

Sermon – 05/15/22  
(*Baccalaureate Sunday*)

Text – John 16:12-22

Theme – “The Spirit of Truth”

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

The words of our Gospel this morning come from Jesus’ last night with the apostles. He knows what lies ahead: for Himself (the arrest, trials, abuse, and crucifixion) but also for them. And He is concerned for them. He knows how they will be shaken to their very core by all of this. He knows how they will be lost, like sheep without a Shepherd. He knows they will be confused and have no clue what this all means, or what to do. He knows all this – and He aches for them and their soon-to-be suffering. His thoughts are for *them*, even though He is just hours away from suffering the hell of the cross! Amazing!

But that is our Lord, isn’t it? He thinks not of Himself but of us. He always gives, always loves, always sacrifices. He never puts Himself first, but only others. And so — on this, His last night on earth — He spends and devotes it to trying to give the apostles what they will need to survive the next three days. He prays for them to His heavenly Father. He teaches them what they are able to receive. And He promises them the Holy Spirit, who will eventually bring to completion this instruction and who will sustain them until the end.

But (as Jesus knows) that coming of the Holy Spirit is still weeks off for them — not until Pentecost. So the little that Jesus is able to teach them now must suffice. He gives them enough to get them through, knowing that later the Spirit will give them the rest. It will come.

So, Jesus says: *“I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of Truth comes, **He** will guide you into all Truth...”* (pause)

Today at our services we are remembering those young people who are graduating from high school. It is an important day for them, but also for us as a congregation. These young people have gone through years of education and teaching. They have learned much.

And yet, every year, when we get to this day I feel a lot like Jesus did with the Twelve that night. It is true: you students have learned much. And you probably *think* you have learned even more. But, as an older person with more experience, I have a pretty good idea of what lies ahead for you in life, and I know how little you (just like the rest of us) really know. I want to echo Jesus, and say to you: *“I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now.”* What you have learned barely scratches the surface; it just covers the basics, the minimum of what one needs to know; it is just the BEGINNING of education and wisdom.

That's the first point I want to make today: that for ALL of us, our learning and growing never ends — especially when it comes to learning the Christian faith. At least, it never **should** end, as there is always more to hear, study, and digest. There is always more to grasp, new depths to explore, fresh insights and applications for us as we mature and enter new stages of life.

Sadly, though, all too often that is not what happens. We see it all the time: our young people finish school and then we hardly ever see them again. The same can be said for parents too -- for they often become only "Christmas and Easter" members once their kids are gone. And we must not let the rest of us off the hook either: do our young people and their families see that dedication and growth from the congregation as a whole — especially from its elected

leaders, from its staff, from its teachers and pastor? I think ALL of us have to admit that our thirst for more of God's Word has not been what it should be.

But why? Why should we want to learn more? Why delve ever more deeply into the Word? Why set aside time each day for devotions and prayers? Why make it a point to come to worship each week? Why attend Bible studies? Why reflect daily on our baptism? Why regularly and faithfully receive the Lord's Supper? The answer is simple; because it is through these things that the Holy Spirit does what Jesus promised in our lesson today. That is, it is through the Word and Sacraments that the Spirit works, that He gives us Christ and all He has done for us. (pause)

Jesus says that the Spirit will guide us into "*all Truth*". That phrase is significant and important. Jesus is saying much more than that the Holy Spirit will tell us truthful "things": that is, things that are factually accurate or without error/mistake. Now, don't get me wrong: what the Spirit teaches is indeed true and right. But it is infinitely greater than that. Remember, earlier that same night Jesus told the disciples that He (Jesus) is the Way, the **TRUTH**, and the Life. Jesus' point is that He — and He alone — reveals the Father to us. Apart from Jesus and His saving work for us, we only know God as Judge, as One who is angry with us at our sin, as One who threatens us with eternal punishment for those sins. And we certainly DO deserve that wrath and judgment. We sin much. Daily. In our thoughts and words and deeds. By what we do and by what we fail to do. We can't help it, that is our nature ever since Adam sinned in Eden. And we can't change or undo or fix it. So, apart from Jesus, we know only the angry face of God.

But Jesus comes to show us His true face: that of love, that of forgiveness, that of our Father. In Christ we see His grace as He gives Himself over to suffer our punishment, our death, our hell at the cross. In Christ we see how much we mean to Him, how much He loves us -- that He would (and did) give everything for us. Just to have us back again as His dear children. That is what the cross and empty tomb mean: you are forgiven. You are cleansed. You are saved. Not because you deserve it. Not because you have done (or even could do) anything to merit it. But simply because that is who God is: our loving Father. The One who made all things for us also has sacrificed Himself for us. How great -- how infinitely great -- is His love! And that love is truly known **only** in Christ crucified and risen, for you.

That is the Truth: Jesus Christ, for you and your salvation. And that is the Truth into which the Holy Spirit guides you. Everything the Spirit does is to point you to that Truth, to that love, to that Savior. That is His work. And He does that through...the Word and Sacraments. Which brings us right back to the importance -- the need, really -- for us to hear that Word, and to receive those sacraments faithfully. If you shut yourself off from them, if you do not hear that Word (in worship, in Bible study, in devotions), if you do not live in your baptism, if you do not regularly feed on the Body and Blood of Christ in the Lord's Supper, then you are closing yourself off from the Spirit -- you are starving yourself of the Gospel, depriving yourself of Christ Himself. (pause)

*"I have yet many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now."* When I think back to my younger days, I realize how true that is. There was so much more for me to learn but I wasn't ready for them just then. I was too immature, too inexperienced, too full of myself. I had enough to do to simply get those basics of the faith down. But as I aged, as I matured, as I

entered other stages of life I could see more and more of what Jesus was saying. I am sure many of you know exactly what I am saying. How much more does your own baptism mean after you have children? How much more does absolution mean when you commit some sin that sticks in your mind, which the devil likes to parade before you, telling you that it is too much to forgive? How much more do the commandments (and Christ's keeping them perfectly for you) mean when you find yourself living in a lawless world? How much more does the Body and Blood of Christ, given and shed for **you**, mean when you feel alone and unloved?

Life drives us to admit our failures, our crying need for a Savior. And the only hope, the only answer, is Jesus Christ. He has done everything for us. He has lived for us, to obey the Law. He has died for us, to pay for our sin. He has risen for us, to prove our salvation. He has ascended into heaven for us, to show us where we too will live forever with Him. You graduates have learned a little bit of this; a tiny taste, really. But God wants us to have more than just a little taste. He wants us to *feast* upon His goodness, His grace, His love. So, come and be fed. Gobble it up, drink it in. And know that there is always more. Keep coming back for seconds. He will fill your plate with so much that you can never exhaust His bounty. Amen.

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

OS — Nicene Creed  
Eldred -- Offertory/Prayers