

May 17, 2020

John 14:15-21

“He Is Near Us; Faith Believes”

Pilgrim Lutheran Church
2155 North Oakland Ave.
Decatur, Illinois 62526

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

In our text for this morning we hear that Jesus is about to leave his disciples behind. Before his crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension, he bids them farewell. He gives them comfort and exhorts them not to be sad or frightened by his departure.

We have never had the pleasure of being in the physical presence of Jesus, only then to lose it. Still, like the disciples we feel sad and frightened by the feeling of being all alone. Sometimes, Jesus feels far away. We want to be with him though we have never seen him. We know that if we are with him, then the many burdens down here are no more.

Jesus comforts his disciples by saying: “If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever ...” To our sinful flesh, it doesn’t sound all that comforting. Nevertheless, what Jesus promised to his disciples and us is what he gives in order to help us in our feelings of being all alone - even abandoned. He does not abandon us as it might feel from time to time. He addresses our sadness and moments when we are afraid. He promises to see us through and get us to our heavenly home.

The tricky part of our gospel text lies in the opening words of Jesus, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments.” Many have stumbled over them. Jesus is not placing upon us the burden and curse of the law. We know that our Savior has fulfilled the law on our behalf and has endured the punishment for all of our failures to obey. So, the “commandments” that Christ wants his disciples to keep is the one, gospel commandment to believe in the forgiveness of sins and to forgive (to love) others. The apostle John writes in his first epistle (3:23-24), “And this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. Whoever keeps his commandments abides in God, and God in him. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has given us.”

As you can see, Jesus is not imposing upon us the horrific burden and curse of the law. Rather, as Luther writes, “Jesus asks and demands no more than one thing, that we faithfully preach about Jesus, watch over his Word and Sacrament, show affection and harmony among one another for his sake, and patiently bear the adversities that this brings.” Or, as Jesus says in Matthew 11:28-30: “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” Indeed! It is a wonderful gift from the Lord God to believe in the forgiveness of sins and to forgive (to love) one another - to bear the death of the self and to be raised in the love of Christ. Such gospel commandment is eternal life.

Up until this point Jesus had been there for his disciples. Through his bodily presence, he had served them by being their helper, advocate, intercessor, counselor, and comforter. He gave them security and made them fearless. Now, he is going away, and they are severely cast down and troubled. Like the disciples we know what it means to feel down cast and troubled, as if all is lost. But Jesus reassures all of his people that his departure will not be something that will harm them. On the contrary, it is necessary,

for he will send another helper to be with them forever - the Holy Spirit. In this way, our Savior is saying to the disciples and us, "Remain my disciples and believe in me when I say that I will compensate you for my lack of physical presence among you. For I myself will ask the Father and he will send to you another Helper who will see you through this sinful life. He will strengthen, comfort, and embolden you."

Again, the apostle John says in his first epistle (3:23-24), "And this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. Whoever keeps his commandments abides in God, and God in him. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has given us." It is this last sentence that really brings it together. Believing in the name of Jesus and remaining in his love guarantees that we abide in the Father. We know that we abide in Jesus and the Father because we have been given the Spirit. With that, we are brought to our theme for today's message: **He Is Near Us; Faith Believes!**

Let's be clear. We know that we have the Holy Spirit because we believe in Jesus, for it is written that "No one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except in the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:3)." This faith has come to us in the preaching of the gospel, for Scripture says: "Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ (Rom. 10:17)." Since we have the Holy Spirit and faith in the gospel, Jesus is with us - **He is Near Us!** - always to the end of the age (Matt. 28:20). And if Jesus is with us, so also is our Father in heaven. We are not alone. **Faith Believes!** The Bible says (1 John 2:24-25): "Let what you heard from the beginning abide in you. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, then you too will abide in the Son and in the Father. And this is the promise that he made to us - eternal life."

With all of these things in mind, the words of Jesus in our lesson for this morning really begin to pop out with wonderful meaning. Jesus says:

I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. Yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him (John 14:18-21)."

He Is Near Us; Faith Believes! Christ has not left us desolate. He comes to us! In the estimation of the unbelieving world and according to our own feelings, we appear to be forsaken and forgotten by our Father and his Son. After all, we are permitted to be reviled and mocked, condemned, persecuted, and murdered, and to be everybody's door mat. Our hearts are frightened, saddened, and tormented by the devil. We appear to be nothing but orphans - abandoned by our parents. Luther interrupts:

"But," says Christ, "I will not forsake you, as it seems and feels. I will give you the Comforter, who will instill in you the courage to be certain that you are My true Christians and the true church. Moreover, I Myself will surely be and remain among you with My protection and My sovereign power, even though I now depart ... even though you will be alone, exposed to the wickedness and might of the devil and world. But the world will not

be so powerful, the devil will not work such havoc, and all the sages and scholars will not be so wise that My Baptism and the proclamation about Me will not remain and be practiced, and that My Holy Spirit will not reign and work in you, even though this is always assailed and seems imperfect among you yourselves.”

Jesus loves us and manifests himself to us by the work of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit teaches us all things and brings to our minds all things said by Christ through the writings of the New Testament. He is the Spirit of truth who bears witness to the person and work of Jesus. Therefore, the Holy Spirit is our helper, advocate, intercessor, counselor, and comforter. He works in the Gospel and the Sacraments. Where he is there is Christ. If you are in deep grief about whatever, he is able to comfort you. If you are in the midst of struggles no matter what they may be, he is your helper. He perfects your prayers and intercedes for you in the language of God. He gives you good counsel when you do not know which way to turn. Let us then use him in the means of grace. Not to do so would be self destructive.

All the Children of God, who believe in Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit working through the gospel, have the comforting promise that they will not be forsaken or left without aid and help. Even if we were to have no human consolation, help, and assistance, still Christ has not and will not leave us desolate and unprotected. All provisions have been made, even when it seems that we are left without comfort and protection, as Peter reminds us (2 Peter 1:3-4) - we have “all things that pertain to life and godliness ... in his precious and very great promises.” Despite everything we may feel and see, we cling to Jesus, who assures us:

I will not stay away from you; and even though I am physically gone for awhile, I will not remain away from you forever! Even now I am with you in my Gospel and Sacraments. One day we will see each other face to face and be with each other forever. You are protected against all devils, this unbelieving world, sin, and death. You shall live and conquer with Me! I am near you! Believe it to be so! My good Spirit has and will help you to the very end!

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott