

THE HELPER

John 14:15-31

Sixth Sunday of Easter (Series A)

May 17, 2020

Trinity Free Lutheran Church, Grand Forks, ND

The gospel lesson for the Sixth Sunday of Easter comes from *The Gospel of John*, chapter 14, verses 15 through 31. This text continues last week's gospel lesson. Jesus tells his disciples that he is going away, and he explains how this is actually a good thing. Please stand as you are able for the Gospel. From John 14, beginning at verse 15, we read in Jesus' name.

¹⁵ "If you love me, you will keep my commandments. ¹⁶ And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, ¹⁷ even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.

¹⁸ "I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. ¹⁹ Yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. ²⁰ In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. ²¹ Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him." ²² Judas (not Iscariot) said to him, "Lord, how is it that you will manifest yourself to us, and not to the world?" ²³ Jesus answered him, "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. ²⁴ Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me.

²⁵ "These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. ²⁶ But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. ²⁷ Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid. ²⁸ You heard me say to you, 'I am going away, and I will come to you.' If you loved me, you would have rejoiced, because I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I. ²⁹ And now I have told you before it takes place, so that when it does take place you may believe. ³⁰ I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming. He has no claim on me, ³¹ but I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father. Rise, let us go from here."

O God, the giver of all that is good, by Your holy inspiration grant that we may think those things that are right and by Your merciful guiding accomplish them; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

You may be seated.

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

He is risen, indeed! Alleluia!

This passage picks right up where last week's gospel lesson left off. In fact, there really is no break in the text at all. Last week the text stopped right in the middle of Jesus speaking, and here we pick it up again. So for us, it's kind of like watching a movie, and just as the plot is building

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to its climax, you get interrupted and have to go do something else. So you pause the movie right in the middle of the main character's speech. Then, a week later, you finally get a chance to finish the movie, so you press play and it picks up in the exact place where you had to leave it the week before. You're right in the middle of the main character's big speech. So you have to remind yourself what's going on in the plot, and you have to remember what the first half of the speech is about. If you're like me, you might even have to back up to the beginning of the speech. That's what's going on here. We're picking up in the middle of Jesus' speech. So let's remind ourselves where we are.

It's the night before Jesus' crucifixion. Chapters 13 through 17 of John record Jesus' words that evening before he was arrested. It's basically five entire chapters of what Jesus said in the presence of his disciples that night. John must have remembered it quite vividly, because he records it in great detail. At this point in chapter 14, they have already eaten supper and Judas Iscariot has already left to betray Jesus. So it's Jesus and the eleven disciples who loved him.

He tells them that he is going away, and that he is going away to the Father. Last week I explained that Jesus is speaking here of his death. He goes to the Father, by way of the cross, to present his blood as the atonement for sin. And even though this will only be a brief absence—Jesus knows he is going to rise again on the third day—he knows that it will be a terribly devastating experience for his disciples. It's not just that their friend dies, but their God dies. The one whom they expected to restore the glory of Israel dies. It's not just their friend who dies, but their God and everything they hoped for. They did not yet understand that Jesus' death was really his means of saving them. They should have rejoiced in this salvation, but instead they were devastated. Even Judas Iscariot, Jesus' betrayer, was devastated to the point that he committed suicide over the whole thing.

So the primary purpose of Jesus' conversation that night is to comfort them. Something seemingly horrible is about to happen, but Jesus knows what he is doing, he has the entire thing under control, and the result will be marvelously better than anything they can possibly imagine.

Last week, regarding verses 1 through 14, we talked about how Jesus is the way to the Father. He went to the Father, by way of the cross, to prepare a place for us in his Father's house. Jesus' blood prepares our place in heaven. So when Jesus talks about being the way to the Father, it's not that he *shows* us the way, but that he actually *is* the way. For us to go with Jesus to the Father in heaven is not a matter of us *following* Jesus, as if he is merely an example for us, but it is simply a matter of *knowing* Jesus, for he will take us there. So all who know him already know the way to the Father, because Jesus *is* the way. He prepared a place for us by his blood, and he will return to physically take us there.

This week, in verses 15 through 31, Jesus talks more about the Holy Spirit, whom he calls the Helper, or Counselor, or Comforter. He promises to send the Holy Spirit to them. And, again, this is a gift that Jesus gives to us because of the cross.

There's a common misconception in the Church—and we might talk more about this on Pentecost, two weeks from today—but there's a common misconception that the Holy Spirit was given to the Church on Pentecost, fifty days after Jesus' crucifixion. But that's not quite right. It's easy to see how this misconception came to be, because Pentecost was the first time the Holy Spirit manifested himself *powerfully* in the Church—we'll read about that in two weeks—but the giving of the Holy Spirit actually occurred seven weeks earlier on Easter Sunday, the day of Jesus' resurrection. This is recorded in John 20, when Jesus appears to his disciples on the evening of his resurrection. He says, “**Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I**

am sending you.’ And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit.’” (20:21-22). We see here that the Holy Spirit was given to the Church on Easter, not Pentecost.

Now here’s the point and how it ties in to our text in John 14: Jesus is able to give the Holy Spirit because he atoned for our sins by his blood. It’s really because of Jesus’ death that the Holy Spirit is able to dwell within us. Notice that Jesus says, “You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you” (14:17). Before Jesus was crucified, he could say that the Holy Spirit dwelt with them (a more literal translation is, “He dwells beside you”), in the present tense, but he uses the future tense to say, “He ... will be in you.” This was a promise that would be fulfilled after Jesus’ death. The presence of God is dangerous, even deadly, for sinful persons. We are, by nature, sinful and unclean. So in order for the Holy Spirit to dwell within us personally and permanently, we must be cleansed by Jesus’ blood. Otherwise, I suppose it would mean death for us. It is because Jesus goes to the Father, by way of the cross, to present his holy and precious and innocent blood as the sacrifice for our sins, that we are able to receive the Holy Spirit. So it’s really quite natural that Jesus would breathe the Holy Spirit upon his disciples the first opportunity he has after his resurrection. It’s what he promised in John 14, on the evening before his death, and he fulfills it in John 20, on the evening after his resurrection.

And since that point, the Holy Spirit is given to every Christian at Baptism. This is what the apostle Peter proclaimed at Pentecost, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.” (Acts 2:38-39).

So this promise of the Holy Spirit that Jesus made to his disciples on the evening before his crucifixion is not just for them, but also for you. If you are a baptized, believing Christian, you have the Holy Spirit dwelling in you personally. You may not always feel him. And that’s okay.

One of the great errors of modern Christianity is to equate the Holy Spirit with our feelings. And so we are led astray to interpret the presence of the Holy Spirit, and, therefore, our salvation, by how we feel. But that is wrong and deadly to faith. We interpret the presence of the Holy Spirit and our salvation by the promise of God in his Word. No one feels the Holy Spirit all the time. Even the most “Spirit-filled” person you can imagine does not feel the presence of the Holy Spirit all the time. But the Holy Spirit does not leave us. He does not come and go. There may be times when we sense him working more powerfully, but this does not happen all the time. And if we interpret his work by the way we feel, we will even end up attributing false things to him, and thus be led astray into error. So we must not confuse the Holy Spirit with our feelings. Rather, we interpret the Holy Spirit’s work through God’s promises.

So what does Jesus promise the Holy Spirit will do? Jesus calls the Holy Spirit our “Helper” (14:16, 26). And the title “Helper,” of course, does not imply inferiority, as if the Holy Spirit is our assistant and we are his boss. The Holy Spirit is obviously superior to us. He is God! He is equal to the Father and the Son. The title “Helper” simply means that he helps us. This word can also be translated as “Comforter,” or “Counselor,” or “Advocate.” The Holy Spirit works in our lives to create faith in our hearts, strengthen us in the faith, preserve us in the Christian faith, and comfort our consciences with the promise that our sins are forgiven for Jesus’ sake. And he does all of this through the Word of God. In short, the Holy Spirit is the one who makes us Christians and keeps us Christians. If it were left to us, we would never become Christians in the first place. And even if we could, somehow, become Christians without the work of the Holy Spirit, we would never be able to preserve ourselves in the faith without the work of the Holy Spirit. The

Holy Spirit is the one who makes us Christians and keeps us Christians. This is the gift of the Holy Spirit to all Christians.

There is also a specific promise to the apostles, which Jesus does not make to all Christians. It is a promise made only to the apostles, but it does benefit all Christians, and I'll explain that. Jesus says in verse 26, "**The Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you**" (14:26).

There have been a lot of bad sermons on this verse, stating that the Holy Spirit will give direct, supernatural revelation to Christians, as if he does this apart from the Word. But this was a promise Jesus made *only* to the apostles. And the reason we limit this promise to the apostles is that Jesus says, "**He will ... bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.**" You can't remember something that you weren't there for.

So, I'm sorry, but this is not a promise *to* you. ... But it is a promise *for* you. That is, it still benefits you, even if it was not made *to* you. It is good for us that Jesus made this promise to the disciples, and, of course, that God the Father fulfilled it by sending the Holy Spirit. It benefits us, because, as the Holy Spirit taught the apostles and brought Jesus' words to their remembrance, they wrote it down for us. We call it the New Testament.

The Holy Spirit may not give us direct revelation, but that's okay, because we have the direct revelation given to the apostles. And, for that matter, we also have the direct revelation given to the prophets. That is recorded in the Old Testament.

This is really better than the Holy Spirit giving us direct revelation. And the reason it's better is that we have certainty in the words of Scripture. If we had to depend on direct revelation given to each of us personally, we would have to somehow distinguish between what comes from the Holy Spirit and what comes from our own sinful nature. We would have some people saying one thing that was given by the Holy Spirit, and we would have other people saying another, contrary thing, that came from the sinful nature. And we would have to somehow distinguish between the two, because both would claim to be from the Holy Spirit. So it is really good for us that Jesus made this promise *to* the apostles, and *only* to the apostles. In this way, the promise *to* the apostles is really *for* us, in the sense that we benefit from the promise and its fulfillment. This promise ultimately resulted in the New Testament being written for our instruction. We don't have to try to distinguish in our hearts which thoughts and feelings come from the Holy Spirit and which thoughts and feelings come from our sinful natures. When we discern what our pastors and teachers say, we are not left to our own wisdom. We can test their words by comparing them to Scripture. God has given us the Holy Scriptures, so that we might have certainty concerning the things God has spoken. It's not about what we think. It's not about what we feel. It's about what God has clearly revealed in Scripture.

I suppose this might be an assault on our pride, because we can't claim anything for ourselves. But, really, our pride needs to be assaulted, so that we might learn to listen to the voice of God as recorded in the Holy Scriptures. They were given through the prophets and apostles so that we might have certainty concerning the things God has spoken.

And to circle back to where we started, this is all because Jesus went to the Father, by way of the cross, to present his blood as the sacrifice for sins. Every blessing we have as Christians is given because Jesus died and rose again. Our sins are forgiven because Jesus died and rose again. We will be raised again on the Last Day and transformed into Jesus' perfect image because he died and rose again. Jesus will take us into his Father's eternal house because Jesus died and rose

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again. The Holy Spirit is given to each of us personally because Jesus died and rose again, and we are baptized into that death and resurrection. The Holy Spirit gathers us together into congregations because Jesus died and rose again. The Holy Spirit formed Trinity Free Lutheran Church because Jesus died and rose again. The Bible itself is given to us because Jesus died and rose again. Every blessing we have as Christians is given because Jesus died and rose again.

So when the mob comes to arrest Jesus, which he knew would happen shortly, he goes with them, not because they have a claim over him, but because it was the will of the Father that Jesus should die and rise again. Through his death and resurrection he gives us every blessing for this life and the next. Amen.

Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:7). Amen.