

John 17:6-19  
May 12, 2024

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

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

So, today is the oddest Sunday of the Church year in my opinion. It is the Sunday in between – in between Jesus' ascension back into heaven and the sending of the Holy Spirit.

For 10 days, the apostles were in between God's physical presence with them – neither Jesus himself nor the Holy Spirit was with them. Kind of weird, right?

Luke tells us that initially after the Ascension the apostles were all just staring up in the sky frozen in time and place until the angels told them to get a move on. They were told to stop staring up in the sky, Jesus will return, but not today.

So, they left and waited for the Holy Spirit, but they didn't do nothing, as we read in Acts today, they found a replacement for Judas. Since there were 12 tribes of Israel, they wanted to be sure there were also 12 apostles, although some will argue that Paul was the true 12<sup>th</sup> apostle. You can argue that out after worship.

So, here we are today in the in between time of the Church year. And yes – I messed up in the newsletter – the in between time is 10 days, not 3 as I had written.

It is 3 days + 7 days, which gives us 10 days – 10 days between the Ascension and the sending of the Holy Spirit. So, we have the three, as in the days Jesus was in the tomb, plus the number for completeness, 7, which gives us a total of 10.

For ten days the apostles were without Jesus. It is interesting that Pentecost falls 10 days from the Ascension, because it is the day the Jewish people celebrate receiving the 10 Commandments. That's the same day we celebrate the giving of the Holy Spirit, but we'll get into that next week.

Today, we focus on this in between time. I always think it is weird to still call it an Easter Sunday, because resurrected Jesus isn't walking about with the disciples, but this is still an Easter Sunday, still a celebration of the resurrection, and it is an especially important one as we remember that Jesus is in heaven in his physically resurrected body with all of the wounds he received at the crucifixion.

Jesus is sitting in heaven on the right hand of the Father with all the resurrected wounds he encountered here on Earth – not so that he can plot his revenge, but so that he can have empathy for us, his people here on Earth.

Jesus in Heaven and knows firsthand all that we experience, which makes it possible for God to know us fully, to have compassion for us, and to be truly merciful toward us.

Because God has taken on human form, God knows us intimately, inside and out, and is thereby able to love us completely, from our own wounds to our own joy, which are tied eternally to Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior in heaven.

The reading we have from John today is part of the prayer Jesus prays with his disciples before he is crucified, but it reads more like a prayer Jesus would give before his Ascension, doesn't it? He talks a lot about leaving.

Perhaps because John doesn't really focus on the Ascension, he has moved this prayer here to where Jesus can give it to his disciples in their presence.

Remember, the Gospel writers were not the first apostles. They were not among the first 12. They were followers of those apostles who wrote down what they learned from the apostles, and any time we go from an oral tradition to a written one, the author who is writing it down is able to rearrange things, led of course by the Holy Spirit.

So, during Jesus' long prayer for and with his disciples before the crucifixion, John has placed this prayer for them concerning their ministry after he has left them, I would say after he has ascended back into heaven.

The good news here is that Jesus prays for us. That's pretty cool right? We often think of praying to him on behalf of ourself or others, but here he is praying for us, and his prayer is that his joy may be made complete in us - that Jesus' joy may be made whole within us – Jesus' joy of intimately knowing the Father, the creator of all things.

Just as Jesus knows us and the Father intimately, he prays that we will also know the Father intimately as our Creator already knows us intimately. Joy is all about relationship. Remember that in two weeks when we get to Trinity Sunday.

Jesus is the bridge that joins us to God and God to us. He is the bridge that makes joy known fully in us.

Joy is being connected to God – God who wants to be known by us and places that want within us. Jesus completes the circuit between us and God.

The truth is that God wants to be in relationship with us as much as we long to be in a relationship with God, and that truth is known in Jesus who came to be among us.

God knows it is nearly impossible for us to have a relationship without a physical presence, so first God sent Jesus and then after the Ascension God sends the Holy Spirit to be in us to continue the tangible relationship with God, and also enables God to be physically present across the entire world through us, bringing Jesus' joy everywhere we go.

That is why Jesus asks that we be sanctified in the truth. But what is sanctified and what is truth?

Let's start with truth. What is truth?

Well, when Pilate asks that question, "What is truth?" he was actually asking the wrong question. He should have asked, "Who is truth?" because the truth was staring him right in the face.

Jesus is the truth. He is the truth of who God is. He is the personification of God's love, mercy, and compassion, a living testament to who God is. And, he is the complete opposite of the deceitful world who rejects him, a world that believes in oppression, violence, and death instead of freedom, peace, and life.

The truth is that God loves us.

And what does it mean to be sanctified in God's truth? First off, do you know what the world sanctified means? There are a lot of fancy Church terms like sanctified floating around that perhaps we do not fully understand.

Sanctified means to be set apart. We are to be set apart in the truth, set apart from the lies of the world in the truth of God's love, compassion, and mercy. Set apart not to rot on some shelf, but to serve a purpose in the world.

We are sanctified not to be remembered fondly, but to be active here and now.

So, Jesus sets himself apart for us, so that we can be set apart for the sake of the world - set apart in the truth so that we can bring that truth into the world, thereby bringing joy into the world.

We are in the world, and not of the world, for a purpose. That purpose is to share the truth of God in the world, to share Jesus in the world, to share God's love through tangible ways in the world.

So, when someone is thirsty, we do not tell them to pray to God to meet their need, or tell them tough luck they should have thought of that before. No. We physically show God's mercy and compassion by handing them a glass of water.

We have been sanctified, set apart, to do God's acts of love in the world and those acts include rejoicing with those who rejoice. As Romans 12:15 says, Rejoice with those who rejoice; weep with those who weep.

So, remember, you have been sanctified to be God's presence everywhere you go and in all circumstances, that includes not retaliating when we are harmed, which is a tough one, but we must never forget that Jesus was killed and never killed anyone, instead he was resurrected and brings God's mercy into the world.

God's mercy and compassion is the truth for which we are sanctified in order to share it in the world. And since this is the last Sunday of Easter, it is a good time to remember our Baptismal covenant: to live among God's faithful people and to hear the Word of God and share in the Lord's supper, so that we can proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed, serve all people, following the example of Jesus, and strive for justice and peace in all the earth.

We are Christians, little Christs, set aside for the purpose of making God known in the world in all circumstances, because people long to know God and God longs to be known in truth as well. The truth is Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior, who has entered our shame and guilt in order to destroy it on the cross and resurrect it into new life. The new life is eternally being connected to God, which makes Jesus' joy complete.

Alleluia! Christ is risen and ascended! He is risen and ascended indeed! Alleluia!

Thanks be to God. Amen.