

The Sixth Sunday of Easter

May 17th, 2020

We prepare for Ascension as we hear Jesus promise his disciples the Holy Spirit in his absence.

PRAYER OF THE DAY: Father of lights, every good and perfect gift comes from you. Inspire us to think those things that are true and long for those things that are good, that we may always make our petitions according to your gracious will; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

OLD TESTAMENT: Acts 17:22-31 *Paul preaches to a tough crowd, and got a tough response. Yet, the Word was tough, too, and still worked faith in the hearts of some.*

Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: “Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you. “The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else. From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. ‘For in him we live and move and have our being.’ As some of your own poets have said, ‘We are his offspring.’ “Therefore since we are God’s offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone—an image made by man’s design and skill. In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead.” When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some of them sneered, but others said, “We want to hear you again on this subject.” At that, Paul left the Council. A few men became followers of Paul and believed. Among them was Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus, also a woman named Damaris, and a number of others.

EPISTLE READING: 1 Peter 3:15-22 *We have a living hope. Let it live to scoff at fear and to confess our faith before the world.*

But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. It is better, if it is God’s will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil. For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit, through whom also he went and preached to the spirits in prison who disobeyed long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at God’s right hand—with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him.

SERMON: John 14:15-21

Jesus Promises and Provides a Counselor for You.

“If you love me, you will obey what I command. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever— the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him.”

There is an assumption that is made by this congregation. You assume that what is presented, taught and preached here is nothing but the Word of God as the truth and nothing but the truth. You even included this in your constitution which says, *“This congregation acknowledges and accepts all the canonical books of the Old and the New Testament as the revealed and inerrant Word of God, verbally inspired by God the Holy Spirit, and submits to them as the only infallible authority in all matters of faith and life.”* That is why you affiliated yourself with a synod that believes the same thing. You demand and assume this is the case in church, in our school, in Sunday School, why the Confirmands need instruction on the Bible and need to confess their faith before you and so on.

But how do we know we have the truth? How is it we can be so sure the Bible is God’s truth without error? There are a lot of smart people out there who claim the Bible contains errors and superstition.

But we can be sure because Jesus guaranteed it. Our text today prepares us for Pentecost Sunday, which is coming in a couple weeks. Jesus promised the gift of the Holy Spirit to his disciples, and he gives us the Holy Spirit through them.

I. Jesus promises the Holy Spirit, to his disciples who desperately need him.

Jesus promised the Holy Spirit for his disciples. ***“If you love me, you will obey what I command. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever— the Spirit of truth.”*** This text comes from Maundy Thursday, hours before his death. Jesus knows he is leaving his disciples, but not because he will die. Remember he will rise from the dead. He is thinking of Ascension when he will return to heaven to sit at God’s right hand. He is going to leave his disciples, but he will not leave them empty handed. He promised them a special “Counselor.” Jesus had been serving as their counselor for the past three years. But he promises them a Counselor who will take his place.

The word “counselor” means someone who stands next to you and gives you advice. This word is used for what we would call a lawyer. When we hear the word “lawyer,” we usually think of high drama trials and intense questioning like Perry Mason or the show, “Law and Order.” But there are different kinds of lawyers. In England they have two classes of lawyers. The barrister is the trial lawyer who argues before a judge. The solicitor is the advisor who tells people if something is legal or not. It is this kind of counselor Jesus is talking about. He is the Holy Spirit., and boy, do the disciples need him because Jesus has a job for them to do.

“If you love me, you will obey what I command.” No, we are not talking about being good little disciples as they obey the commandments. The command Jesus gave to them is to preach his Word and make disciples of all nations. That is a tall order, and it becomes harder when you realize that the world doesn’t want to hear about Christ. ***“The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.”*** In general the world will refuse to listen. The world will even try to kill or hurt them. And now he is sending them out there? They need the Holy Spirit’s help them do this.

Also, the disciples have proven that they were not the best students. Jesus had taught them for three years, and not just an hour and a half a week like our catechism class. Their classroom was 24/7. Yet

how often did they forget what Jesus said? How often they failed to put two and two together and understand his resurrection or what exactly is the kingdom of God? How often did Jesus say to them, "Oh you of little faith?" They still need schooling.

But that will change when the Spirit comes. Jesus is pointing to Pentecost Day when they will receive the Holy Spirit. And he does what Jesus promises. We are told that these hillbilly disciples from Galilee spoke different languages without training so that people from all over the world could understand. We see Peter, who once cowered before a teenage servant girl, boldly preach to a crowd of thousands. We see disciples who once hid behind locked doors, standing in the temple courts every day teaching about Jesus Christ, the very same temple courts where they had beaten and tried Jesus. We see these same disciples who fled in the garden, standing up for God's Word. The Holy Spirit gave them boldness.

He also taught them things so when they spoke, they spoke the truth of God's Word. In Acts two we are told that the first church devoted itself to the apostles' teaching. In Ephesians 2 we read that the church is, **"built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone."** In 2 Peter we are assured, **"You must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit."** So how do we know we have the truth? How do we know the Bible is God's Word? The answer is that special counselor, the solicitor, God the Holy Spirit. He gave these apostles' the Word of God so they can share it, and not just in their lifetime, but also for us today and every generation. It is called the Bible.

So why did God go through all that trouble? Well, because God has a special message for the world. **"Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live."** Remember, Jesus spoke these words hours before his death. Yet in the face of death Jesus confidently says, **"I live!"** No normal man died on Good Friday. God made flesh died on Good Friday, but he didn't remain dead. Jesus came back to life on Easter.

And why did he die on Good Friday? So we also may live. I saw a story on TV of a family who adopted a child. They had their own children, but wanted to give a home to a child without a home. And they purposely chose one who was a minority and had some health issues. That child went from no home to a loving home and family. Jesus came to do that for us. You heard it in our reading earlier: **"For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit, through whom also he went and preached to the spirits in prison who disobeyed long ago."** That is why he died, the righteous for the unrighteous. That is why he rose from the dead and ascended into heaven. He is preparing heaven for you. And if he is doing that, it means he is coming back for you even if your new home is the grave. **"Because I live,"** he promises, **"you also will live."**

Now you see why he promised the Holy Spirit as the Counselor for the disciples. He wanted to get this gospel message out so they can tell us the truth. And through them he sends us the Counselor so we may know the truth today.

II. Through those disciples he sends the Counselor to us.

"On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you." On that day, Pentecost, the Holy Spirit made the disciples understand so much, how Jesus and the father are one and they are one with him. When did you understand that? When did you realize that God is Triune, Father, Son and Holy Spirit? Was it sitting in science class? Watching baseball?

In our first reading for today, you heard about some Greeks in Athens. They were a very religious people. But they did not know who God was. So they guessed. They imagined God to be this and that and came up with hundreds of gods. But they were only guessing. So Paul told them. Remember how Jesus warned many would not accept the Holy Spirit? Well, what did most of those Greeks do? They laughed at Paul. But some believed. Why? God the Holy Spirit.

We believe. Why? We have only the Holy Spirit to thank. He tells us the truth as he moved those

apostles to write down God's Word. But he also convinces us it is the truth. I love it what it says in Romans 8: ***"The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children."*** A counselor stands next to you giving you advice. The Spirit is there with the Word telling us this is true, so believe it. When doubt comes to our minds, the Spirit advises, "Don't worry. Just believe." When we are scared, he advises us, "Don't worry. God loves you." And when we are down on ourselves, he testifies that we are God's children.

And he gives us advice on so much more. ***"Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him."*** I appreciate what our Synod President did. When the lockdown began and states were closing stores and churches, he simply asked, "Does God give us any advise on this?" And he directed us to the Ten Commandments. What does the Fourth Commandment advise us to do? Since they are not telling us we can't preach (we still do this through the mail and internet), humbly obey and close churches for a while. Why? Well, what does the Fifth Commandment say? So we can find a way to help protect our neighbor's life and health. What does the Third Commandment advise? Continue to preach and teach at our school and here at church. You are watching that right now.

Get it? God gives us wonderful advise in his word. He tells us what is right and what is wrong. As the Scripture tells us, ***"Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit."*** It is like a child in the store with a parent. Those little legs rush to keep up. The Spirit is leading you. Keep up with him. He is advising you on how you can tell God how much you love him by obeying him.

We do well as a congregation to insist that all we do here is based solely on God's Word as the truth and nothing but the truth. That's what Jesus wanted. He promised the Holy Spirit to serve as a counselor to the disciples, and he is still serving as a counselor to us today through them, that is, the Word he moved them to write down. The disciples needed him. So do we. So use that Word, believe it, and live it. Amen.