

## Easter 6 John 14 “Christ is Here” May 17 2020

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be pleasing unto You, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen!

In our Collect this morning, we heard: O God, the giver of all that is good, by Your holy inspiration grant that we may think those things that are right and by Your merciful guiding accomplish them.

**We** always say “Holy Spirit.” Not just because He is Holy but because He makes **us** holy.” It is a “holy” inspiration that matters here. And this implies that there is another sort of inspiration. We Christians are fooling ourselves if we believe we have an innate ability to discern this. This is the time to trust one’s baptism and the act of God in our lives. And the guidance of God is also described here as merciful, as in we have not earned this. Mercy is only shown to the person in need, never to the innocent or the powerful.

Both of these adjectives, Holy and merciful, highlight the fact that in the Spiritual realm, we human beings are given to participate, but we also have to acknowledge that we are out of our league, like helpless children wandering the streets of a large city, we are just too easy of a target, easily deceived and easily put at a disadvantage. There are terrible spiritual realities and threats which we only dimly perceive. We need God’s help for which we pray in this collect.

Our Gospel reading goes on to say, <sup>16</sup> And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, <sup>17</sup> even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you. <sup>19</sup> Yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. <sup>20</sup> In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. <sup>21</sup>

We do not proclaim a “real absence” of Christ, but a real presence of Christ. Christ is here! – This is His Church. We encounter the presence of Christ in His word, are moved to trust Him by the Holy Spirit, and rejoice in His presence.

We are not orphans, abandoned by God who sits up in heaven and looks down at us, but we are constantly in the presence of Christ, strong in Him, joyful in Him, peaceful in Him, alive in Him. It is this very empowerment of the life which the world considers mundane and ordinary that makes Christianity such a potent force.

Jesus promises to be with us. Jesus made this clear when he said that the Spirit both dwells with us and will be in us. Talk about loving faithfulness! The Spirit has been with us much longer than we ever knew. Before we knew Jesus or even thought about spiritual things, the Spirit has been calling out to us, drawing us to Jesus. This is not a relationship we can create on our own. As Martin Luther correctly states in his catechism: I believe I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to him. But the Holy Spirit has called me by the gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, sanctified and kept me in the one truth faith." The Holy Spirit sought us out and made his home within us. He did this through the gospel: the message of salvation in Christ.

The Holy Spirit is responsible for our faith in Jesus Christ. He's also responsible for keeping that faith alive and allowing us to live for Christ. It might sound a bit unsettling for Jesus to say, "if you love me, you will obey what I command", but those words need not frighten us. It would be scary to think that our obedience to Jesus was based on our merits or worthiness, but it's not. We can't even believe in Jesus Christ on our own, let alone obey him. Again, this is all credited to the work of our Savior-God. The Holy Spirit leads us to obey God, by reminding us of his faithful promises. The Spirit uses the Gospel in the Word and Sacraments to remind us that we have a faithful God who loves us so much that he died for our sins and rose again so that we might live with him eternally. That message of love leads us to trust, listen, and obey.

Christianity is not found in the fireworks of miracles, but in the much more potent miracles of His Word and His Sacraments; potent miracles like the waters of Holy Baptism in which we die and rise again in new life like His, being adopted into the family of God, children of the Heavenly Father;

Potent miracles like the Very body and blood of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ given and shed for the forgiveness of our sins; potent miracles like the sweet sound of forgiveness proclaimed in Absolution that, as the songwriter says, “is like honey on our lips, like a symphony in our ears, and like Holy water on our skin. It is found in simple people sharing their bread, loving their neighbors, and forgiving one another.

By these things, Word, Water, and Spirit, we are moved to love Him and obey Him. This obedience part we think of as oppressive, partly because we **cannot** do it perfectly. But think about some of the **times** we **do** obey and it becomes more clear.

There is no tyrant more demanding than a newborn infant. As parents we obey that child’s demands, yet do we consider such a thing drudgery? It may tire us out, it may at times make us to complain, but has anyone who has held and comforted an infant in the middle of the night really regretted it or remembered it as only a burden? And we don’t do that perfectly either.

Even in the Old Testament we tend to hear things this way. Moses commands the people of God to obey the commandments, statutes and ordinances of God. We roll our eyes and like petulant teens chafe against the very idea. But look at the rules, statutes, ordinances and commandments of God in the OT. Most of them are not about the things we have to do for God, but most of them are the system he created for establishing and re-establishing our relationship with him. Whole sections of Leviticus are dedicated to what we should do with our burdens of sin. We bring these burdens to God so He can bear them!

It is kind of like calling it a rule that when you are hungry you must eat. This is true, we even have whole advertising campaigns which tell us to obey our thirst or serve our hunger. We probably don’t really think of hunger as a rule and eating as obedience, but it is. One does not **have** to eat when one is hungry...starvation is certainly an option. We don’t chafe at this rule because it is an obedience which we love, but it still technically is an act of obedience. And we don’t do that perfectly either.

What does **Jesus** command us to obey? Love one another, forgive one another, be a community in which our deepest needs and most profound problems are carefully and blessedly served and dealt with? Is this really a burden? I am commanded to bring the sweet news to my neighbor that the sin which has come between us is no longer between us but has been removed by Christ and his death upon a cross. Can we really call this a burden? If you love me, you will obey me? The clues are all there, this is not some odious thing, but much more like the service a parent renders to his or her child, the service a spouse in a loving marriage performs for their beloved.

But this hurdle of our perceptions is just part of the story here. This life lived, lived in the joyful hope that Peter also talks about, is but the clue that this life is far more than the worldly eyes can see. This life, which is defined by this joyful and loving obedience to this really good “way,” is nothing less than the presence of the resurrected Christ. It is the work of the Holy Spirit in this world today. Our words of forgiveness are not simply play acting by deluded adults, but in the forgiveness which we speak to our neighbor, God is acting, the Spirit is empowering, Jesus is present to the one to whom we speak, through our faces, through our words, through those gifts. This is the presence of Christ in the gift of the Holy Spirit.

It is the world which demands miracles, not the Church. We **have** miracles aplenty. If we believe what Christ has said to us, we have touched God himself in our Baptism, He has entered us in his Supper, his creative and efficacious Word flows through our ears and cosmically significant things happen when we hear, “for the sake of Christ, you are forgiven.” Rest in that, my brothers and sisters!

May the love of God and the grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit abide in you to life everlasting. Amen!