

The Sixth Sunday of Easter, May 17, 2020

Pastor Peter Gregory, Our Savior Lutheran Church, Westminister, Massachusetts

A Different Future, the Same Promises

John 14:15–21

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Eph 1:2

Before His death and resurrection, Jesus made this promise to His followers: **“I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth”** (v 16).

Today we’re back with Jesus and the disciples on the night when He was betrayed. We’re listening as He says “goodbye” and talks about the future. The disciples don’t know what lies ahead, but He does. They aren’t prepared for what’s coming, but He is. He sees past His crucifixion and burial to His resurrection and ascension and the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. He knows what the disciples need. He knows what you need.

NO MATTER HOW DIFFERENT THE FUTURE MAY BE,
THE PROMISES OF JESUS REMAIN THE SAME.

What He has done in His death and resurrection isn’t just for a moment. It will last. Everything else may change. This will last an eternity.

What did Jesus promise to do after His ascension? He said, **“I’ll ask the Father, and He’ll give you another Helper to be with you forever”** (v 16). The disciples won’t be alone. Those who believe in Jesus are *never* alone. They’ll have *another* Helper, another One like Jesus. A counselor. An advocate. The Spirit who comes alongside them and continues the work of Jesus. And with the promised Spirit come other promises, too:

- the Spirit causes you to love Jesus;
- the Spirit leads you to keep, treasure, and hold fast everything that Jesus taught;
- the Spirit **dwells with you and will be in you** (v 17).

Jesus also promises that He will continue to be with His Church: **“I won’t leave you as orphans; I’ll come to you”** (v 18). He promises resurrection and eternal life: **“Because I live, you will live also”** (v 19). One promise after another,

because Jesus atoned for our sins, reconciled us to the Father, and conquered death and hell. Promise after promise from His death, resurrection, and ascension. Just as Jesus placed these promises into His disciples' ears long ago, so now He put them into your ears today. These promises are for you.

They were given for the time when Jesus would no longer be visibly present with the disciples. He was about to do His Father's will by laying down His life for the sheep. He was about to "depart" — to die and rise and ascend to the Father.

His departure would be difficult for the disciples. After everything they'd seen — after the blind received sight, after the lame walked, after the poor had good news preached to them, after the dead were raised — after all that, Jesus was going away. It might seem like they were being left behind or orphaned. It might look like they were on their own to deal with the troubles of the world, the devil, and their sinful flesh. Their hopes for glory, power, and earthly success were dashed. They didn't know the day or hour when Jesus would come again in glory. Their lives would still end with death. This wasn't how it was supposed to go. This wasn't what they expected.

That's how the world sees Jesus and His disciples. Maybe you feel let down by a Jesus who seems so far away. And this much of it is true: it is difficult to be a Christian. We don't see Jesus with our eyes. We do struggle with sin, doubt, and disappointment. We do suffer from fear, sadness, and loneliness. We do experience crosses, trials, and even death.

If we didn't have Jesus' word, if we didn't believe His promises, it would make no sense to be a Christian, to believe in a crucified God. Without His word and promises, we truly would be alone. But rest assured, He does come in His word. He gives life through His word and comfort and help. It's as if Jesus says to the disciples: "Because you won't see Me, I speak to you all these words, put My word in water and with bread and wine for you. I'm about to depart. Don't be afraid; but believe in Me. Trust what I'm telling you. For although you'll find no real comfort or help in the world, I won't leave you on your own. Yes, I'm going to the Father for this very reason, to assume My power and My reign and then show them to you. Even though I depart from you physically, I shall send you

another Comforter and Helper from the Father. He'll always remain with you, for I know that you can't abide in the world without a comforter.

“Because I desire to have you love Me and keep My commandments, I'm doing this for you. As I've been your Helper in My earthly life, now I'll provide you additional help through My death, resurrection, and ascension. I conquer sin, death, and the devil. I win for you forgiveness and the gift of new and eternal life. For I Myself will ask the Father to grant you this Helper, the Spirit of Truth, who will stay with you forever. He is the Lord and Giver of life. He will dwell with you and be in you and enable you to keep My commandments, for He will write them in your hearts.”

You have this gift of God! The Holy Spirit came to you in Holy Baptism. He joined you to Jesus' death and resurrection. He has given you new life in Christ. Through the word, the Helper strengthens you for this life, for the battle against sin, for the times of fear and sadness, for the trials and difficulties of this world. Yes, He even prepares you for death. He brings you into the community of the Father and the Son, into their eternal life. He proclaims that your sins are forgiven. The Holy Spirit doesn't come just once. He keeps coming to you, keeps helping you, keeps forgiving you, keeps joining you to Christ and His eternal life.

Jesus has kept His promise. **“I won't leave you as orphans,”** He said, **“I will come to you”** (v 18). And He does. Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen from the dead, lives and reigns forever. In saying “I will come to you,” Jesus promises to come in and through His word—through Holy Scripture, and Holy Baptism, and Holy Absolution, and Holy Communion, which we so long for in these days. He ties Himself and His life to your difficult life in this world.

So Jesus comes to us, His Spirit comes to us, and through them the Father too lives in us. This is the Christian life that you have, that you still have. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit bring you all the gifts Christ promised, all the gifts He won, the same eternal gifts in an ever-changing world, until we see Him face-to-face.

The peace that passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Phil 4:7
