

Sermon for Easter 7 – John 15:26-16:4

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

In Marilynne Robinson's novel entitled "Housekeeping," the narrator makes the observation that absence is an intense form of presence. The idea being that when someone is here they are occupying space where you can see them and interact with them. But when they're gone, our memories discover them in more places where they have been. For instance, Grandma (who has passed away years ago) is always in the kitchen baking bread or cookies or pulling the dry towels and sheets off the clothesline. Dad is always out in the garage tinkering with his tools, sitting in his recliner watching the game, or driving home from work. While no longer with us, our memories of them can make them seem more present than before.

This may begin to help us understand the absence and real presence of our Lord. It's not a complete explanation, but it's at least a start. Christ Jesus has ascended to the Father's right hand as we heard on this past Thursday, Ascension Day. But now He's more present than ever. It was good for Him to go away, for rather than being localized in one place, His going away allows Him to fill all things.

And just how does He do that? He sends who our English translations call the Helper, or the Comforter, or the original Greek--the Paraclete. He is the Holy Spirit. He is called the Comforter because we need His comfort. We have a spirit of terror, of fear. We're terrified. So we need a Comforter to make us fearless through the difficulties we face.

Our consciences can be weary. In our homes, at work, or at school: Have I done enough? Am I doing the right thing? Did I make the right decision? What if they know that I'm a Christian? What if they know what I believe? The Holy Spirit reminds us that we have become children of God through God's Son. We cry with Him, "Abba, Father," and God hears us, because Christ has reconciled us with the Father. If the Lord is on your side, if the Lord loves you and has your back, what can't you do? What can't you suffer? We are bold to confess the faith freely before the whole world. There's no adversity that we can't face.

Do we have an example of this fearlessness? Yes, the apostles. Before they had the Holy Spirit—they ran from Christ. They hid. They stayed behind closed doors. But when the Holy Spirit came, they stepped forward and confessed Christ fearlessly before the whole world. What's more, they rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer contempt in the name of being a Christian. Our Lord promised them, "Let the world rage, let the devil spread his terror, let the tyrants burn with anger. I will send you a Helper who is all-powerful. He will protect and defend you from every danger. He will give faith to your heart. He will kindle love within you. He will comfort you in all

troubles, so that you don't have to fear the devil, the world, or any other tyrant." We will suffer, but we will endure all that can be laid upon us.

And this Holy Spirit, this Helper, this Comforter, does He live up to His name? Very much so. He comforts us in our affliction. He teaches us truth. He bears witness to us that Christ is the Son of God and the Savior of the world. Therefore what has been written and taught by the Holy Spirit shall remain. Everything else in this world will fall apart and be ruined. All your demons will be destroyed. All your tyrants will be torn apart.

But not for now. And Christ Jesus says so. "I have said these things to you, that when their hour comes you may remember that I told them to you." There is great comfort for us in these words. When we're in the thick of it; when we're struggling; when it seems like there's no way out and no end, Christ said it would be so. God desires it to be this way, otherwise no human being could stand. If Christ didn't say this, we would have to wonder why the world rejects us and Him. What is the reward for all our toil and trouble in this world? Our old Adam still loses patience when things don't go our way. We receive utter ingratitude for our good deeds.

While seemingly absent, Christ is ever present for us in our sufferings and hardships, for He knows something about them. He was put out of the synagogues and cities, even from His hometown of Nazareth, as a hometown prophet is not received in his home. He wasn't even allowed to die within the walls of Jerusalem, but on a hill outside the city. There the Romans and chief priests thought they offered a service to God in sacrificing the one they considered to be a blasphemer. But they didn't know the Father. And they certainly didn't know His Son who was redeeming the world in that moment. Do we not follow in the way of Christ? After all, isn't that part of what being a Christian means? If Christ bore the entire tree of the cross and our sins, should we not who follow Him have a few splinters?

We know that our crosses and sufferings all come from God. They are laid on us by Him. Our crosses from God are not sent from Him to destroy us, but rather for our good. They remind us that God is with us in the midst of our suffering. They remind us that God is with us and we don't have to give up. So be self-controlled. Be sober-minded. Keep loving one another as love covers a multitude of sins. Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. Serve one another as good stewards of God's varied grace so that God may be glorified in you. We can endure with God's help and patience until the blessed eternity that God grants to us. For He will never leave us or forsake us. Amen.

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