

KING OF KINGS LUTHERAN CHURCH



John 14:25-27

A Boring History Lecture that Matters

Filioque. It is a Latin word that is used in the Nicene Creed. About 1,000 years ago that word caused quite a stir in the Christian Church.

The Nicene Creed was written in response to a heresy espoused by a man named Arius. Arius taught that Jesus was like God, but not equal to God. He believed that Jesus was the first and greatest creation of God the Father. And so, led by a man named Athanasius, the Christian Church had to oppose this teaching. The Church council at Nicea met in 325 A.D. to condemn Arius' false teaching. It took some time, but from the council of Nicea came the Nicene Creed in which we confess that Jesus is ***"the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one being with the Father."*** With that creedal statement, that we still use, the Christian Church confesses the truth that Jesus is true God.

When first complete, the third article of the Nicene Creed said, ***"And we believe in the Holy Spirit."*** That was the total third article. In 381 A.D., a council at Constantinople enlarged the third article to say, ***"We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of Life; who proceeds from the Father, who with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified; who spoke through the prophets."*** It is almost what we say today. But to further clarify that Jesus is true God and to show the unity of the Trinity, in 589 A.D. at the Council of Toledo, they added *"filioque"* — "and the Son." That is, the Holy Spirit proceeds (is sent by) from the Father AND the Son. This addition slowly spread through western Europe, but was not included in the creed of the eastern churches.

Later, when a dispute arose between the Pope in Rome, the head of the western churches, and the patriarch in Constantinople, the head of the eastern churches, the *filioque* was the breaking point. The eastern churches said it was wrong to

include that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Son. The western church refused to budge. So in 1054 A.D. there was "The Great Schism." The pope excommunicated the patriarch of Constantinople, the patriarch excommunicated the pope, and the two sides split giving us what we still have today — the eastern orthodox churches and the western churches, which include us.

Now, it is proper for us to confess that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father. In our text from John 14 we hear Jesus say, ***"the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send."*** But it is also proper for us to confess that the Holy Spirit is sent by Jesus. Later in John's Gospel, Jesus said, ***"When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth . . . He will testify about me"*** (15:26). Or again from John's Gospel, ***"Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you"*** (16:7).

Sadly, the *filioque* saga in the Christian Church shouldn't have happened. It is Scriptural for us to confess what we say in the Nicene Creed.

And that is why this history lesson matters. The truths we confess about the Holy Spirit, including that he proceeds from the Son, are vital truths for our salvation. Next Sunday we will confuse ourselves with the doctrine of the Trinity. The fact that the Father and the Son send the Holy Spirit should not lead us to infer that the Holy Spirit is inferior in any way. Today though, we are reminded of the powerful, ongoing work of the Holy Spirit. He was sent from the Father and the Son to work in our hearts. To fail to confess this robs the Holy Spirit, who is God, of the credit he deserves. It also leads to confusion about how we are saved.

This work of the Holy Spirit would visibly begin on Pentecost when the disciples would understand and boldly proclaim the message of Jesus as the Savior. Ten days before Pentecost,

they were asking about Jesus establishing an earthly kingdom. Before that they had been hiding after the resurrection or Peter had denied that he knew Jesus on Maundy Thursday. After the Holy Spirit came, they would be willing to be put in prison and would begin to travel in order to preach about Jesus.

The work of the Holy Spirit would continue as he would enable writing of the Bible, reminding the disciples of the things Jesus said. By inspiration, he would have the disciples write the Bible that communicates to us the message of salvation.

The results of this work is what we have in our hearts — peace, a peace that comes from Jesus and a peace that allows us to live without fear.

Like the disciples asking very short-sighted, earthly questions at Jesus' Ascension, we don't by nature see God. Humanity may generally agree that a god exists, but the details of what he is like are foggy. Human imagination makes him into a ruler who will set up a kingdom on earth; a score-keeper who watches to see if we do enough good to earn a place in heaven; an angry judge who finds pleasure in sending us troubles; or a kindly old grandfather figure who smiles at and ignores the foolishness of the people on earth.

Sin is a powerful spiritual blindness that infects us all. We live under the illusion that we are good people. We ignore or deny our sins. Calling our selfishness or greed *normal*. We excuse our gossiping because other people do it. We imagine that God doesn't mind when we don't pray or when we find delight in immorality or tell lies to hide the truth of what we've done.

The Holy Spirit does the work of convicting us that we are sinful. The Bible calls this his *alien work*. In Isaiah, God warned that understanding the message of sin will bring terror. Then he says, "**The LORD will rise up . . . to do his strange work, and perform his task, his alien task**" (28:21).

The Holy Spirit also does the work of opening our eyes to see the true God who has saved us. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians, "**No one can say 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit**" (12:3). The Holy Spirit is called the silent member of the Trinity because he is sent by the Father and the Son to talk about anything but himself. He creates faith in our hearts so that we know and believe what Jesus has done for us. By the work of the Holy Spirit, we see the meaning of Jesus' death and resurrection. His death was the punishment that sin deserved. His resurrection is God's proclamation that sin is paid for. The Holy Spirit allows us to see that what Jesus did is more than just a historical event, but by faith is a personal event that he did for me, and for you. This is why, in the Nicene Creed, we say that the Holy Spirit is "**the Giver of Life.**"

Pentecost is an event that took place 2,000 years ago. It was, as Peter told us, the fulfillment of a prophecy. It took place on the day when the Old Testament believers celebrated the new harvest — foreshadowing the new spiritual harvest of the Christian Church. But Pentecost isn't just ancient history. The Father and the Son send the Holy Spirit to work in your hearts.

Pentecost is about even more grace from God. It is about a Triune God who is perfectly united in saving us. He leaves nothing to chance, but his loving hand is everywhere, guiding us to faith and to heaven!

What we confess in the Creed is not ancient history or boring Christian doctrine. We confess truths that assure us of life that will last forever. We cling to the truths that assure us that our sins are truly forgiven. Hold to these Scriptural truths and find the joy God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are ready to give you. Amen.

Festival of Pentecost
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