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St. John's & Immanuel Lutheran Churches – Kimball, NE & Burns, WY

Sixth Sunday of Easter (Series A)

May 25, 2014

Text: John 14:15–21

Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed. Alleluia!

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

It's been a joyous Easter. After Lent, the alleluias came rolling off our tongues with joyful, exuberant regularity. Jesus conquered sin and death on Good Friday and Easter. We believers are safe and secure in Jesus. Those original disciples certainly felt the glorious presence of Jesus after the resurrection. But the goose bumps and thrills of seeing the resurrected Jesus eventually wore off. In John 21, seven of the eleven disciples were together near the Sea of Galilee. Peter tells the other 6 he's going fishing; the others decide to join in.

Here Peter and other disciples are returning back to their former lives. Doesn't that seem unfathomable? How could they go back to catching smelly ol' fish when they have seen, heard, and touched the resurrected Son of God the Father Almighty?!

There's something important we 21st century Christians to hear time and time and time again. It's so easy to think that if we had Jesus walking around so that we could see, hear, and touch Him, everything would be so much better. No more religious disputes, no more atheism, no more religious wars, and so forth. The sad truth is that it's not true. Seven witnesses to the resurrection of Jesus are ready to go back to their old lives and try to pick up where they left off. This they did, having seen, heard, and touched the resurrected Jesus on at least 2 different occasions. On this side of eternity, we believers need something else.

That's what today's Gospel reading from John 14 prepares us for. Jesus knows that even after His resurrection, His Church will need His on-going presence. But it must be a presence that transcends what we know through our 5 senses. In short, Christ's Church needs to the Holy Spirit or all is lost. And I'm not exaggerating about everything being lost.

This Thursday, the 40th day after Easter, we will celebrate the Ascension of the Lord Jesus to the right hand of God the Father almighty. From that moment forward, Jesus will no longer be visibly present among His people. But He is with us nonetheless through the Holy Spirit. That is the way it needs to be.

Let's take a few moments and consider today's gospel reading beginning with vs. 15, "Jesus said, 'If you love me, you will keep my commandments.'" How are we to hear and understand these words? Is this a statement of the Law telling us that to prove and demonstrate our love for Jesus we must keep His commandments? I don't know about you, but I find no comfort in such a thought. I can't keep the laws of Moses, the 10 commandments, much less any other commandments given by Jesus or His apostles. That's the first thing that makes me think something else is going here in this text.

The second reason why I don't think Jesus is giving more Laws for us to keep is that it doesn't make sense with what Jesus is telling His disciples. Jesus is talking about love; His love for them, their love for Jesus. Love isn't based upon rules and regulations, do's and don'ts, but upon the relationship you have with the beloved individual. Let me illustrate.

I love my kids. They are awesome kids, gifts of God. I began loving them from the moment Vickie told me she was pregnant. Immediately and instantaneously I loved each child at that moment. No commandments were stated, no regulations. I was their father, they were my children. And I loved them, embraced them, cherished them. Because of that love, I began fulfilling, as best I could, all the commandments associated with being a father. I bought the car seats, baby-proofed the house, looked after mom's health, bought toys, etc.

Jesus is teaching us something similar about our relationship with Him. If in fact we do love Him, we will keep, observe, and cherish His commandments. Why? Because we love Him. He's our Savior. He swallowed sin and death to save us from its awful effects. What could be more proper than to love Him and cherish what He commands? All that He does and gives is for our good. We keep His commandments because He loves us and we love Him.

Look at the next two verses, "And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him" (vs. 16–17a). Notice the language

of giving. The Father will *give* you another Helper, even the Spirit of truth. That hardly sounds like a contractual or legal relationship of do's and don'ts.

It's as if Jesus were saying, "Because of my love for you and your love for Me, I desire to give you something most precious and dear. My Father loves Me and loves you as well, so I will ask Him to give you the Holy Spirit, who also loves Me, the Father, and you too. Oh, and the Holy Spirit won't be with you for a day or two or even a few years. He will be with you forever."

You see that's what people who love each other do. They give to each other. They receive from each other love and kindness and goodness. So it is with God the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. They love us. Not in the silly, sentimental way that we hear so much about in cheap, popular music, television, and books. This is true love. That gives and receives sacrificially for the sake of the beloved.

Notice the intimacy of this relationship God's people have with the Holy Spirit in vs. 17b, "You know him (i.e., the Holy Spirit), for he dwells with you and will be in you." The Father sends the Holy Spirit at the request of Jesus for the purpose of living within your heart and mind. This is a Holy Spirit-filled place because you, as God's beloved children, are filled with the Holy Spirit.

Some might be tempted to think that Jesus is just passing us off to the Holy Spirit. Then we would be right to ask, "What kind of love is that? You say you love us but then abandon us with someone else." Look at vs. 18, "I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you." Jesus comes to us in and through the power of the Holy Spirit for the express purpose of bringing us into fellowship with Himself and His Father. Our sins and the sins of the world have left us as orphans, children abandoned and unable to take care of themselves. It's a sad picture. We don't think about orphans much these days, at least, I never did. In years gone by, English speaking cultures had orphanages to take care of abandoned children. Today, abandoned children are placed into foster care or other types of programs.

Jesus is telling us that we will never be abandoned. I will come to you, says Jesus. And you will be mine and I will be yours forever. Make no mistake about that declares the Lord Jesus. No sin, no mistake, no evil, nothing in this life or the life to come can separate us from the on-going presence of God in our lives. Jesus has come to us in the power of the Holy Spirit and, vs. 19a, "Because I live, you also will live." All the events of Easter should rush into our minds when we hear these words. Death

is defeated. Sin is swallowed up in Christ's invincible life. Christ's resurrection life is now our life.

The Lord's resurrection changes everything. Vs. 20, "In that day (what day? Easter!!) you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you." Easter is the linchpin that holds everything that Jesus said and did together. Because of Easter, we know that Jesus is the Son of the Father as He claimed to be. Because of Easter, we know that the Father lives in Jesus, Jesus in the Father, the Holy Spirit in the Father and the Son. Because of Easter, we know that God the Holy Trinity lives in each and every baptized believer!! The glory and mystery of the Holy Trinity is revealed in each and every Christian. Young or old, rich or poor, male or female, none of things that create distinction and separation in this world apply when it comes to our relationship to God. In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you and the Holy Spirit with you forever!!

This is the kind of love and commandment keeping that Jesus has in mind. In vs. 21, the Lord Jesus returns back to where we began: love cherishing and doing what is good and true for the sake of beloved, "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."

It is through the power of the Holy Spirit that Jesus and God the Father are manifested to us. Through the Spirit of truth and for the sake of our relationship with the Father and the Son, we keep the commandments of Jesus. On this side of eternity, we don't see, hear, and touch the Lord Jesus. His presence among us transcends our physical senses. On the Last Day, in the glory of our resurrected flesh, we shall see, hear and touch the Lord Jesus. Until then we pray, "Come Holy Spirit. Live within us. And Bring to us your grace and love and the on-oing presence of the Father and the Son."

Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed. Alleluia!

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

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.