

**“The Spirit Within”**

Galatians 2:17, 20

**PENTECOST 3**

13 June AD 2010, Proper 6

*Our* first reading for today, from Galatians 2 and 3 is of monumental importance to us as Lutherans specifically, and to protestants in general. Paul understood that we humans have a tendency to be religious, we lean toward and we are curious about heaven. There’s even a place in our brain that is responsible for what I will call our “God thinking.” They say that even those who don’t believe in hell, hope there’s a heaven. In Acts 17 Paul makes this inner religious spirit the ground of a sermon, and as proof he uses the Athenian’s altar dedicated to an “Unknown God.”

Humans tend to be religious and we see this in our superstitions and in the vast number of religions. The common thread in all of them is that you have to do something for God. The most common myth is that in this life you need to do good works, and that they will be weighed in the balance against your flawed nature, your sins, and the good you failed to do in this life. The image of blind and impartial Justice with her scales is seen in court buildings. Justice is built-in to our thinking and rehearsed each year in the holiday classic, *A Christmas Carol*, by Charles Dickens.

Underneath the story of Scrooge’s redemption, is a warped theology of good works. Ebenezer Scrooge is visited by the ghost of his business partner, Jacob Marley, and he is subsequently converted in an evening by the ghosts of Christmases past, present and future. Frightened by the prospect of his own judgment, visions of loneliness and hell and Scrooge is filled with remorse and sets out to right a life-time of miserly living. Suddenly Ebenezer is the epitome of generosity, his life overflowing with good works.

I am not criticizing Charles Dickens’s work. He wanted to tell a story, and who doesn’t enjoy a good ghost story? A Christmas Carol gave nineteenth century people a vision of what Christmas might be. But the theology in the story, people too easily bought that hook, line, and sinker. At Christmas we answer all those appeals to one charity or another. And we’re thinking, “God, do you see this?”

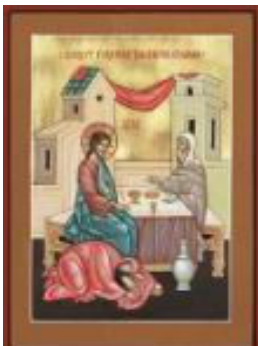
Paul writes, “we *endeavor* to be justified.” **We work** hard trying to get saved, justified, made righteous. We want to look good in God’s presence. But in spite of all our *endeavoring* we are sinners, whether Jewish or Gentile. And, in our endeavoring to get God to notice our goodness we may even get religious, go to church, or say some prayers. What we are really doing is trying to get God to love us because we’re good, because we’re religious, or because we are remorseful over the bad we’ve done. “*If justification comes by way of the law (or works), then Christ died for no purpose.*”

The story of the Cross—the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus confronts us at this point. All that the law demanded was fulfilled by our Lord—the self-offering of Jesus on Golgotha. But in fact, we still *try* to justification the other way. We try to obey the law and we hold up our good works to heaven; we want to show God how good we are and how lucky he is to have us. That’s just insulting. God *gives* (gifts) us the answer we need, and we reject that

wanting to offer him our own, selfish good works. Ahg! Would you insist on paying your mother for the neck tie she gave you for Christmas? Of course not! That's absurd, it's insulting.

Salvation is the gift of God to you. "God so loved the world," John wrote, "that he gave his only Son that whoever believes in him, shall not die but have eternal life." God gives his Don to the world, nothing there about good works or religious acts and piety.

Yes, God give his Son to us—God gave his Son to me. In Baptism I became his and he became mine, we are locked in a covenant of God's grace and love. Mystically I am united to Christ, and so the *life I live, I must live by faith in the Son of God*. And, if I do some good work, or manage some charity, or if I pray and worship, it is not I alone who am doing it, *but it is Christ who lives in me*. If I manage some goodness it is because a holy communion exists between the Triune God and me.



### Luke 7:36-8:3

The major reading for today is about the woman who, with her tears of remorse and her hair, washed Jesus' feet. For those of you who are into Bible study, it used to be thought that this woman was Mary Magdalene. It was also once popularly believed that "this sinner," was a harlot. In 2010 that's all up for discussion. Luke does not say this is Mary—we've just assumed it. Luke does tell us, in chapter 8, that Jesus exorcised seven demons from the Magdalene. She is numbered among the group of well-to-

do ladies who generously contributed to Jesus' ministry. She will follow Jesus to the end; these faithful women will come to be known as *the Myrrh-Bearers* because of their role in the Good Friday events.

Though we can't say with certainty that the woman at Jesus' feet is Mary, what we know of Mary Magdalene's life suggests that she loved Jesus. Much contemporary literature (some of it fiction) has speculated that she loved Jesus more than we would feel comfortable discussing. That line of thinking showed itself in the *SUPERSTAR* song, "I Don't Know How to Love Him." Mary loved Jesus, as did the sisters of Lazarus, Martha and Mary of Bethany. Lots of people loved Jesus. Mary Magdalene was part of the crowd that followed Jesus, "Jesus' groupies."

Mary was faithful to the end and beyond. Not only did she, with her myrrh-bearing friends, bring the burial spices on Friday, Mary lugged them back again on Sunday morning. And when the stone was found rolled away, she alone stayed to grieve, wonder and pray. As such she became the first to see Jesus alive, and he made her his "apostle to the Apostles."

What Luke tells us of Mary is important; Jesus *cleaned house* for her. He cast out from her seven demons and then moved into her heart. She could certainly tell us with Paul, "it is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me. And the life I live, I live by faith in the Son of God—by faith in Jesus my Lord, the teacher."

I don't personally know or understand what it is like to be in bondage to the devil. All I know I learned from Linda Blair in *THE EXORCIST*. Having said that, be sure that I think demonic possession is something to be taken seriously. No one wants to be to be possessed.

But not so fast; I am thinking that I may want to be possessed by *the Spirit* of Jesus. 1 John 4:4 reminds us that *greater is he who dwells within us than the one who is in the world*. That's our theme today, isn't it? It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives and works in me—Christ to whom I was entrusted at my baptism, whom I claimed the day I was confirmed. And so it makes sense that “*the one who began a good work in me, will bring it completion*” (Phil. 1:6) in his own time. But the work is his, not mine. The glory belongs to God, not me. The inspiration and the will, is the Spirit's. Me? I'm just lucky enough that the Spirit has called me along for the thrill of the ride.

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen

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