

“The Holy Spirit the Strength of Faith”

John 16:5-15

Sermon for the Fifth Sunday of Easter 2022; May 15, 2022

Emmanuel Lutheran Church, Rifle, Colorado

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Last Sunday Jesus said “a little while and you will not see me and a little while and you will see Me” (John 16:16). We talked about how this involved Jesus’ death and resurrection. We also talked about how this involves the time in between His ascension to the right hand of God the Father and His visible return in glory. This time in between comes directly into focus today, as Jesus says: “But now I am going to him who sent me” (John 16:5 ESV). And then remarkably Jesus says, “[I]t is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go I will send Him to you.” (John 16:7 ESV). This “helper” is the Holy Spirit, whom Jesus refers to as the Spirit of truth (John 16:12).

So Jesus brings the mission and work of the Holy Spirit into view. And this is fitting on this confirmation Sunday. For we ask our confirmands this morning: “Do you acknowledge the gifts God gave you in your baptism?” One of those gifts is the Holy Spirit, as the Apostle Peter said: “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” (Acts 2:38 ESV).

Jesus puts the work and importance of the Holy Spirit in context and perspective for us when He talks about the Holy Spirit in the time between His return to the Father and not being seen any longer by anyone (John 16:10), for Jesus returning to the Father means that He is not seen by anyone with the eyes. The disciples would not see Jesus any longer (John 16:10), and, of course, we do not see Jesus with our eyes. The Holy Spirit comes into view here to do the work of constantly presenting Jesus to us and delivering Jesus and the salvation Jesus won for us to us. Jesus says that the Holy Spirit “will take what is mine and declare it to you” (John 16:14 ESV).

This is the truth because the Spirit does “not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak” (John 16:13 (ESV). Here is one aspect of the way of the Spirit; it is not speaking on one’s own authority but hearing first and then speaking. The Holy Spirit first hears what the Father and the Son say, and then declares it to us as God’s word. Walking in the way of the Spirit, we then hear this word the Spirit has declared and then believe and speak and act.

This word is the testimony to God’s mighty acts. This word is the testimony to what Jesus said and did. This word is the proclamation of the redemption Jesus has won for us. This word is the proclamation of Jesus’ resurrection, which Jesus speaks of as overcoming the world. This word is the promise of Jesus’ visible return in glory. This word is the truth of right and wrong, God’s law.

The Holy Spirit has given us this word in the Holy Scriptures and in Baptism and Holy Communion as those special acts of God that connect us to Jesus through water and bread and wine. The Holy Spirit has given us this word and keeps this word and Sacrament going for us in this in between time. He does this to connect us to Christ, the redemption He has won, and His victory over sin and death: “He will glorify Me for He will take what is mine and declare it to you” (John 16:14).

But Jesus also said that it is advantageous for us that He goes to the Father and that we not see Him and that He sends the Holy Spirit instead. The advantage is in the Holy Spirit being Spirit. The Spirit as spirit can “testify” to our spirits, As the Apostle Paul says in Romans 8 (Rom. 8:16). So you have the word of God given by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit takes this word

and testifies to your spirit so that you believe it and have Jesus and His overcoming the world in your soul by faith.

This is vitally important because we do not see Jesus and because in the world we have tribulation, as Jesus says (John 16:33). When the world is raging in its madness; when it seems like the sinful flesh is gaining the upper hand; when your own body or the body of a loved one is failing or has failed; where do you find the strength to believe, and walk the Christian walk, according to God's word? When really smart people tell you lies and things that are not true about God and Jesus and salvation and the world and human nature, how do you walk in the truth? When they tell you that Jesus could not be who the Scriptures claim; when Jesus' death, therefore, could not be an atoning sacrifice; when Jesus' resurrection is a fairy tale and has nothing to do with any genuine knowledge of God, how do you continue to believe?

These are vitally important questions because we do not see Jesus with our eyes. Maybe we think that if only we could see Jesus, then we and everyone else would certainly believe that everything the Spirit says in God's word is true. Then we would know that Jesus and the Gospel are true as the world, the devil, and our own sinful flesh rage against God and His Christ.

Yet, there is no guarantee about seeing with the eyes. Jesus spoke about people who saw Him with the eyes and what He did. He said that "they have seen and hated both me and my Father" (John 15:24 ESV). Seeing is no guarantee. They could see Jesus in the flesh. They could see the works He did, the miracles. And yet they did not believe. It seems that no matter how much they saw, their hearts could not believe. The heart needs to be brought to repentance and faith. This is what the Spirit does, as Spirit to spirit.

So the Spirit gives us the word and sacrament. Then the Spirit gives us the faith to believe it. And this faith is in our souls where the Spirit works Spirit to spirit. As Jesus says the Spirit "dwells with you and will be in you" (John 14:17 ESV). The Spirit does the miracle of creating faith in Christ and life in God and sustaining that faith. And then the Spirit works within us in the way of truth, humility, and God's love for the other.

This is advantageous since Jesus has gone away from sight and we have tribulation in the world and in our flesh. As the Spirit works faith in your soul through His word, there is no tribulation in the world that can take away that faith that is given by the Spirit. The Spirit brings Jesus to live in your soul with the redemption Jesus has won for you and His overcoming the world. Nothing can happen to you in the world and in your flesh that can take that living reality away from you. And so just as Jesus has overcome the world in His resurrection, so the Apostle John can say that this also overcomes the world, that is, our faith (1 John 5:4). The strength and power of this faith is the Holy Spirit, whom the Father and the Son have given to you.

So today we acknowledge this very great gift God gives in Holy Baptism: the Spirit of truth, our helper, who brings what belongs to Jesus to us in word and sacrament and into our souls and gives to us the forgiveness of sins and eternal life. Thanks be to God for this remarkable gift. Amen.