

Rev. Danny Mackey
Fifth Sunday of Easter
April 29, 2018
John 16:5-15
Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church in Muncie, Ind.

He is risen! [He is risen, indeed!] Alleluia!

[Jesus said:] "It 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."

It's to your gain that Christ ascends to the Father. You're better off because of it—not only because Jesus is now seated at the right hand of the Father, ruling over all things for the sake of His Church, not only because He is interceding for you before the Father's throne, not only because He's preparing a glorious place for you in heaven—you're also better off because had He not ascended the Holy Spirit wouldn't have been sent to you.

Why is that better? Because the Holy Spirit brings to you and to the Church in every land the special, saving presence of Christ. No longer is the risen and ascended Jesus present in only one place, as He was according to His humanity before His resurrection. Now, in His exalted humanity, Jesus fills all things in heaven and on earth and is specially present for His people wherever they are gathered in His name. By the working of the Holy Spirit, Jesus is there for you fully as true God and true man in Word and Sacrament. Indeed, it's to the Church's advantage that Jesus depart visibly and send the Holy Spirit. For now Jesus has not just one voice but multiplied thousands of voices as He speaks through His faithful preachers and all sons and daughters of the Father throughout the world. The risen Jesus is present and accessible in all the earth, wherever the Holy Spirit is ministering His words and His Supper, giving His eternal life to His people. It's because of His Ascension and through the work of the Holy Spirit that Jesus can indeed say, "And I will be with you always, even to the very end of the age."

This is what Jesus meant when He said, "I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you." Christ comes to you by sending you His Spirit. Jesus as God the Father made Himself known to mankind through the sending of His Son, so now God the Son makes Himself known to you through the sending of the Holy Spirit, who proceeds from the Father and the Son. Jesus says that the one who sees Him sees the Father. And now Jesus says that the one who hears the Spirit hears Him. For they are three in one, the Holy Trinity. Jesus comes to you and is present with you by the Holy Spirit.

Christ calls the Holy Spirit “the Helper.” That word can also be rendered as “Counselor” or “Comforter” or “Advocate.” Literally, it means “one called alongside to help.” That’s just what the Holy Spirit does. He is the third person of the Trinity who in your baptism was called alongside you to be with you and in you on your journey to your heavenly home. On the way there, He counsels you with the wisdom of the Scriptures. He comforts you with the forgiveness and the life of Christ. He speaks the saving Word of God to you, and then through that Word He prays in you and brings your prayers to the throne of heaven. Truly, the Holy Spirit is your Helper.

Jesus speaks more specifically about what the Holy Spirit will do when He comes. The Lord says, “And when [the Helper] comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment.” Let us deal with those three things in order.

First, the Holy Spirit will convict the world of sin. This is an aspect of the Spirit’s work that most people don’t like to think about. For especially today, the world doesn’t like to think of much of anything as being sinful, unless it’s something really extreme. Fallen man likes to believe that morality is relative and something that people can make up for themselves; they can decide on their own what’s right and what’s wrong. But then the Spirit comes, and through the Word He calls sin what it is. He exposes our rebellious hearts and the evil we’ve become so adept at covering up and rationalizing away. He lays your soul bare before God and teaches you that you cannot save yourself. You are at the mercy of a just and holy God. This is the first way that the Helper helps you. For as it is commonly recognized, a person can’t really be helped until he first recognizes and admits the full extent of his problem.

And notice what Jesus identifies as the root of all sin: unbelief, that lack of faith and trust in Him. That is the ultimate trespass, trusting in yourself, in your own goodness, in your own wisdom, in your own possessions. This should make it clear that sinners are not only those whose lives are manifestly immoral and evil but also those whose lives may outwardly appear to be very good. For the Scriptures say, “Without faith it is impossible to please God.” That means that even the most upright, clean-cut, nicest person in the world who doesn’t have faith in Christ is under God’s judgment. All his or her good works are like filthy rags before God. Only faith in Christ and the good works that flow from it are pleasing to God and are received by Him.

And faith is nothing else than to rely on Christ and His Word, to stake your life on His good works, His wisdom. The true worship of God is the faith which clings to Christ alone to be saved, which seeks out the blessings His Holy Spirit gives in divine service. It is written in John 3, "He who believes in the Son [of God] has everlasting life; and he who does not believe in the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."

Second, Jesus says that the Holy Spirit will convince the world of righteousness. He will make true righteousness known. And Jesus says that the Spirit will do that "because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer." That's a very clear signal to you of where true righteousness is to be found. Usually, righteousness is thought of as a quality within a person. It is held that a good and moral person is more righteous than others. But the Spirit says in the Scriptures, "No one is righteous; no, not even one." True righteousness, then, is not to be found in any ordinary person but in Christ alone. The source of your righteousness is He who is seated at the right hand of the Father. That's why the Holy Spirit must make this righteousness of Christ known. For He is presently hidden from your eyes.

So it is that St. Paul declares, "I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ... For in it the righteousness of God is revealed." Through the Gospel, the Spirit reveals and gives to you Christ's righteousness. He speaks Jesus' righteousness into your ears, so that the heavenly Father no longer sees your unrighteousness but only the holiness of His Son. Jesus gave up His glory as God and descended to this earth in order that He, who is entirely without sin, might take your sin upon Himself and utterly destroy it in His body on the cross. By His victory over sin and death on the third day, He earned unlimited righteousness for all people. Christ has now ascended on high to pour out that righteousness on His people by His Word and Spirit. Therefore, when you believe in Christ, your sin is exchanged for His holiness. You are made right with God. As it is written, "Having been declared righteous by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." You do not have a righteousness of your own from inside of you but that which is through faith in Christ from outside of you. So it was that Jeremiah prophesied of Jesus, "This is the name by which He will be called, 'The Lord our Righteousness.'"

Third, Jesus says that the Holy Spirit will reveal judgment to the world. However, it's not your judgment that He makes known but the judgment of the devil. For Jesus declares, "The ruler of this world is judged." The ruler of the world in its fallen state is Satan. He governs

the world with lies and deception that turn people away from the ways of God. He leads the world to hate and cause trouble for God's faithful people. He lures mankind away from Christ and into false religion and artificial spirituality. But although Satan is the prince of this world, his fall from power has already been secured. For the Scriptures say, "The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work."

Jesus took on your flesh, your human nature, in order to release you from Satan's power. He defeated the devil in the wilderness for you by fighting off all his temptations. And then, in a marvelous turning of the tables, Jesus used a device of the powers of darkness, namely death, to crush Satan's head and bring down his kingdom. The resurrected Christ has now opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers.

Therefore, although the devil may still buzz about like a wasp trying to frighten you and take away your faith, be assured that his doom is certain and that in the end he cannot cause you any harm. For Christ has taken away the sting of death and the devil and has given you to share in the abundance of His divine life. Believe these words of Christ and know that they are true: "The ruler of this world is judged."

All of this is how the Spirit brings glory to Jesus, by leading you into the truth of sin and the truth of the righteousness of Christ and the truth of His judgment of Satan. The Holy Spirit takes the eternal gifts of Christ and declares and delivers them to you, in order that they may become your own. The Helper preaches into you Christ's forgiveness and life and salvation, that you may never be separated from your Lord and His love. All such true and faithful preaching is the preaching of the Holy Spirit. And the voice of the Spirit is the voice of Christ, who is eternally one with the Father who sent Him—the blessed and holy Trinity, to whom belongs all glory, honor and worship, now and forever.

In Jesus' name.

He is risen! [He is risen, indeed!] Alleluia!