

Lent Wednesday 2 (3/15/2017)  
Luther's Small Catechism  
**The Creed**  
Ephesians 2:4-10

The Third Article: On Being Made Holy

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.<sup>1</sup>

Luther elaborates:

Neither you nor I could ever know anything about Christ, or believe in him and receive him as Lord, unless these were offered to us and bestowed on our hearts through the preaching of the gospel by the Holy Spirit. The work is finished and completed; Christ has acquired and won the treasure for us by his sufferings, death, and resurrection, etc. But if the work remained hidden so that no one knew of it, it would have been all in vain, all lost. In order that this treasure not remain buried but be put to use and enjoyed, God has caused the Word to be published and proclaimed, in which he has given the Holy Spirit to offer and apply to us this treasure, this redemption. Therefore being made holy is nothing else than bringing us to the Lord Christ to receive this blessing, to which we could not have come by ourselves.<sup>2</sup>

Have you ever wondered how a first-century Palestinian peasant – executed by the Roman Empire along with thousands of other expendables – eventually drew followers in the billions over the centuries and throughout the world? The cross of

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<sup>1</sup> *Luther's Small Catechism*, 500 Years of Reformation edition, 31.

<sup>2</sup> Martin Luther, *The Large Catechism*, in *The Book of Concord*, 436.

Jesus, after all, is foolishness and scandal – not worthy of our reverence, according to worldly standards. Yet, to those of us who are called, disciples in every time and place, the cross is the epitome of God’s way in the world, the sign of God’s solidarity with a vulnerable, suffering humanity.<sup>3</sup>

How can we possibly come to see the humiliation of the cross as a source of hope? Only, according to Luther, by the power of the Holy Spirit. Contrary to popular opinion, faith “is not [our] own doing; it is the gift of God – not the result of works, so that no one may boast.” We don’t conjure up faith of our own accord; we don’t come to trust in a crucified Lord naturally. **The grace of God, embodied in the person of Jesus, is made known to us only by God’s own gracious will through “the preaching of the gospel by the Holy Spirit.”**

**The same Holy Spirit joins the whole church on Earth in one communion of saints, diverse and strained, yet everywhere clinging to the living Christ among us. And finally, by the movement of the Spirit, Christ’s promises of forgiveness and eternal life release us from fear and self-preoccupation and sustain us in lives of faith and sacrificial love.**

Dear church, listen to what the Spirit is saying to us again today.<sup>4</sup> Take comfort in God’s word of grace, the treasure the Holy Spirit bestows on us as a gift, a blessing to which we could not have come by ourselves.

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<sup>3</sup> 1 Corinthians 1:23-24.

<sup>4</sup> Revelation 2:7, 29; 3:6, 13, 22.