

13 Sunday after Pentecost

Part 3 of 3 on the Apostle's Creed

3rd Article and Luther's Sm. Catechism Meaning

The Third Article *Of Sanctification*

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Christian 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 I cannot by my own thinking or choosing believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to him. But the Holy Spirit has called me by the gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith. In the same way he calls, gathers, enlightens and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith. In this Christian church he daily and fully forgives all sins to me and all believers. This is most certainly true.

Introduction: Grace, mercy and peace are yours because God the Father created you, God the Son redeemed you, and God the Holy Spirit sanctified you.

When you and I think of the 3rd article maybe you have images of a ghost or a spirit. Or maybe if you remember from confirmation class – He is no scary ghost or haunting spirit. He is the HOLY Ghost or Spirit. That word Holy is the key to unlocking all the valuable meaning from the 3rd article of the Apostle's Creed.

HOLY is a term we should only use for God. WE use it more often when we are surprised or upset. Only God is holy. HOLY and holiness is a divider. It separates God from the human race of sinners. Holy has come to mean sinless, perfect, righteous, good and simply something on God's side of the dividing line. The third person of the Trinity is called the Holy Spirit. Of course HOLY describes who God is as well as the first, second, and third person of the trinity – Our God is Holy. Holiness is what the Spirit of God is all about. It's not just who he is as his description, it is what he does – He makes people HOLY.

In our communion service, we sing the "Sanctus" or as my catechism children call it, the 3 Holy song. The Sanctus Spirit (Holy Spirit) is the Sanctifying Spirit (The Spirit who makes people holy). It sounds better than the Holyizer. When we understand the Holy Spirit as the Spirit who makes people holy, we can connect the 4 statements in the 3rd article of the Apostle's creed as one whole. When I first studied the 3rd article for our sermon today, I thought to myself, "I am not going to have time to talk about each of these 4 different things in one Sermon: the Holy Christian church, the communion of saints, (the first two are one thing) the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting." I was wrestling over the fact of trying to connect all these seemingly disconnected truths. But the light went on and I was enlightened as well. The Spirit who makes sinners holy is responsible for all of those things. It is the power and activity of the Holy Spirit that builds the Holy Christian Church. It is the power and activity of the Holy Spirit that turns a mass of sinners into a community of saints. It is by the power and activity of the Holy Spirit that dead bodies come to life not just spiritually for a time but physically and spiritually for all eternity.

Martin Luther summed up the importance of the work of the Spirit who Holyizes (sanctifies) us in just one simple sentence. "I believe that I cannot by my own thinking or

choosing believe in Jesus Christ my Lord, nor come to him.” Here lies our problem. God the Father created us to serve him willingly, yet we read:

Psalm 14:2 The LORD looks down from heaven on the sons of men to see if there are any who understand, any who seek God. 3 All have turned aside, they have together become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one. God the Son said, John 6:44 "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him," And no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit.

The whole human race has a deadly problem – Is it our sins? Not anymore. In truth sin has been solved by the work of God the Son, Jesus Christ. He paid the debt of sin for all humanity – those good in the world’s eyes and those evil in the world’s eyes; sin in the past, present and future. All expunged! Sin has been removed by the perfect life and innocent death of Jesus as the world’s substitute. Sin need not keep us out of heaven! The terrible problem I’m referring to is finding, obtaining and holding onto Jesus Christ’s Great Redemption! When it comes to this great item, Jesus’ redemption, sinful human beings do not have the gifts to find, grab a hold of, and hang onto it for any length of time! It is truly humanly impossible! The disciples even asked Jesus, “Then who can be saved?” Remember Jesus’ answer? Mark 10:27 Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God."

My brother, many of you know, battled bone cancer through his teenage years. The Lord saw him through it, but took away his ability to remember things – his short term memory is shot. They say it’s due to the drug cocktail and radiation they used to zap the cancer cells. His wife Jennifer would get so made at him for forgetting to do the things he said he would do. Now she understands him and their relationship is much better. She knows he forgets things. She has learned to just accept his limitation. Aaron now uses his phone to leave himself memory messages. “Pick up Jen at Nail Salon 4:30. Pick up dogs at Vet 3:30.” He knows he doesn’t have the gift of memory so he worked around it.

When it comes to finding Jesus, grabbing His redemption, and holding onto Him, we simply do not have the gifts as sinful people. No matter how hard you try, you can’t. The gift of faith is missing! It’s been zapped and destroyed by sin way back in the Garden of Eden. When Adam and Eve started the human race, all their children were born without that gift! There is no way around it. Humanly speaking there is no device, no prayer to recite, no trick of commitment, or life plan that will enable natural born sinners to have faith in Jesus Christ as their Savior. Faith in Jesus Christ is a gift of God that comes to us through the Holy Spirit.

He enlightens us with His gifts! Not our natural born sinner’s gifts. When our children are born, we all think they are special, right? We think in the back of our minds, “Ohhhh he is gifted” – professional musicians, athletes, doctors and mathematicians. When it comes to Jesus Christ’s redemption, entering God’s family, becoming a member of God’s family, being considered a saint in God’s eyes, having our sins forgiven, entering paradise, rising from the dead, and living in heaven forever, we simply do not have the gifts. The Holy Spirit calls us, gathers us, and enlightens us with His gifts! Not our human gifts of reason, memory, determination or logic! He uses His gifts to give us faith in Jesus Christ, to find it, grab it, and hold onto it. That is the work of the Holy Spirit. He makes us holy in God’s sight! He calls us out of the sinful world. He connects us to Jesus Christ’s perfect life. He makes us saints and gathers us together into the Community of Saints – The Holy Christian Church.

How does God the Holy Spirit do it? Could the Lord connect us to Christ and keep us connected by His bare naked power? Yes. Has God promised to do that? No. God has promised

to send His Spirit and accomplish His sanctifying – holyizing power through means – the Word of God, the Word of God connected with simple water in baptism, and the Word of God connected with simple bread and wine in the Lord’s Supper.

Do you understand what a relief that truth is to you and me? This past year, I put a lot of effort into teaching my son to be a great hitter in baseball. With all my years of experience, I gave him the basics and tried to correct his stance and swing whenever he got lazy. Then I realized it really comes down to, “You just gotta feel it. Do you feel it?” Can you imagine if the certainty of your salvation depended on all these teachers and experts telling you what you need to do in order to be a saint in God’s family, be a believer in Jesus Christ, escape death, and enter paradise forever? But then, after all the things they tell you to do, they say, “Well, you just gotta feel it. Do you feel it?” Thank God what a relief it is to know that my status in God’s eyes, my connection to Jesus Christ, and my confidence of escaping death and entering heaven does not rest on my ability or a feeling. It all rests on God. God the Father who created me, God the Son who redeemed me, and God the Holy Spirit who called me, gathered me, and enlightened me by the Gospel of Jesus Christ in Word and Sacrament.

As comforting as the use of the means – the Word and Sacrament – is to the community of saints, so also then separation from those means – the Word and Sacrament – is uncomfortable and disheartening. Please listen to me when I say this – simply put, God has promised us no other way to keep our faith in Jesus Christ and escape death and enter paradise! There is no other way. Believers do not and cannot, exist, outside of the Word and Sacrament.

I like to fish, but I’m no fisherman. Under the 1st article, we were reminded of God’s gift of creation to mankind and our responsibility to use it wisely. Animals are for our use as well as plants for food, yet it is difficult to see a fish out of water. It is inevitable when you take a fish away from its element, it will not survive. Flopping around on the ground and gasping for water, I’m uncomfortable with that image. How much more so should we be appalled at the image of our fellow saints in God’s family as they flop around gasping for faith, as they neglect hearing God’s Word and neglect receiving the forgiveness of sins in the Lord’s Supper. In a sense we are watching them commit spiritual suicide.

We must act. Like being the first on the scene of a traffic accident with knowledge of CPR and first aid, we must act to save helpless sinners. Use the means – Word and Sacrament: Lord’s Supper, daily Meditations, Bible readings, weekly worship services, Bible study, Sunday School, Christian Day School. It takes three to save us. Bring the souls of your family to the God who created them, the God who redeemed them, and the God who sanctified them!