

**John 16:8-11**

“Once upon a time...” Nearly every fairy tale begins with these words. “...And they lived happily ever after.” Almost every fairy tale ends with these words. But how does one go from, “Once upon a time...” to “...And they lived happily ever after?” What lies in between these two points? That’s where the story comes in—the hero slaying the evil dragon, rescuing the princess from certain death—the story whatever it may be, comes between “Once upon a time...” “... And, they lived happily ever after.”

And that, Kendra, is also true for you. Your life is no fairy tale—oh, no—it’s quite real. But we can ask the same question: How do you go from, “Once upon a time...” to “...And they lived happily ever after?” For once upon a time God formed you; He fashioned you within your mother, and allowed her to bring you forth into this world. What joy He gave to your mom and dad the day you first opened your eyes. And then God caused your parents to bring you to the font where He gave you birth into the family of His Son, Jesus Christ. What joy He gave to your family on the day of your baptism—the day He made you a Christian.

“Once upon a time.” Fifteen years and six months ago to be exact, you were born into this world, and then born again into God’s Kingdom of Grace. That’s where you began. It’s where we all began. Once upon a time each one of us was born into this world, and then reborn, by the grace of God, through Holy Baptism into God’s family. How do we get from there to “...And they lived happily ever after?” Because that’s how we all want the story to end. So that it really doesn’t end. Because we live happily ever after—and that’s heaven—and that, too, is no fairy tale. For heaven is very real. And that’s where we all want to go. So again the question: How do we go from “Once upon a time...” to “...And they lived happily ever after?”

Well, as we know it all has to do with the story. The story comes in between. Whose story? I suppose we would say “our” story. But even more, it’s Jesus’ story. Because He’s the “Hero” in the story. He’s the One who slays the evil dragon. He’s the One who rescues us poor sinners from certain death. By His death He ended the evil dragon, Satan’s rule over us. By His resurrection He gives us life through the waters of Baptism, delivering us from sin and death.

That’s His story. He lived for us. He suffered and died for us. He rose again for us. That’s why it’s Jesus’ story. He did it all. But it’s also your story, for He did it all for you. And He isn’t finished with you, because He’s leading you from “Once upon a time...” to “...And they lived happily ever after.” And that’s where Pentecost comes in. Yes, today is both your Confirmation day, Kendra, and it is also the Day of Pentecost; the day when God poured out His Spirit upon His Church.

Your presence here this day is no accident. The Holy Spirit has led you here. He gave you faith in Jesus in your baptism. He has been teaching you about Jesus through the Word. He has led you to this time and place, and He will not stop until He leads you to “...And they lived happily ever after.” Because that’s what He does. That’s why He came. That’s the purpose and work of the Holy Spirit on earth.

Jesus says it in this way, “He will convict the world concerning sin, and righteousness, and judgment.” The Holy Spirit “will convict (or convince) the world with regard to sin because they do not believe in Me,” says Jesus. You see, we do not automatically become Christians at birth; nor do we automatically remain Christians in the faith after baptism. There are many people in this world who do not believe in Jesus Christ. There are many people who have walked away from Jesus after baptism and confirmation.

So the work of the Holy Spirit is to preach the Law. He needs to show people who do not believe in Christ that they need a Savior from sin. He needs to remind Christians who have walked away from Jesus that they need a Savior from sin. You and I won’t come to this knowledge on our own. Someone needs to teach us this. So the Holy Spirit uses God’s Law to convince us that our sinful nature is of the devil; that we cannot make it on our own; that you and I need a Savior.

Secondly, Jesus says that the Holy Spirit “will convince the world of righteousness, because I go to My Father, and you see Me no more.” After His resurrection Jesus went to His Father—to show Him the wounds in His hands and feet and side. He showed His Father that He had died for you; that all your sins are forgiven by His blood. So the Holy Spirit’s work is to tell you that God loves you and accepts you for Jesus’ sake—that you are righteous and holy in God’s eyes because your Savior took all your sins away. This is the most joyous work the Holy Spirit can do—to lead you to Jesus and keep you with Jesus.

And then also the Holy Spirit, says Jesus, “will convince the world of judgment because the ruler of this world has been judged.” Satan, who once ruled over you, has been judged. He is no longer your master. He cannot harm you. Jesus defeated him by His death and resurrection. The Holy Spirit convinces you, day after day through the Word of God, that you are free of sin and Satan; that hell is not your destiny; that you are going to heaven because you belong to Jesus.

This is why the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost—to convince you that you are a sinner in need of a Savior; to lead you to your Savior, Jesus Christ, in the Gospel; and to assure you throughout your life that you are a forgiven Christian who has the certain hope of eternal life in heaven.

And this is how Jesus leads you from “Once upon a time...” to “...And they lived happily ever after.”—by giving you His Holy Spirit, through His Word, so that the story in between—the story of your life—is one where you just simply keep learning; keep growing; keep hearing about sin and grace, keep confessing your sin and hearing the Gospel of forgiveness in Jesus. And for you, Kendra, this story now will include receiving Jesus’ body and blood in His Holy Supper, so that your faith may be nourished by this wonderful meal.

“Once upon a time.” We all begin that way. How do we get to “...And they lived happily ever after?” Jesus does it for us through His Word and Sacraments. That’s why He sent His Spirit to us—so that you, Kendra, along with your family, and all of us who trust in Jesus, may truly for Jesus’ sake, live happily ever after in heaven. Amen.