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Immanuel Lutheran Church, New York, NY  
Pentecost Sunday, June 9, 2019  
John 14:8-17, 25-27  
Your Cheatin’ Heart

In the name of the Father and of the † Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

My wife, Carol, likes country music. Actually she likes all kinds of music, especially Bach and Handel, and rock and roll from when we were young, back in the 1960s and 70s. But also she likes country music, including Patsy Cline. Now, Patsy Cline sang a great version of a Hank Williams’s song called Your Cheatin’ Heart.¹ That’s what I’m talkin’ about. That’s what I’m talking about in this sermon: your cheatin’ heart. The good news of Pentecost Sunday is that your cheatin’ heart can get better. The Holy Spirit will help you, if you are willing.

My Bible text for this sermon comes from our Gospel Lesson for today. In his high priestly prayer, Jesus says this to his disciples:

15If you love me, you will keep my commandments. 16And I will pray the Father, and he will give you another Counselor, to be with you forever... (John 14:15-16, RSV)

And the prayers of Jesus are powerful.

In this passage, our Lord Jesus prays that God the Father will send us another Paraclete. Pastor Caleb pointed out to us a couple Sundays ago that the Greek word Paraclete used in this text can be given many true English translations. It can mean Intercessor, Advocate, Comforter, Helper, or simply Friend. I love the title Comforter, but in this sermon I want to go with the title Counselor. It is good to have a skilled counselor. In the Holy Spirit, you and I have the very best of counselors. The great trick in life is to heed our Counselor. The great trick in life is to heed the Holy Spirit. When you hear a voice in your heart urging you to do something Christ-like, or to refrain from something awful, that is how the Holy Spirit is trying to heal your cheatin’ heart. And let us not grieve the Holy Spirit!

I like attorneys of law. I like their powers of speech, their knowledge of complex stretches of law, and their powers of analysis. When Jesus prays for another Counselor, he is praying that you and I might have Someone really

¹https://video.search.yahoo.com/search/video?fr=mcafee&p=your+cheatin%27+heart#id=0&vid=0cfa56b02a7517bf4165c1961b36ac0c&action=click
smart to stand beside us in the critical times of life, in times of temptation or discouragement or perplexity, like a great attorney.

In St. Paul's sublime Eighth Chapter of Romans, the apostle notes something that the rest of us are usually ready to agree to. He says that we do not know how to pray “as we ought.” St. Paul says this:

...the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words. (Romans 8:26, RSV)

This interceding for us “with sighs too deep for words” is the work of our great Counselor, who takes our feeble prayers and presents them to God the Father. Our Counselor knows the love for which we are yearning, but which we often poorly express in our prayers. So, our Counselor improves our prayers, a whole lot! He knows our hearts and our true needs, and he knows the heart of God the Father. He intercedes for us, improving our poor prayers. He takes the prayers we blurt out, and presents them to the Father, “with sighs too deep for words,” so that God the Father can and will grant them. So pray on, boldly! Your Counselor stands by you as you approach God’s throne of grace in prayer.

So, that is good. The Holy Spirit – our Counselor – intercedes for us in our prayers, making them wiser and better.

But in this sermon I want to focus on that other role of the Counselor in our lives. I want to focus on the power of our great Counselor to guide us and to heal our cheatin’ heart, if we are willing.

Earlier this past week, Carol and I attended the retirement banquet for one of our dear clergy friends: Pastor Thomas McKee, down in the Lower Susquehanna Synod of Pennsylvania. The banquet hall was filled with clergy from all over the land who love this gentle pastor in Christ, Tom McKee. During the supper, I chatted with another colleague who said that what she really needs in life is more of the spirit of Tom McKee. I know exactly what she means. Many of us could use more of Tom’s spirit. Then we would be calmer and wiser in tough times.

Likewise, in the Bible we read of a certain prophet who desired a good dose of the spirit of another prophet. I mean the prophet Elisha. Elisha was the disciple of the older prophet Elijah. Now it was given to Elisha to know that his master was soon to be taken from him. And so Elisha followed Elijah around with great earnestness. Elijah then turned to his disciple, and they had this brief conversation:

...Elijah said unto Elisha, Ask what I shall do for thee, before I be taken away from thee. And Elisha said, I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me. (2 Kings 2:9,KJV)
And that splendid request was granted. Over the course of his career, Elisha performed many and great miracles.

Some people have lovely and strong spirits — the kind of spirits that can inspire other people. I wish, for example, that I had some of the spirit of, say, Abraham Lincoln or Martin Luther King Jr. or Mother Teresa. Then I would be a better person on this earth.

But chief of all, I wish I had more of the spirit of Jesus. Do you not wish for that too? If we had more of the Spirit of Jesus, then we would be kinder, braver, more patient, more understanding, more forgiving. Altogether, we would be stronger people of love in this world — stronger people in the love of Christ.

That is what Pentecost Sunday is about. This Sunday cherishes the prayer of Jesus that something of his Spirit will be upon us. If so, it will improve our hearts in this world.

Now there are various ways in which people can have a cheatin’ heart. There is the awful way of adultery. You promise to love and cherish someone for the rest of your days, but then you turn around and break that person’s heart by committing adultery. You have a cheatin’ heart. Pentecost Sunday says that you can get over that. You can repent of your adultery and repair the damage you have done as far as lies possible for you. You are baptized, you belong to Christ, he has prayed for the Holy Spirit to be upon you, and so you can do this thing. You can repent of your cheatin’ heart, mend your ways, and live a life of repentance henceforth. That will be better. Adding it all up, that will be better!

But there are other forms of cheatin’ hearts too. There is cheatin’ in business, and cheatin’ in work, so that we are lazy or needlessly incompetent. There is cheatin’ the world, because God gave us some talents in life, but we have neglected them. There is cheatin’ toward our neighbors, because we discriminate against them and just do not give them a fair chance.

Look! Here is Jesus, and here is you and me. On the one hand, Jesus, and on the other, us! What Pentecost Sunday is about is the real chance lying before us that you and I should become closer to Jesus. More like him. You and I have permission from God to walk in the Spirit of Jesus. So, let us plunge ahead and do so. Let us go for it!

As I near the end of this sermon, let me lift up an interesting thing about Martin Luther’s commentary on the Lord’s Prayer. I mean the great emphasis he places on the very last word of the Prayer: Amen! It is a short word, we say it, and tend to think we are done. But Luther teaches us that that word “amen” carries spiritual implications with it, and I would say moral implications too. So, in his Small Catechism, Luther writes this:

Amen.
What is this? Answer:
That I should be certain that such petitions are acceptable to and
heard by our Father in heaven, for he himself commanded us to
pray like this and has promised to hear us. “Amen, amen” means
“Yes, yes, it is going to come about just like this.”

I do believe, and here I stand, that there is a good and acceptable prayer that
you and I can pray. It goes like this: “Please, heavenly Father, send me some
more of the Holy Spirit. Send me a larger dose of the Spirit of Jesus.” And how
do we end such a prayer? With the declaration, Amen! Then, we should do as
Luther says: We should be certain that this little closing word means “Yes,
yes, it is going to come about just like this.” And we should set out in life
supposing it to be so. That is, we should set out in life supposing that our
prayer for the Holy Spirit is in fact granted by God the Father. Then we should
do something about it. Indeed, then we should cast ourselves forward in life
daring to walk in the very Spirit of Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour, to
whom belongs the glory, with the Father and the Holy Spirit now and forever.
Amen.