

Dear Saints,

If each of us were to do a life review, we would find many people, events, and milestones that have shaped our lives. There have been mountaintop highs and valley lows. Life has been peppered with trials, tragedies, sufferings, and struggles. The entire world is struggling and wrestling with the global pandemic. We read the statistics regarding the spread of "the virus." We scour the internet for the latest research about COVID-19 in hopes of moving closer to a cure. Generalized, free floating anxiety is ramped up as "the virus" exposes the vulnerabilities of nearly every society upon the face of the earth.

"What are we going to do?" we ask ourselves. That is a uniquely American question. We are a society of "do-ers." We have accomplished much in 244 years as a country when you stack us up in comparison to other countries much older. If anything, this pandemic has taught us the limits of our bent towards the poem "Invictus." Luther's explanation of the Third Article of the Creed in the Small Catechism speaks of the empowering and gracious third person of the Holy Trinity. He explains to us how we are made holy. I know, you are reciting it in your head right now. Got it? Great! Now, let us move on to Luther's explanation.

I believe that by my own understanding or strength I cannot believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to him, but instead the Holy Spirit has called me through the gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, made me holy and kept me in the true faith, just as he calls, gathers, enlightens, and makes holy the whole Christian church on earth and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one common, true faith. Daily in this Christian church the Holy Spirit abundantly forgives all sins- mine and those of all believers. On the last day, the Holy Spirit will raise me and all the dead and will give to me and all believers in Christ eternal life. This is most certainly true.

We are powerless in the face of this pandemic, but God is not. The Holy Spirit makes us holy and sanctifies us. This is unearned and unmerited grace. It is that very grace that saves us. Grace is not a "hall pass" or a "get out of jail free" card to act out. It is the gift that makes us holy and empowers us to be "little Christs" for each other and the world. It is the gift which helps us to serve both God and our neighbors, near and far. This is not an easy thing to do apart from the Holy Spirit.

We will struggle. Not all struggles are horrible. In fact, some are sacred. A butterfly must free itself from its chrysalis if it is to survive. The same goes for a baby chick pecking through its shell. Life is not easy but worthwhile. If our tendency towards doing rather than being is to serve us at all, let it be towards living into the call of our baptisms. Let us yield to God as we become more fully ambassadors of Christ bearing the ministry of reconciliation to the world which God so loves.

One with you in Christ,

Pastor Shannon