

Sixth Sunday of Easter – May 5th, 2024
THREE WITNESSES

Prayer

Jesus, we pray that your spirit would help us to better understand both your work and your person through the thee-fold witness.

AMEN

To Whom and About What do They Witness

The closing lines of today's epistle reading are (1 John 5:7-8):

For there are three that testify: the Spirit and the water and the blood; and these three agree.

Indeed, these three are pictured on the cover of today's bulletin, but question is **to what** are they testifying? The earlier verses make it clear that the testimony is to exactly what I typically use as greeting each Sunday morning – to the clear witness about the person and work of Jesus Christ.

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On Trinity Sunday, we'll do a deeper drive, but suffice it to say that as we believe and confess that our Lord Jesus Christ, God's Son, is both God and man. The orthodox of the first century were united on the absolute necessity of the **full** deity and **full** humanity of Jesus Christ. They realized that only God Himself could rescue us from our desperate plight and that only a man could earn back what the first man had lost

Water

How did we see water used earlier in today's services? Indeed, Noah was baptized through water and the word, adopted by God, and marked as one redeemed by Christ.

This echoes Jesus's baptism for the repentance of sins by John in the Jordan, as recounted by Matthew in his Gospel (Matt 3:13-17):

Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. But John tried to deter him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?"

Jesus replied, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness." Then John consented.

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As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water.

At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."

While we may not hear God's voice that identified the baptized as a child of God or see a physical dove in flight, be assured the adoption is valid and that the seal of the indwelling Holy Spirit is given at Baptism.

To summarize, at His baptism, Jesus' **person** as well as his eternal **position** as God's only begotten son was confirmed.

Blood

Let's now turn to the blood. Throughout the Old Testament, blood has at least two significant uses. First, it is used for atonement, as a reparation or expiation for sin. From the Torah, we read (Lev 17:11)

For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement by the life.

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The bloody system of sacrifices detailed in the Old Testament was but a foreshadowing of the blood sacrifice that Jesus made for our sins once for all just shy of 2,000 years ago. This sacrificial act was foretold by Isaiah hundreds of years before Jesus was born (Isaiah 53:4-6)

Surely, he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—everyone—to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

And it was confirmed by Peter after Jesus' resurrection (1 Peter 1:18-19):

knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.

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The second function of blood was protection, such as when the blood of the lamb was used to signal the angle of death to Passover the houses of the Hebrews while they were still in bondage to the Egyptians.

Both functions are combined when we use Jesus' title and related work The Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world.

So, the blood testifies to the **work** of Jesus and His **position** as the promised Messiah.

Blood is also present in Jesus' last will and testament, as we hear when we celebrate the Lord' Supper:

In the same way also, he took the cup after supper, and when He had given thanks, He gave it to them saying "Drink of it, all of you; this cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you for the forgiveness of sins"

Spirit

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Turning to the last of the three witnesses, the Old Testament prophet Joel records a promise and prophecy of God concerning the spirit (Joel 2:28-29):

"And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. Even on the male and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit.

Jesus reiterates this promised as recorded in John's Gospel (John 15:26)

"But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me.

Just before His Ascension, which we will celebrate next Sunday, Jesus clarified the timing of the outpouring of the spirit (Luke 24:49):

And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high."

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And finally Christ fulfilled the promise at Pentecost, which we will celebrate the week after next, and as recorded in the book of Acts (Acts 2:1-4):

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

Indeed, through the external word, written and spoken, the Holy Spirit, does indeed testify to **both the person and work** of Jesus.

As Lutheran, we understand that God works through all of these means – the water and word of Baptism; the bread & wine, body & blood of Holy Communion; as well as the Holy Spirit as He spoke through the prophets and the apostles to create the inerrant, inspired books of what we call the Bible.

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It's my prayer for all of us here today that we avail ourselves of all the means of God's grace as we have opportunity so to do.

AMEN