

John 14:23-31

Pentecost + June 9, 2019

Good Shepherd Lutheran Church + Boise, Idaho

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Pentecost, Peace and the Paraclete

The Word of the Lord from John 14:26-27: Jesus said, "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. 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." This is the Word of the Lord.

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

The story of Pentecost always catches my imagination because it's one of the most dramatic moments in the New Testament. The disciples are gathered together, waiting in anticipation. Suddenly, there's that sound from heaven, as if it's coming straight down from above. It's the sound of a mighty, rushing wind: the Holy Spirit was content to descend as a dove when Jesus was baptized, but now He arrives with a roar that draws a crowd. Tongues of fire appear on the disciples' heads, and they begin to speak in various tongues: whatever languages are found in the crowd, the people hear the disciples and they understand. They declare the mighty works of God, that "everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved." Peter goes on with his fantastic Pentecost sermon, people are convicted left and right, and 3,000 are baptized that day. It's a remarkable kick-off for the era of the New Testament Church.

Big days are big days, but big celebrations don't go on for long; and after they're over, life is quite ordinary again. So once the flames are gone and the sound of wind has faded, what are those early Christians doing? According to Acts 2, the baptized are devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching, they're partaking in the breaking of the bread and the prayers, and then they're taking care of each other. In other words, as baptized Christians, they keep gathering to hear the Word and receive the Supper together in worship, and then they go about doing good works. That's why we do what we do here. We don't have loud rushing wind sounds or tongues of fire on our heads, but that's okay: wind-sounds and flames never took a single sin away. We do have the same Father, Son and Holy Spirit at work for our good. We have the same means of grace, and by them the Lord still gives us forgiveness, life and salvation.

If we want to be precise, this giving in the means of grace is principally the work of the Holy Spirit. Of the persons of the Holy Trinity, it is the Spirit who takes the lead here to glorify Jesus.

Jesus calls the Holy Spirit the "Helper" in our translation, but we can do better than that. In fact, the word in Greek is "Paraclete" – we sang it in the first hymn, and it gets translated with words like "helper," "comforter," "advocate" or "counselor." It's a strange word to our ears, but it's worth the peculiarity because it's rich in meaning. It's a Greek word with the sense of a companion who encourages; and as I explain it in confirmation class, "Paraclete" means the One who says what has to be said. Where you're in need of repentance, the Holy Spirit works by means of God's Law to convict you of sin and show you your need for forgiveness. Where you're in need of grace, He works by means of the Gospel to give you forgiveness, strengthen your faith and deliver life. Where you're in need of wisdom, He provides instruction by means of the Word. Where you're in need of consolation, He provides the comfort of knowing that you are in fact God's own child for the sake of Jesus. He does all of this by the Word of God, spoken by itself or added to water, bread and wine. That's how He operated at Pentecost, and that's how He operates today.

Because the Paraclete works through the Word to give you forgiveness, life and salvation, He delivers another priceless gift: you have the peace of Jesus.

As Jesus says in our Gospel lesson, His peace is quite unlike the peace that the world gives. See, peace in this world is a fleeting thing, because the sort of peace that the world gives only lasts as long as there's no trouble to give you grief. It starts to fade as soon as you've got worries. If you live in a world of terror attacks, violence or natural disaster, there's always something to worry about. If you've got kids, an ailing spouse or aging parents, you've got something to worry about. If you have bills to pay, assignments to turn in or employment requirements to fulfill, you've got worries. Let's face it: as long as you've got a pulse, you're going to have things to be worried about – and all of those worries work to steal away the peace that this world gives, because peace in a dying world is just that fragile and tenuous and fleeting.

The worry you suffer is not just physical stress or emotional anguish. It has a spiritual dimension to it, for devil is going to use it against you. Don't be deceived: you're under spiritual attack. Jesus speaks in our text of the devil, that self-appointed and deluded so-called "ruler of this world," which is kind of like being "king of the dumpster fire." The evil one is at work; and having been completely defeated by Jesus, he's looking for someone he *can* destroy, and so he's coming after you. Worry is one of the devil's best weapons against you, because he uses worry to persuade you that God doesn't care much for you at all. And if you're persuaded that God doesn't care at best, or – at worst – is out to get you, you're not going to have any peace at all.

Of course, the devil's got more than one play. Sometimes instead of worry, he supplies false comfort. He tries to sidetrack you from worry with sinful distractions – drug and alcohol abuse, pornography or sexual immorality, worship of material goods or the great outdoors, etc. When you and I feel pain, we want anesthetic: if we can't make the worry go away, we want it masked. So the evil one tempts you to indulge in sin in order to create an *illusion* of peace; but that sort of temptation leaves you unforgiven and facing God's judgment.

The peace that Jesus gives is far, far better; because the peace that Jesus gives is the certainty that you're right with God. You're right with God because Jesus has shed His blood to make it so; and with a price paid like that, you can be certain of God's love. You can be certain that you're His beloved child, even when He permits times of trouble to discipline faith. When violence or disaster take place, you know you're still the Lord's because Jesus has died for you. When medical or financial troubles plague, you know that the Lord is still at work for your good because the Lord has made you His child at the cost of His own Son. When the devil comes along and tells you that God must be out to get you for your past sins, you know better: if Christ has died for all of your sins, there is nothing left for God to get you for. No matter what is happening now or what the future brings, you know that your eternity is in heaven for the sake of Jesus. You're at peace with God. That's the peace that Jesus gives. Apart from Him, there is no peace.

No wonder the angels sang of "peace on earth" when Jesus was born, because finally the Savior had arrived to take away sin. No wonder the risen Jesus' first words to His disciples were, "Peace be with you," because that's what He died to bring. No wonder, just before the Lord's Supper, the pastor turns to you with the body and blood of Christ and says, "The peace of the Lord be with you always." It might even be why some pastors bless you with God's peace one last time as you leave the service. It's remarkable: you're no longer an enemy of God, because Jesus has taken away the sin that made you an enemy. That means you have peace.

How did *you* get this peace? That's the work of the Paraclete, the Holy Spirit. He encourages, and He uses words – namely, God's holy Word – to give you the forgiveness that Jesus has won. When He gives you forgiveness, all of God's other gifts come with it: He gives you peace. He gives you faith. He gives you eternal life. It's all there, given in His Word! How sad that the world goes looking everywhere for peace, when it's easily found exactly where the Lord promised it to be!

That's how it was on Pentecost: recall Acts 2, and you find that Peter preaches to a crowd worried about their sin, and he points them to baptism and the Lord's Word. It's the same for you today, because listen to how our Gospel lesson begins. Jesus says, "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." Make sure you get that right – or else you'll get it very wrong. It's pretty natural to hear Jesus' words as, "If you obey My Word well enough, then God will love you." If that's what Jesus is saying, then you're left with the constant worry that you're not obeying well enough. But the word "keep" means "to guard" or "to treasure." Jesus is giving a description, not a list of requirements: the one who loves Him is the one who holds onto His Word, and that one dwells with God. He isn't saying, "If you stop sinning enough, you *can be* My people." He's saying, "Because by faith you hold onto My Word, both Law and Gospel, you *are* My people."

This is not a challenge. It's a comfort. By the grace of God, for the sake of Jesus Christ crucified and risen again, you are His holy people both now and forevermore. You're at peace with God. That's the work of the Holy Spirit.

Blessed are you. The Lord pours out His Spirit upon you this day by His Word, and the Spirit delivers Jesus to you – even His holy body and blood – so that you might have forgiveness and faith. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid. Though you will have your share of troubles in this life, you are at peace with God both now and forever.

Be at peace.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen