The Love of God in Christ – For You!
John 14:23-29
Trinity Lutheran – Kearney, Missouri
May 15, 2016 – Pentecost Sunday
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Grace to you, and peace, from God, our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. This morning’s Gospel text leaves us standing in the Upper Room with Christ and His Apostles on the night He was handed over to His voluntary suffering and death. Jesus had just fed them with His body and blood — even as He still feeds you today from this very Altar. He had humbled Himself as the Servant of all by washing His disciples’ feet — even as He washed you free of your sin in the waters of Holy Baptism. And now, He’s about to be sold out to His enemies for cash — by one of His own!

I mention all these things because they’re absolutely necessary if you’re going to rightly understand our Lord’s words here in this text — for indeed, these Means of Grace — namely Baptism and the Lord’s Supper — are the necessary context in which you ought to always hear the Word of God — and most especially, the Gospel-Word — because these Means of Grace are the very things Christ was giving to His Apostles to pass on to His Church that night — even as He was being handed over to death on His Cross. Indeed, these are the Means whereby the blessings of Christ’s Cross must always be given to and shared with His Church — and what’s more, they’re the foundation upon which the Love of God in Christ is given to and shared with each of you — so that you are then able to love our dear Lord Jesus, and also your neighbor.

Now for some reason, today’s Gospel begins in the middle of one paragraph and ends in the middle of another — one small portion of a much longer Sermon Jesus gave on the night of His betrayal. And, if we were to ignore this context, it would be very easy — perhaps even inevitable — to hear these Words of Jesus in a people-centered way, as though everything depended on us — that is, on our decision, our commitment, our love and our obedience. After all, what is it you hear? “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My Word.” Might you not conclude from this that everything begins with you? And if so, might you not also understand this as a Commandment? But if you do, you’ve turned our Lord’s words and meaning inside-out and upside-down.

As one of my colleagues once pointed out to me, this section from John’s Gospel begins with these very significant, decisive words: “When Jesus knew that His Hour had come (the Hour of His Cross), that He should depart from this world to theFather, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end...” It’s then that the Feast of the New Testament Passo-
dy for sin and the restoration of love found its origins in the heart of God. Because the Father’s Love for His creation was an extension of His Love for the Son, He wasn’t about to let it fall into total ruin. Rather, He took it upon Himself to fix what we had broken. He would restore love within His creation by sending His own beloved Son into this world – on the one hand to bear the curse and destruction of sin; and on the other, to bring the Son’s Divine love for the Father through the Holy Spirit into our flesh and blood – which is what Pentecost is all about – and thereby restore once more the Image of God in man.

Now, without question, the love of God in Christ – for us – is shown especially in His voluntary suffering and death on the Cross. It’s there God loved us with the depth of His very own Being – as the Father gave up His Son, and as the Son willingly submitted Himself to the agony of His bloody Passion. Nowhere else in all the world has love ever been more perfect, more complete, more faithful or more unflinching. But, by the same token, as unique and all-sufficient as the Cross of Christ was, it continues to be, for us, a reflection of that Divine love of God which never ends. And, as such, the Love of God in Christ continues without end in the sharing of His Cross with us through His Gospel-Word and Sacrament – which brings us again to the critical importance of the context in which this morning’s Gospel was first spoken. For if you are to love Christ and keep His Word – because remember, *everything* depends on Him – then He first must come to and abide with you in some way – and you have to have some means of access to Him – which brings us back to where we started: The Means of Grace!

Remember, the Father first comes to you in the Son through Baptism and the Holy Spirit in order to make His home with you. There, in Holy Baptism, united with Christ in His Cross and Resurrection, you were anointed with the Spirit of Christ and adopted as one of God’s children. Jesus continues to come to you with His Body and Blood in Holy Communion here in His Church, where He has promised to be present to sustain you with His Gifts. Here’s where He places His very body and blood into your mouth and into your body, thus making your body His home – a temple of the living God. And here also is where the Holy Spirit teaches you and actually enables you to love the Lord with all your heart and soul, to keep His holy Word in faith, and to love your neighbor as yourself.

The Holy Spirit is the One who “teaches you all things” in the preaching of the Holy Gospel. Thus, for example, as a called and ordained servant of the Word, I can and must say to you, that the Word you hear from my mouth isn’t mine, but only that which the Father has given me in Christ to speak by His Spirit on the authority of His Holy Scriptures. And by this Divine Gospel-Word, your heart is taught the Love of God as it’s been revealed and lived in the Life of Christ. The Holy Spirit is the One who “reminds you of all things” pertaining to Christ; and this not only in the proclamation of the Word, but also – and especially – in the Holy Supper of Christ’s body and blood. For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup – the holy body and precious blood of Christ – you thereby remember His sacrifice for us all, and thus proclaim His death until He comes. Indeed, it’s only by the Word and Spirit of Christ that you receive His body and blood in true faith – and to your abundant blessing. Certainly, no amount of piety or preparation on your part can accomplish this, “but the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father has granted in the Name of Christ,” is the One who enables you to Commune worthily and thereby receive God’s infinite blessings and power whenever you partake of this most holy Meal. Only then can you begin to live as He lived for you – to love as He loved you – to forgive as He’s forgiven you – and to sacrifice yourself for others, as He surely sacrificed Himself for you.

In all this stands the beautiful promise of Peace in the Words of Christ which are reminiscent of the words He spoke following His Resurrection – again in the upper room when He appeared to His disciples, saying, “Peace be with you!” And then He breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.” Thus, the Peace Jesus gives by His Holy Spirit in the Ministry of Holy Absolution, is the same Peace, forgiveness and life He gives in His Cross and Resurrection – a peace not as the world gives – a false sense of security in material possessions or fleeting success – but the genuine security of eternal salvation in the name of our Holy Triune God.

Finally, dear friends, by means of the Gospel-Word and Sacraments, you are able to endure in this Peace with confident faith, even though – and even as – you bear the Cross in your own life here on earth. For as you live in the self-sacrificing Love of God in Christ, it will often be the case – sadly – that the world around you – and sometimes even your own beloved – will nail you to the Cross and otherwise spurn your love. But having been given the Word and example of Christ – and, even more than His example, Christ Himself – you will be able to believe, trust and cling only to Him. In His Love for you – with which He loves you to the end – He will also bring you safely home to Himself to live with Him in His heaven forever. Amen.

And now the Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Love of God the Father, and the Communion of His Holy Spirit will keep you in Christ Jesus, unto life everlasting. Amen.