

## John 15:26-27; 16:4b-15 – “Looks Can Be Deceiving”

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The theme for today’s sermon is “Looks Can Be Deceiving.” In his book on the purpose and value of worship, called The Fire and the Staff, Pastor Klemet Preus tells of an older couple who visited his congregation. After the service this couple told him that they could tell the Spirit was active in his congregation. When Pastor Preus asked them how they could tell, they said, “We just knew from the joyful looks on people’s faces.” Looks can be deceiving!

Sometime later, Pastor Preus visited a young man who had worshipped with them on a couple of occasions and he asked him what he thought of the church. The young man said, “Pastor...no offense, [but] I just didn’t get the impression that the Spirit was really alive in your church.” Again, when Pastor Preus asked how he could tell. The young man said, “There just didn’t seem to be the joy you would expect from a church that was really alive in the Spirit” (p. 79). Looks can be deceiving!

These people’s comments express a common misunderstanding about how the Spirit of God assures us of His saving presence. They think it’s based on subjective feelings instead of the objective Word of God. We may not always feel Spirit filled. Does that mean that at those time we’re not? Go to God’s Word for the answer.

In our second reading we heard of some of the miraculous things that took place on the first Pentecost Sunday in the NT. One of the amazing things that happened was that even though the Jews who gathered that day were from many different nations and spoke many different languages, when they heard the disciples speak, they all heard them speak in their own native tongue.

When something miraculous like that happens it’s natural to think or feel like it’s a “god thing.” This, of course, can be a dangerous thing to assume since evil spirits can do supernatural things as well. Looks can be deceiving! So how can you tell? You, again, go to the Word of God, like Peter did.

Peter began his sermon by saying “*these men are not drunk, as you suppose...*” Looks can be deceiving! “*But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel. “And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and daughters shall prophesy...And I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below”* (see Acts 2:1-21).

But this wasn’t the main part of Peter’s sermon. Our second reading ended with these words from the prophet Joel: “*And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.*” Then Peter spoke of Jesus Christ as the Lord who saves us!

If you look at our Gospel reading, where Jesus spoke about sending “*the Spirit of truth,*” He foretold the very things that would happen on Pentecost and thereafter until His return. Jesus said: “*the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, will bear witness about me.*” After Peter preached his sermon that day, the Spirit enabled about 3,000 people to believe in Jesus as their Savior.

Was it because of the visible miracles that they believed or because of the Spirit of God working through the Word of God. While the miracles helped to verify in their minds that Peter was preaching the Word of God, “*Faith comes from hearing and hearing through the Word of God*” (Romans 10:17).

Does God’s Word need to keep on being varied by miracles for people to believe what God says? Jesus said, in relation to His miraculous resurrection, “*Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed*” (John 20:29). This is the most miraculous thing the Spirit does through God’s Word, He gives and sustains in us saving faith, or as Jesus put it in our Gospel reading, “*He will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment.”*

When it came to convicting the world of sin, the Spirit (through Peter) sure didn't mince any words. *"Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves know—this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men"* (Acts 2:22-23).

A woman, who spoke to me recently at the Tiny Treasures' booth during Delta's Spring Expo, told me why she was against the organized church. She said, "The organized church killed Jesus!" Of course it wasn't just the people then who were responsible for killing Jesus. In my response, I kindly let her know that all of us, because of our sin, are responsible for Jesus' death.

But the good news is that we and our sins are ultimately not in control, God is! Jesus assured us of that through His resurrection from the dead. It was our Lord's love for us poor, helpless sinners that caused the Son of God to become a man so that He could suffer, die and "go through **hell**," or should I say "go **through** hell" and rise from the dead in victory over our sins, death and the devil, and ascend back to the Father where He was given all authority in heaven and on earth, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, to make us righteous. This, then, is God's judgement for those in whom He has created faith in Jesus: your sins are forgiven.

Through this Gospel message, which is proclaimed throughout the Old and NT, and which has been verified by the miracles of Jonah, Jesus and Pentecost, the Holy Spirit works to give us eternal life. Why do we still need God's Word and Spirit to keep us believing this good news? Because looks can be deceiving—because what we see and experience in this world, and therefore often feel in our hearts, doesn't always lead us to believe that God loves us or that He is in control. It certainly didn't look that way when Jesus hung dead on a cross. And it doesn't look that way when we see the health of a loved one fade away and they die. But looks can be deceiving. On the third day Jesus rose from the dead, in victory over all sin, death, and the devil. And, as Almighty God, He promised that those who believe in Him will also rise from the dead. *"But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep"* (1 Corinthians 15:20).

When this truth is being proclaimed in the sermon and throughout our liturgy and hymns, God's Spirit fills this place and is working according to God's promise to give and sustain in us eternal life. Therefore, as Paul writes in Colossians, *"See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ. For in Him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have been filled in him"* (2:8-10). While you and I may not always look like Spirit filled children of God, looks can be deceiving, but God's Word is Truth.

All glory be to God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

[Children's Sermon] Today we heard about some amazing gifts that God gave people on the first Pentecost Sunday, but the greatest gift He gave people on that day was the gift of faith in Jesus as their Savior. How many of you believe that Jesus died on the cross and rose from the dead so that you can live forever with Him? That means God has given you the gift of faith. Along with the gift of faith, which saves you, God also gave you other gifts and abilities which He wants you to use as part of His family, the Church, to save others.

Some of you have the gift of Crisco; you keep your parents moving. Some of you have the gift of flour; you help people stick together. Some of you have the gift of sugar; you're sweet and kind. Some of you are like this vanilla extract, you add flavor to people's lives.

By themselves, these gifts or abilities don't accomplish as much as they do when we work together. What happens when we mix these things together? They can make things, like this cupcake, to celebrate the birthday of the Church—the day when God worked through His Spirit and His people to give birth to other children of God as they shared the good news about Jesus' death and resurrection for our salvation. [Light candle on cupcake.] The light of the Gospel enables us to see/believe in Jesus as our Savior.