

Our Teacher

John 16:1-15~ January 29, 2017 ~ Heritage Lutheran Church

But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth.

A small group of men are together in a room designed to accommodate just such a gathering. In a fashion foreign to everyone who has never eaten a true Japanese Restaurant, these men are sitting about on the floor just finishing a meal. There are cushions, mats, and low tables arranged for the important communal meal they have just shared. When Leonardo Da Vinci painted the scene of the last supper so familiar to us, he had them all sitting in chairs on one side of a high table. In Da Vinci's day this is how nobility would be seated to share a formal meal. But at the time Jesus shared this last supper with his disciples they were "reclined at table," meaning they sat on the floor eating from low tables. As we talk about Jesus teaching concerning the coming of the Holy Spirit, try to see the original scene in your mind if you can.

Supper is over. Jesus is doing what he came to do. He is teaching his disciples. Many called him Rabbi. That means teacher in the Hebrew language. And the word disciple actually means student more than anything else. A disciple is a learner who follows a rabbi. A disciple is devoted to his masters teaching and seeks to put that teaching into practice in any way he can. The disciple is absolutely dependent on the teacher to learn how to live life in a way that reflects the will of God. Jesus' disciples understood this above everything else. They knew in this moment how vital Jesus teaching was to their very way of life. They also knew that they had a great deal still to learn.

But in this very moment something is happening that is causing great grief and anguish to spread throughout the group. Jesus has just told them that he is about to leave them. Jesus will die, yes. He has been warning them about that for some time. But he also teaches that he will be raised from the Dead. This is a matter of hope and joy. But even with the prophesied joy of the resurrection, Jesus still confirms that he will be leaving them. Jesus is going to the Father. He will prepare a place for them to come and be in death, But he will not be journeying on with them in life. This departure, this separation is the stroke of tragedy. How will they go on. Jesus teaching is everything. Jesus as master orders their lives. He gives them meaning and purpose. They are his disciples. As disciples they wanted and needed Jesus to be with them. As disciples they wanted and needed Jesus to keep teaching them. As disciples they wanted and needed

Jesus to guide everyday of their lives. But he explains firmly that he is going away. He is very clear that he is leaving them.

Now if you put yourself in the disciples place you can understand their grief, their anxiety, and their fear. In fact many Christians have had questions on just this point. Jesus died, yes that is certain. But Jesus was also raised from the dead. He was alive again. He came back for forty days to be with the disciples. But that return to be with them was not permanent. Jesus is very clear that his destination was heaven. He was returning to the Father. So if you were a disciple wouldn't you want to ask the question, "Jesus, why do you have to go back to heaven? Why can't you stay here with us and be our teacher forever?" Isn't that exactly the question we would have if we were with the disciples in that upper room?

I believe that is exactly what we would want to ask. In fact we can be quite sure it was in the minds of those disciples because Jesus answers that question precisely. And his answer has everything to do with us right here and now... To answer the disciples question about why he had to return to the Father Jesus says:

None of you asks me, 'Where are you going?' Rather, you are filled with grief because I have said these things. But very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.

When Jesus talks about the Advocate, he is talking about the Holy Spirit. Jesus explains to the disciples that the coming of the Holy Spirit requires that Jesus return to the Father. I do not have an explanation for why this is so. I have never heard any explanation that clarifies it. But we need to be willing to trust Jesus' word here. For some reason inside God himself the person of the Son of God must leave so that the person of the Holy Spirit can be present with us.

There are actually lots of things in life that explain themselves by the way they work and not why they work. Take gravity for example. It is crucial to life and the universe in more ways than we can ever name. We can talk about how it works with great precision. But we can never satisfactorily explain the presence of gravity in the universe. It simply is that way by natural law.

The coming of the Holy Spirit on the heels of Jesus' departure falls into the same category. There is no why about it. It simply is. However there are several important things that we can say about how it works and what benefits it brings.

First, the Bible goes to great lengths to explain how salvation requires God the son to become the human Jesus in order to achieve salvation for human beings like you and me. We sense that the historic and current human nature of God the Son is a crucial element in forging the new relationship we have with God which we call salvation. Again we cannot say why this is so, but we recognize how it works. God's willingness to become one of us is crucial in winning us to faith in him. We can believe in and trust the human Jesus in ways that no other expression of divinity can achieve with us. But in Jesus humanity, God made a concession to time and space that is a bit foreign to his essential nature. By this I mean that we assume that by his humanity Jesus is always at one point in space and time. This is certainly the way he talks in our sermon text. His leaving is an action in space and time. Human beings are by nature in one place at any given time. So they can be here, but when they leave they go away.

However, As Jesus foresaw, the developing Christian church needed a totally new way for God to express himself. God's plan for the Christian church was to express himself inside the very hearts and minds of all Christians from the time of the Holy Spirit's coming until the Day of Judgment itself. So Jesus' departure to enable the coming of the Holy Spirit was not just done for those disciples gathered in that upper room. His departure also means that the Holy Spirit comes to us as well. The Holy Spirit has come into this world to engage in the process of creating faith in as many human hearts as possible.

The second benefit we receive in the coming of the Holy Spirit is that we are linked directly to Jesus and his teachings. Jesus makes this point when he says:

I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears

This is what discipleship is all about. Each and every one of us has the opportunity to be a disciple of Jesus Christ, just like the original twelve disciples. Where they wandered around the country listening to Jesus, we live out our discipleship through the work of the Holy Spirit within us. The Spirit uses the word of God in our reading the Bible, in our

study of the Bible with fellow Christians, in preaching, and in conversation with other Christians to teach us day in and day out, just as Jesus did for his disciples. The Holy Spirit listens to Jesus and echoes his teaching to each of us, just as we need to hear it. In this way we learn in our own context about God's will for our lives. Our discipleship needs us to know that Jesus teaches us directly through the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Now it is vital that what we think we are learning needs to be anchored against the written word of God in Scripture. Without that anchor we will quickly become subject to worldly powers. But with God's Word, the Spirit is able to teach us quite effectively about life, about faith, and about the call of God into his Kingdom. And like the twelve disciples before us, we have the incredible presence of a teacher whose work has the power to transform us into the likeness of Jesus. That is why Jesus left. He left in order to make it possible for the apostles to go, make, baptize, and teach. In the same way the purpose of God's Holy Spirit is to empower us to go, make, baptize, and teach disciples for Jesus Christ.

God is in your life. He is in you. He is there in the person of the Holy Spirit. He is your teacher. You are a disciple of Jesus Christ by virtue of the Spirit's real presence in your life. This reality not only grants you salvation, but it gives you purpose for daily living. Because you have a teacher that is with you day and night, wherever you are, whatever you are doing, You have the opportunity to enter the Kingdom of God and enter into its real life work this day and every day, forever.

The cross is full. The tomb is empty. Jesus is alive and leading us out to go, make, baptize and teach disciples. Let us take up our cross and follow him.