

THE SPIRIT OF TRUTH
Sermon for the 5th Sunday of Easter, 2019
John 16:12-16

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is John 16:12-16, the first 5 verses of our Gospel, ¹² **“I still have many things to tell you, but you cannot endure them now. ¹³ However, when He, the Spirit of Truth, comes, He will lead you into the whole truth. For He will not speak on His own authority but will speak whatever He hears and will tell you what is coming. ¹⁴ He will glorify Me, because He will take from what is Mine and will tell it to you. ¹⁵ All things that the Father has are Mine. That is why I have said, ‘He takes from what is Mine and will tell it to you.’ ¹⁶ “A little while and you do not see Me any longer and, again, a little while, and you will see Me.”**

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

The crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ are more than just a once-in-a-lifetime set of experiences. They are unique in all of time and space. That is what makes the teaching of Jesus in today’s Gospel such a challenge.

Jesus and His disciples were in the upper room the evening before His crucifixion. He was preparing His disciples for what was going to happen over the next few days. We know what happened: In a few hours they would be in Gethsemane. There, Jesus would be arrested and taken before Annas and then Caiaphas, the high priest. The next morning, He would stand before Pontius Pilate. Then He would be led away to the cross. He would die and be buried in a borrowed tomb. Three days later, on the first day of the next week, He would bodily rise from the dead, before returning to the Father 40 days later.

The disciples, however, did not know what would happen. Yes, Jesus had told them that these things *would happen*, but they weren’t ready to understand what all this meant. There is a tension and a drama that arises from the fact that Jesus must prepare His disciples for events that they can’t understand until *after* they have happened.

In his Gospel, John brings out this tension and drama as he gives an account of Jesus’ words in that upper room. In fact, he dedicates five whole chapters of his Gospel to those words. Jesus, in His great love for His disciples, is giving them preparation and comfort for the upcoming ordeal. Even though the disciples don’t understand - even though they will endure terror and sorrow during these events - even though the events of the next few days will overwhelm them - the words of Jesus will sustain them through this ordeal.

Our text begins at the point where Jesus has told the disciples all that they can handle. Now He says, ¹² **“I still have many things to tell you, but you cannot endure them now.”** Even then, He has words of encouragement for them. He says, ¹³ **“However, when He, the Spirit of Truth, comes, He will lead you into the whole truth. For He will not speak on His own authority but will speak whatever He hears and will tell you what is coming. ¹⁴ He will glorify Me, because He will take from what is Mine and will tell it to you.”** With these words, Jesus re-introduced the disciples to the Holy Spirit. He also told them of the special role the Holy Spirit would have as they witness to the words and deeds that they witnessed while they were with Him.

So, even though the disciples did not understand Jesus’ words at the time, the Holy Spirit would bring those words back in crystal clarity. The Holy Spirit would help the disciples put the pieces together so that they may proclaim the Gospel to others. Earlier in his Gospel, John said, *“His disciples did not understand these things at first, but when Jesus had been glorified, they remembered that these things had been written about Him and that they had done these things to him,”* (John 12:16). It would be the work of the Holy Spirit to bring these memories back to mind and enable them to understand.

This is very important for all who read the Bible. We would not have the New Testament if the Holy Spirit had not come and helped the disciples. Without the Holy Spirit, their thoughts would be confused, and their memories would be foggy at best. With the Holy Spirit, their memories became sharp and accurate, and they understood the teachings of Jesus. Without the Holy Spirit, there is no way that they could have written what they wrote. With the Holy Spirit, their writings are *“the power of God to save everyone who believes it,”* (Rom. 1:16).

These words about the Holy Spirit are important in another way. These words tell us how we can discern the true prophet from the false prophet.

In today's Gospel Jesus said that the Holy Spirit "**will not speak on His own authority but will speak whatever He hears and will tell you what is coming.**" The Holy Spirit will never ever change what Jesus has already said. He will only tell us what *Jesus has already said*.

Down through the ages, there have been many false prophets who have said they had a word from the Holy Spirit. Today, false prophets also continue to abound. Jesus tells us that the Holy Spirit will always and forever agree with the words that we already have in the Bible. So, if someone ever disagrees with the Bible, they are not of the Holy Spirit.

Saint Peter also warns how false prophets and teachers will come. He says, "*They will deny even the Lord who has bought them and will bring swift destruction on themselves.*" ² *Many people will follow their immoral ways, and because of them the way of truth will be slandered.* ³ *In their greed they will make a profit out of you by means of fabricated words,*" (2 Peter 2:2-3). These false teachers may be under the influence of a **different** spirit, but it is **NOT** the Holy Spirit. Jesus made it very clear that the Holy Spirit will not tell us anything new. Instead, He will clarify the things that Jesus already said.

Martin Luther explained like this: *In this way Christ sets bounds for the message of the Holy Spirit Himself. He is not to preach anything new or anything else than Christ and His Word. Thus we have a sure guide and touchstone for judging the false spirits. We can declare that it surely does not indicate the presence of the Holy Spirit when a person proclaims his own thoughts and notions and begins to teach in Christendom something apart from or in addition to what Christ taught. No, that betrays the presence of the loathsome spirit of lies, the devil, of whom Christ declares in John 8:44: "When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature," that is, what he himself has fabricated.*¹

Nothing has changed since Martin Luther preached these words some 500 years ago. Our old sinful nature still entices us to believe something is true because it feels good. Our culture tells us to let our feelings be our guide. The devil tempts us to search constantly for the next mountaintop experience. The forces of evil will do anything and everything to prevent us from finding the Holy Spirit where He has promised to be, that is, in the Holy Scriptures.

Today's Gospel account continues to remind us of the roles that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit take as they give salvation to us. We see the Father sending, the Son redeeming, and the Holy Spirit declaring. It is the Holy Spirit's role to declare the salvation that Jesus earned for us. The Holy Spirit makes us holy by bringing us to faith in Christ. He declares this by calling us by the Gospel to partake of the spiritual blessings that are ours in Christ.

Jesus said, ¹⁶ "**A little while and you do not see Me any longer...**" A little while after Jesus said these words, Judas betrayed Him into the hands of the enemy. The enemy mocked, tortured, and crucified Him. After He died, His friends laid Him in a tomb. He left their sight. They saw Him no longer. This is the work of Jesus that the disciples did not yet understand. This is also the work of Jesus that earned salvation for all people.

Jesus also said, "... **and, again, a little while, and you will see Me.**" Jesus did not remain in the tomb. He rose from the dead, and He lives forever more. The disciples saw Him again. The disciples witnessed Jesus as He redeemed the world to God.

Then, after Jesus ascended back into heaven, **the Spirit of Truth** did indeed come to the aid of these witnesses at Pentecost. He kept their memories sharp, and He helped them understand what they had witnessed. They were able to place the witness of their testimony into a written form that will be with us forever. Jesus said, "*Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will certainly not pass away,*" (Matthew 24:35).

Jesus Christ promised that He would send the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit proclaims Christ's salvation whenever we hear the Word of God in its truth and purity. Through that proclamation, the Holy Spirit establishes, maintains, and strengthens faith. Through that faith, the Holy Spirit delivers the gifts that Jesus Christ, our Redeemer purchased and won for us with His life, suffering, death, and resurrection. The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son to give us eternal life in the presence of the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

May we forever treasure the work that God the Holy Spirit has done for us! Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, Vol. 24: Sermons on the Gospel of St. John: Chapters 14-16, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald and Helmut T. Lehmann, Jn 16:13 (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1999).

PRAYER FOR THE FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

Almighty God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, You have sent Jesus, Your holy Servant, into the world, not to be served, but to serve, and to give His life to redeem all people. After He had offered His life as the one sacrifice for all sins for ever, You raised Him from the dead by Your glorious power. Give us a living faith in Him, so that we may possess the sure hope of eternal life through Him.

We thank You for all Your kindness in our lives. We praise You for every blessing that You give us, and that Your mercy is never-ending.

We thank You, O Father of all light, for taking away the darkness of our minds and spirits, and for revealing to us Your Word of truth in Jesus Christ. Pour out Your Spirit on us, that He may continually plant Your Word in our hearts. Increase our willingness to study the Scriptures, and our understanding of them.

We thank You for the fellowship of believers in Your church. Keep us all in the unity that the Spirit gives, and in the peace that binds your children together. Keep us in faith in Christ Jesus, in joyful obedience, and in loyalty to Your infallible Word. Bless Your church everywhere, protect it from all its enemies, and give it success in all the work that believers do in Jesus' name.

We thank You for our Christian homes. Surround every family with the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, that love, peace, forgiveness, comfort, joy, and moral purity may fill their lives.

We thank You, Lord, for the blessings that we enjoy in our rich land. Defend it, both within and with-out, from all who would harm it by sin, undermine it by strife and rebellion, or destroy it by war.

Strengthen the faith of those in our midst who are suffering illness, who are bereaved, and who are lonely, or depressed in any other ways.

We thank You for health and healing, education and social joys, friends and companions, and all the beauties and wonders of Your creation. Fill us with gratitude for Your goodness, and give us opportunities to use what You give us to serve you.

Surround us all with Your love, and finally receive us into perfect, unbroken fellowship with You and our Saviour Jesus Christ. Hear these prayers in Jesus' precious name. Amen.

FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

Acts 11:1-18

¹ The apostles and other fellow-disciples throughout Judea heard that even the Gentiles had received the Word of God. ² However, when Peter went up to Jerusalem, those who belonged to the circumcision disputed with him. ³ They said, "Why have you gone to visit uncircumcised men and eaten with them?"

⁴ Then Peter began and explained it to them point by point. He said, ⁵ "I was in the city of Joppa praying and, in a trance, I saw a vision. An object like a large linen sheet was coming down, being lowered by its four corners out of heaven and came right down to me.

⁶ When I looked at it intently, I examined it and saw four-footed animals of the earth, wild animals, reptiles and birds of the sky. ⁷ I also heard a voice telling me, 'Get up, Peter! Kill and eat.' ⁸ However, I answered, 'Surely not, Lord! For nothing defiled or unclean has ever entered my mouth.' ⁹ A voice spoke from heaven a second time, 'Stop regarding as unclean the things that God has declared clean!' ¹⁰ This happened three times. Then it was all drawn up into heaven again. ¹¹ At that very moment three men stood at the house where we were, the ones who had been sent to

me from Caesarea. ¹² The Spirit told me to go with them without making any distinction. These six fellow-disciples also accompanied me, and we entered the man's house. ¹³ He reported to us how he had seen the angel standing in his house and saying, 'Send to Joppa and ask Simon, who is also called "Peter," to come! ¹⁴ He will speak a message to you by which you and all your family will be saved.'

¹⁵ "When I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them as He also did on us at the beginning. ¹⁶ Then I remembered the Word of the Lord, how He used to say: 'John baptised with water, but you will be baptised with the Holy Spirit.' ¹⁷ Therefore, if God has given to them the same gift as He gave to us too when we became believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could hinder God?"

¹⁸ When they had heard this, they became silent and began to glorify God, saying, "Therefore, God has given repentance to life even to the Gentiles."

Revelation 21:1-7

¹ Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth. For the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. ² I saw the holy city, a new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God,

prepared like a bride adorned for her husband. ³ I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying: "Look! The Tabernacle of God is among human beings. He will dwell with them, they will be His people, and God Himself will be with them as their God. ⁴ He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death. There will not be any more grief, crying or pain, because the former things have passed away."

⁵ The One who was sitting on the throne said: "Look! I am making all things new." He also said: "Write this down! For these Words are trustworthy and genuine."

⁶ Then He said to me: "Everything has taken place. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I shall give to him who is thirsty water from the fountain of the water of life, without cost. ⁷ The one who wins the victory will inherit these things, and I shall be his God, and he will be My son."

John 16:12-22

¹² "I still have many things to tell you, but you cannot endure them now. ¹³ However, when He, the Spirit of Truth, comes, He will lead you into the whole truth. For He will not speak on His own authority but will speak whatever He hears and will tell you what is coming. ¹⁴ He will glorify Me, because He will take from what is Mine and will tell it to you. ¹⁵ All things that the Father has are Mine. That is why I have said, 'He takes from what is Mine and will tell it to you.'

¹⁶ "A little while and you do not see Me any longer and, again, a little while, and you will see Me."

¹⁷ Therefore, some of His disciples asked one another, "What does this mean that He is telling us, 'A little while and you do not see Me and, again, a little while, and you will see Me' and 'Because I am going to the Father'?"

¹⁸ Therefore, they kept asking, "What does this mean that He is saying, 'A little while'? We do not understand what He is saying."

¹⁹ Jesus knew that they wanted to ask Him. He said to them, "Are you trying to find out among yourselves about this thing that I said, 'A little while and you do not see Me and, again, a little while and you will see Me'?" ²⁰ Truly, truly, I tell you that you will weep and mourn, but the world will rejoice. You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will be turned to joy. ²¹ When a woman is giving birth, she has sorrow because her hour has come. However, when she has given birth to her child, she does not remember her anguish any longer, because of her joy that a human being has been born into the world. ²² Therefore, you also have sorrow now, but I shall see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy away from you."