this. Even right before Peter started speaking up, there were those in the crowd who were mocking the disciples and accusing them of being drunk. Yet, the Holy Spirit didn't allow this to discourage Peter or make him silent. As a result of this, the crowd of people actually repented.

This teaches us that repentance is a gift of the Holy Spirit. He is the one who turns hearts and minds from sin and unbelief and causes them to desire God's Word. Yes, it's true that people often react with apathy or anger toward God's Word. But not on this day. No, on Pentecost, the Holy Spirit added 3,000 souls to his fold, 3,000 people who were persuaded by the words of eternal life.

We should be encouraged by this account. It should literally give us courage to speak the Word we learn from the Holy Spirit, confident that he will cause it to bear fruit according to his good pleasure.

Repentance includes two parts. It includes remorse, or sorrow over sin. And it also includes faith that God forgives sin for Christ's sake. Both of these things – sorrow over sin and faith in Christ's forgiveness – are works of the Holy Spirit. The people were cut to the heart, asking what they should do. What could they do? They couldn't possibly make up for what they did. The sin, which dwells in your mortal nature from your conception and birth, is what placed Jesus on that cross. And there is nothing you can do to make that right. This is why the other part of repentance is so vital. Peter teaches us, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

This is what makes repentance true repentance. It isn't just being filled with grief and regret, wondering how you can make it right. It is the confidence that God has made it right in his Son. It is faith that he forgives you for Jesus' sake. It is the new birth and life the Holy Spirit gives you in your baptism. As we boldly confess in the Creed, "I acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins."

Here we see that the boldness and courage of Peter isn't just his personal gift. Those who were cut to the heart are now given that same confidence in their baptism. Such boldness to stand before God, certain that he forgives you and bestows on you his Holy Spirit, comes from his sure promise. And this promise is to you and to your children and for all who are far off, all whom the Lord our God will call to himself. It is the promise that God has set his anger aside, that he has established peace by the death of his Son, and that he saves you forever.

Baptism saves us. The Word of God saves us. The Holy Spirit saves us. This is because Jesus, our Savior, saves us. He saves us from sin and death. He saves us from this twisted and dying generation. He saves us from the wrath to come. He bore the fire of God's judgment so that we may have the flame of boldness in his gospel, confident that it will not return empty but remains powerful to save the soul. As Paul says to Timothy, be devoted to the doctrine, for by it you will save yourself and those who hear you.

Doctrine saves. The Holy Spirit saves you by teaching you. Even a little baby who is being baptized is already being taught the Word, and he continues to grow in this salvation. As Isaiah says (Is. 54:13), "All your children will be taught by the LORD, and their peace will be great." The

true, pure biblical doctrine is not just a bunch of rules and details that only experts can understand. No, doctrine is life. It all centers on Christ, his death, and his resurrection. The chief article of doctrine is that we stand forgiven and justified before God through faith in Christ who has made full satisfaction for our sins. So don't avoid learning this biblical doctrine. Follow the example of those 3,000 souls whom the Holy Spirit granted repentance and faith during Pentecost. They remained devoted to the doctrine of the apostles, to the communion in the breaking of bread, and to the prayers. They continued to gather around the teaching of God's Word and the administration of his sacraments.

This is how the Holy Spirit gives us boldness and courage to confess the Word of our Savior. He doesn't leave us orphans, left to our own devices. Instead, he comforts and save us even as he teaches us. He encourages us even as he gives us peace. Therefore, let us pray:

Come Holy Spirit through Thy Word.
Strengthen our faith in Christ our Lord.
Lead us in what we do and say,
And give us courage ev'ry day.

In these last days of sore distress
Grant us, dear Lord, true steadfastness
That pure we keep, till life is spent,
Thy holy Word and Sacrament.

To hope grown dim, to hearts turned cold
Speak tongues of fire and make us bold
To shine Your Word of saving grace
Into each dark and loveless place. Amen.