

Sermon Easter 5 2020

May 10, 2020

John 16:5-15

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. This morning we meditate on the Gospel Lesson previously read.

I think in our current circumstances we can appreciate the tenor of the response of the disciples in the context of our lesson. Here they are gathered around Jesus for the Passover meal, the meal they don't realize will be their last with Him before the crucifixion, and they are puzzled and concerned about Him speaking about leaving their presence. I've said this before, but I think there are so many people who see God as being absent in the midst of this. There's all of this sickness and death. Where's God? There's the loss of livelihood, where's God? I can't handle this anymore, where is God?

But Jesus told us exactly where He would be going. He told us He would be going to the Father, to His Father and our Father by faith in Him. And in this lesson, He even says something that should strike us. He says it's better for Him to go away. It's better that we can't see Him in person. Why? **I tell you the truth: 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 better for Jesus to go because by going, He'll send His Helper, our Helper, the Paraclete, the Counselor. He'll send to us His Spirit, the Spirit of Truth.

Now as we look at this passage in the time we're in in the Church Year, it makes sense to have this reading. Jesus has been crucified and raised. After His resurrection, we know there will be the Ascension, and then the giving of the Spirit to the Church at Pentecost. This is Jesus teaching about the Spirit, about His coming to us, and about His work among us and in the World.

One of the things I always say is that I think the Spirit is the most difficult person of the Trinity for us to understand. I'm saying that again, and I'll probably say more about that on Pentecost. But it's true. And so we have Jesus telling us of His work.

Now as I say that, I read something this week that made the point that this passage tells of the work of the Spirit in the Church and outside of the Church. I don't necessarily agree with the way the author made the distinction, but I could see the point. I think we could see this in another way. The first division is the Spirit's work in Law and Gospel and the second part is that we can see His Work in revelation.

What do I mean? Hear again what Jesus says, **"And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will**

**see me no longer; concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.”** So the Holy Spirit will do this work of conviction.

Now that work of conviction is Law and Gospel because this conviction isn't the legal kind. It's not as though the Spirit comes to make the legal declaration of guilt or innocence. No, that's already happened on the cross and resurrection. No, this conviction is the internal sense of something. And this conviction comes in both Law and Gospel.

I know when I say this, that many of you might be saying, “there goes Pastor on Law and Gospel again...” But this is the key to understanding the Scriptures in so many ways. For those of you that can't ever remember how this works, remember that Law is the discussion of the Commandments in general, what God calls us to do. It's also within that, though, that conviction that we haven't done those. And as I use the word conviction here, I mean that both in the internal sense that we're talking about with the Holy Spirit, and the legal aspect where we see that we deserve—as we say in the prayer of confession—God's temporal and eternal punishment. That's the Law. The Gospel is that blessed Good News that despite our conviction, so to speak, in God's Court, He has declared us “Not Guilty” because of the work of Jesus. Since Jesus didn't break those Commands, didn't break God's Law, and since He suffered death and Hell on the cross for us, in our place, we are forgiven. We are “Not Guilty” by His resurrection victory over sin, death, and the devil. That's the Gospel.

So to apply that to this work of the Holy Spirit, when He convicts **“the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment,”** we see this Law and Gospel happening. In particular, we see the accusation of the Law, when Jesus says the Holy Spirit will convict the world **“concerning sin, because they do not believe in me.”** Think about this. There is a conviction of sin because there is not belief in Jesus.

Have you ever had a conversation with someone about the faith and they told you that it made them uncomfortable? I remember a conversation I had with someone in college, and that's what they said to me. I was talking about Jesus and the person said that the conversation was making them uncomfortable. Now, to be clear, our goal when we are confessing the faith to someone should not be to make them uncomfortable. In fact, if we can say it in a way that doesn't, we should try. At least we should try so long as we don't contradict anything that the faith teaches, so long as we don't compromise the condemnation of the Law and our forgiveness in Christ alone. But this is the Holy Spirit convicting of sin.

But as I say that you might think, “but Jesus said this is because of not believing in Him, Pastor, you haven't mentioned that.” You're right. What does this have to do with faith in Christ? Well, on the one hand this has to do with the fact that all sin flows from

unbelief. We sin because we don't believe that God's commands are good. We sin because we don't trust that these truly are what is best for us. But there is also the fact that this conviction—this internal discomfort where we are convinced of our sinfulness—that this rests on us and is uncomfortable until we realize that there is a way out.

Think about it. When you have no way out from a dire situation, it makes you uncomfortable until you have resolution. If you get pulled over for speeding, you have anxiety until the policeman gives you the ticket or warning. Well, the conviction of the Law of God, is way worse than that. And when it hits us that we can't earn or work our way out of the sentence, then it makes us uncomfortable. It does so even more when we have convinced ourselves that we are good enough to earn our way out of it, or that we aren't so bad and so we don't actually deserve that temporal and eternal punishment. But faith in Jesus relieves that discomfort. The relief of the conviction comes with the Gospel. It comes when it's clear that the way out is by the cross and the forgiveness in Jesus' resurrection.

In fact, that's the righteousness aspect. **“concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer.”** Jesus' ascent to heaven is that proof that He is the perfectly righteous man. He is the One who kept those commandments perfectly. He is the One whose righteousness and goodness is given to us, given to you by faith. And as we “see [Him] no longer,” then we know He is the Righteous One at the Father's right hand. We know that God has put Him in the place of ultimate authority, because He earned it by His obedience.

And it's in this that there is the conviction concerning judgment: **“concerning judgment that the ruler of this world is judged.”** Now, I always say this is a bit hard for us to understand. We always understand that God rules all things, that He's all-powerful. And He is. But we have to remember that the fall into sin took the dominion of this world that was originally man's and gave it to the devil. At that point, the devil became the ruler of the world. That's why all the bad things that happen in the world happen. But now we don't have to lay awake at night worried about that. Now, Jesus is at the right hand of the Father, now the ruler of this world is judged. It's done. In fact all bad, all sin is judged with Him. It's all been overcome. If you've been listening to my sermons since Easter, you know I keep bringing up that victory of Jesus—that victory over sin, death, and the devil. He's won over all of them.

And as that victory is proclaimed, there's this Law and Gospel in the work of the Holy Spirit. He convicts of sin, He shows Jesus' forgiveness and victory. He shows Jesus' righteousness and the judgment of the devil. He shows the conviction of the Law and convinces of the glory of the Gospel.

Now that's the first part of this. I said there's this Law/Gospel part and there is a part about revelation. 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 the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you."** So, we hear there what the Holy Spirit does. He brings these words of Jesus to us. What Jesus says, He says. He guides us, He leads us to all truth.

As we hear those words, there a lot of confessions that say that this means that we have to have our antennae, so to speak, attuned to hearing the revelation of the Holy Spirit. They say that this means that we have to open our hearts to hear what the Holy Spirit is telling us now. But this isn't anything more than what Jesus Himself said. In other words, this finally isn't more than what the apostles gave to us in the books of the Gospels, than what Paul received from Jesus and wrote into his letters, than what we have in the New Testament. That's what this means.

In fact as it says there that "He will guide you into all the truth," how can we understand that? Well, what does Jesus say about Himself just before this in John? He says, "I am the way, the TRUTH, and the life, no one comes to the Father but through me." The Holy Spirit leads us to Jesus. As we have this conviction of the guilt of our sin, of righteousness, of judgment, the Holy Spirit leads us to Jesus. He leads us to Jesus so that the guilt of our sin can be seen in its forgiveness in Jesus. It can be seen in the righteousness that is His, that is given to us in baptism, in preaching, in His supper. It can be seen in the judgment of sin, death, and the devil on the cross, and the victory in the resurrection.

So, we can't see Jesus now. In our times, this concerns us. Where is God? Where is Jesus in the midst of this pandemic? Where is Jesus in the midst of this broken world and the suffering we all know? He's at the right hand of the Father in His righteousness. But He's there sending His Spirit to us to comfort us, to lead us back to Him. In fact, He's also with us by that same Spirit. That Spirit bringing Jesus to us in His Word and Sacraments. And though we can't see Him, He promises this. He left so that He could come to us and bring us His grace, His righteousness, His victory. And when we can see these in faith, the trials seem more manageable. His apparent absence is found not to be absence at all. And His love is proven to be unfailing. Where is Jesus? He's right where He promises to be, with you, His precious possession, never to leave you nor forsake you. Amen.