

Sermon for Easter 7 Exaudi Sunday – John 15:26-16:4

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

The last time we gathered to hear God's Word in this place was Thursday. We celebrated the Ascension of our Lord. Forty days after Christ's resurrection from the dead, and after numerous appearances to His disciples, our Lord ascended into heaven to sit at the right hand of God the Father. This event we commemorated just 4 days ago. We are drawing to the conclusion of the festival half of the church year, the time of retelling the events in the life of Christ. As we now have past His ascension to the Father's right hand, the lingering question remains: What now?

Christ has defeated death and the devil. He now reigns as Lord of Lords supreme. It would seem likely for us to expect peace and glory in His kingdom. But just as our Lord's glory was hidden here on earth, so is the glory of the church hidden. The disciple is not above his master. In the world, we will have cross and conflict. The cross is the mark of the children of God. The cross is our trademark for all time. Christ said, "Whoever does not take up His cross and follow Me cannot be my disciple." Cross bearing and being Christ's disciple come from confessing Him before men.

We like to think of ourselves as honest people. We like others to think that we're honest people. And if we're going to be honest, what we say and do should match up. If we say we're going to do something, we should do it. If we believe something to be true, we should say it. And this is not all that different from the Christian faith: by the gift of faith we believe, then we confess the truth. The chief part of confessing is the truth. It's not enough to be honest, to mean what we say. What we believe must also actually be true. Even if someone very honestly and sincerely believes a lie, what he believes and confesses is still a lie.

Every day we make our confession whether we think about it or not. One can confess with his mouth and deny with his deeds. If we neglect God's Word or certain parts of it to avoid dissension from the world; if we become lukewarm and follow the world's alluring examples; if we keep silent and let everything be considered equally good; if we serve the sins of greed, pride, and love of money; if we think we can act like the world; do we not deny Christ? Do we not pledge our allegiance to this broken world and the father of lies? This world has its own confession. This world has its own testimony. This world has its own god. This world has its own peace and joy. Is the world happy about the Christian faith? No! It hates Jesus' testimony because Christ's testimony condemns this world and its prince.

So how do we, who have neither seen God nor spoken with God; how do we who have never seen Christ—how do we know if what we believe and confess about Him is true and real? How do we know that we confess the truth? God be praised that our Lord tells us in today's Gospel: "But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will bear witness about me." The Spirit knows. He proceeds from the Father and the Son. There is no error in Him.

Yes, the Holy Spirit. But where is He? What does He testify? It is by the Lord's apostles whom He testifies. We have their confession. We know how they received power. We know how

they received courage. We know how they received enlightenment to bear witness to Christ. They went forth as witnesses to what they had seen to testify. Today we call their witness the New Testament.

We have in the Scriptures everything we should confess. We have in the Scriptures the most important teachings Christ's witnesses have said about Him: who He is, what He did and said, what He still does, how we should trust Him, find peace in Him, hear His voice, follow Him, live in Him, expect His return, and love, honor, and serve Him through the neighbors He gives us. This is the testimony which the Apostles have left us in their writings. In these the Holy Spirit speaks. In these we believe the truth: the Holy Spirit's testimony through the prophets and apostles about Christ.

So how do we share this truth? What does it look like? Look to those who first confessed it: John the Baptizer, St. Stephen, the Apostles. They were GREAT. They were BRAVE. They were ordinary people. They said what God said about doctrine. They lived their lives and applied God's Word to it. Sin and grace. Pain and mercy. They simply lived. They didn't just confess what wouldn't offend people, but the whole counsel of God. Their whole life was a hymn of praise to the glory of God, not in peace and quiet, but in the midst of the constant battle against evil. No matter what their situation was, even if they had reason to be afraid, they lived in joy. They were Christians. That was their calling. In the world they had many different vocations. Above all, they were Christians who confessed the truth of Christ. As He said, "Whoever confesses Me before men, him also will I confess before my Father who is in heaven."

And we are blessed to do the same: How is the truth confessed among us? In sermons, prayers, and hymns? Yes, thanks be to God. In other places? In our homes? From fathers and mothers to their children? In the workplace? The opportunities are countless. Keep Christ's Word in your heart. Regard the world and its glory as nothing. Be faithful to your calling.

Christ warns us that horrible things will happen and are happening to His disciples. Fired from jobs, outcast. Even being killed in the name of God. Is all hope lost? No. The first apostles did not fail because Christ did not fail. When all hope was gone, as the Savior was slayed and laid into a tomb, Christ rose victorious. This is a glory still hidden, only to be revealed in full sight on the Last Day. Yet by faith, the hidden reality is today: Christ cleans us from our uncleanness, and gives us a new heart and a new spirit.

Remember Christ. Remember the cloud of witnesses who have gone before us. Our Savior will not abandon us. We know this because of what Jesus says not only at the end of John chapter 15 but also at the beginning: "I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in Me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing ... As the Father has loved Me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love ... These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full." We are not dead leaves blown everyway by the wind. The world and the devil may have its way with us, but we are branches connected to the Vine. His joy is in us and our joy is full. Amen.

The Peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. ✠BJF✠