

The Holy Ghost Calls And Comforts By The Word

John 14:23-27, Pentecost Sunday

June 4, 2006

Beloved of the Lord.....If you look at a map of Italy, you'll see that the country is shaped like a cowboy boot. At the tip of this boot there is the large island named Sicily. The ocean strait which lies between Italy and Sicily is called the Strait of Messina. This narrow ocean passage is quite treacherous for ships. On the Italian side there is a large rock which many ships have been dashed against. On the Sicilian side there is a large whirlpool which pulls ships down to the depths of the sea. Sailors have named this dangerous passage the "Scylla and Charybdis" (pronounced sil'-a & ka-rib'-dus) of Greek mythology. Therefore if you are caught between two dangers, you are "between Scylla and Charybdis". You are between a rock and a hard place.

Christians are often caught between "Scylla and Charybdis" On the one hand we must be careful that we do not become hardened or secure in our sins, thinking we have no need for God or forgiveness. On the other hand we must be careful we do not despair of God's mercy, by thinking our sins are too great for God to forgive us. The dangerous "Scylla" then is the hardened heart which loves sin and will not repent, and the dangerous Charybdis is the whirlpool of despair where we are led to believe our sins are too powerful for the redeeming blood of Christ. In the picture of this narrow sea passage, we are like a person floating on the waters between two very dangerous places. If we stray too far to the right or left we perish.

But what are we to do? For who can swim between Scylla and Charybdis and survive? The only way to safely navigate this treachery is to have someone pulling us through from the other side. Consider now the Holy Spirit, which Jesus calls our "Comforter". Jesus said, "But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, He shall teach you all things." The Father sends the Holy Ghost, our Comforter, to rescue us. In our picture, the Holy Ghost stands with His feet firmly implanted upon the shore. Moreover He has thrown us a lifeline, which is the saving Gospel Word of Jesus Christ. At the end of this lifeline is a life preserver, which is the righteousness of Christ. We grab hold of His righteousness by faith. His righteousness helps to keep us afloat. When we drift too close to the rocks, the Holy Spirit helps us to steer clear of them. When we drift too close to the whirlpool, He pulls us away lest we be drawn into confusion. The rope which connects us then to the Holy Spirit is the Word of God. God's Word is the rope, the guide which keeps pulling us toward the safety of shore, which is heaven.

As we hear the words of Jesus today let us learn more about the third person of the Holy Trinity, the Holy Ghost, our Comforter. Indeed the Father has sent this Comforter in the name of Jesus in order to comfort and guide us as we pass through the various dangers in this world.

I. The Holy Ghost calls us by the Gospel. As we begin let us look at a similar picture. Consider that all of humanity is like an ocean of people floating upon the waters. Here and there are a few lifeboats with people safely in them. Though they haven't reached the shore yet, the people in the boats are hopeful. Many happily sing songs of praise to God, for they know they are safe. But in this same scene there are also many people in the water. Though there still is room left in every boat, the people floating in the ocean think or assume all is well as they tread water. They do not consider that the sea below them is deep, dark, and cold, and filled with death. They do not realize that they cannot tread water all night, as their limbs grow numb. These people who willfully remain in the water are the unbelievers. They think they have no reason to get into the boat. They do not believe that their own sins brings death and damnation. They have no need for God or His salvation. By the way, God is in this picture too. In each boat, at every helm, the Holy Spirit is there guiding and comforting His people in the boat. Indeed the Comforter instructs His people to throw out the life preserver to those in the water. This they happily do. The Word of God is tossed out to the people, but they do not receive it. Though there are plenty of life preservers in the water, they do not grab hold. These people are secure in their sins. They think they can swim to the shore by their own strength, or perhaps a bigger boat will come to rescue them. And so they wait though no other ship is in sight.

Beloved in the Lord, there is no other way to heaven, other than the way of Jesus Christ. Jesus says, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." Jn. 14:6 Those in the boat have come to believe the Gospel, that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses them from all sins. Those in the water reject God's Word that is thrown to them by the Holy Spirit. They don't believe God's Word, nor do they think they have transgressed His commandments. It is just as Jesus says, "He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings." Those who do not love God, such will not keep His commandments, having no faith. By the same token, where there is faith, there is love for God and His commandments. And so Jesus says, "If a man love me, he will keep my words." Therefore dear friends, where are you in this ocean picture? Are you in the boat with the Holy Spirit which brings salvation and the forgiveness of sins through the Word, or are you out there floating aimlessly upon the waters, secure and hardened in your sins?

I hope and I pray that all in this house of God today are in the boat. I hope and I pray that all of us have by faith, received the lifeline of salvation, the Gospel of Jesus Christ, by which the Holy Ghost has called us to repentance and faith. For this is the primary or first work of the Holy Ghost, repentance and faith. When the catechism asks the question, *What is the work of the Holy Ghost?* The answer given is, "The Holy Ghost sanctifies me, that is, He makes me holy, by bringing me to faith in Christ and by imparting to me the blessings of redemption." (Q# 163) God's Spirit has thrown out His lifeline to you. His Gospel Word draws

you to the Father, and His Word of Hope pulls you safely into the Church, where all are sons and daughters of God by faith.

God's own Holy Spirit comforts us with His Word, when we are caught between Scylla and Charybdis. God's Spirit, the Comforter, pulls you safely into the boat saying, "Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." For where there is Christ and His Spirit, there is remission of sins. Where there is mercy and grace, there is salvation! It is God's Spirit Himself who teaches you the meaning of Jesus' words, "He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life." When we come to know that our own works cannot save us, but that Jesus Christ came down from heaven to save, then we know and believe, "By grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast." Eph. 2 What blessed news this is to us!

II. The Holy Ghost also calls to restore the fallen to faith.

Not only does the Holy Spirit call and comfort us by the Gospel, but He works to convert those who have fallen away from faith. It is possible for the fallen to be restored to faith. For in life we know people who for a while believe, but in time of temptation fell away. Yes God works to call such again into His kingdom. "The Lord is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." 2 Pet. 3:9 Also, "God will have all men to be saved and to come unto the knowledge of the truth." I Tim. 2:4 God's will truly is that all be saved. Therefore there is comfort knowing that God's Spirit works to restore those who have fallen. Consider David and Peter. David fell away committing adultery and murder. Peter denied his Lord three times, thus losing his salvation. Yet God in His infinite mercy did not give up on David or Peter. In both instances He brought about repentance and faith. See Rom. 11:20ff Therefore if we have a loved one who has fallen away from the Christian faith, do not give up hope! God's Spirit still is working for their salvation. They can still be saved, if only they repent. His Gospel invitation still applies just as much to them as it does to us. "The Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." Rev. 22:17

III. The indwelling Spirit grants comfort and peace by the Word.

We know that by God's grace, His twelve apostles took of that water of life freely. Fifty days after Jesus ascended up into heaven, Jesus fulfilled His promise by sending them God's Spirit, the Holy Spirit, the Comforter. Being gathered together in the unity of faith on a Sunday, the room where the disciples worshipped was filled with the sound of a rushing mighty wind. On the heads of the apostles there appeared what looked like cloven tongues of fire. The Holy Spirit came upon them and they began to preach the Gospel in foreign languages (tongues). With this gift the New Testament church quickly grew and spread to

the Gentile nations. The Gospel Word of Jesus Christ on that first Pentecost Sunday was fruitful.

God's Word is still fruitful today by the untiring work of the Holy Ghost. God still sends His Comforter today throughout this world by the preaching of the Gospel, that the lost souls of men might be saved - that those still floating in the ocean of unbelief might receive the lifeline of God's Word, and be pulled safely into that boat, the New Testament Church. We are gathered here today, as a part of that New Testament Church, members of Christ Jesus, spiritual members of His own body by faith in the remission of sins. Though Jesus has ascended into heaven, He does not leave us without comfort as He said, "I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you." Jn. 14:18 Indeed salvation has come to us through the lifeline of His Gospel Word. He has absolved us of our sins, washed us clean, and made us whole by the blood of Jesus Christ. By faith, yea by His own gift of faith, God does indeed dwell in the heart of each and every believer. Not only the Holy Ghost, our Comforter, live in each believing heart, but the entire Trinity, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. "There is no need for the Christian to sigh longingly for the union with the Triune God in heaven, for His throne is also right here on earth, wherever His Word is preached and He enters into the hearts of the believers. That is a blessed mystery and a glorious fact." (P.E. Kretzmann)

Therefore though we be at sea, though we still live on this earth, we are safe and secure by Christ Jesus and His remission of sins. Moreover God's own Spirit, the Holy Ghost will guide us, "He shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you." His Spirit teaches us His Word. Not only is He in heaven throwing out the lifeline of the word to all men, but He is here with us in the boat, the New Testament Church, wherever His Word is preached, heard, read, or meditated upon in the heart. Even now He is living within you by faith, constantly comforting you by the Gospel which gives assurance and hope. Our Comforter grants us a spiritual peace, an inner peace, which is well able to endure the spiritual storms raging around us. God's Spirit says to us, "Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." Where there is forgiveness of sins, there is salvation and life everlasting. Our conscience can be at peace!

Therefore do not despair beloved brethren in the Lord. The Triune God is with you in the boat, and His Word connects you to heaven, from where He safely pulls you toward shore. As we close today may we hear His beloved Words in our heart, for our Jesus says, "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." Amen.