

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

Today is Exaudi Sunday. It is the only Sunday after the Ascension of our Lord and before the festival of Pentecost. It is the last Sunday in the Easter season. Exaudi means “Hear!” or “Listen!” This Sunday’s name, like many, is taken from the Introit verse spoken by the pastor in our divine services and printed each week in our bulletin. This verse is taken from Psalm 27.

“Hear, O Lord, when I cry aloud. Your face Lord, do I seek; hide not Your face from me.”

This verse is a prayer to God by one who suffers and is being persecuted. The psalmist cries out to God, confident that God will hear him and deliver him from those who are persecuting him. He knows the cost of confessing the truth. God’s people will be persecuted for saying what God wants them to say. King David knew it. The prophet Ezekiel knew it. St. Peter and the other apostles knew it. Martin Luther knew it. There is a natural animosity—a fierce opposition—between Christ’s teaching and the religion of this world. We who identify with Christ will always be marginalized and persecuted. How do we know this is true?

Because our Lord says so. He has said all these things to us to keep us from falling away. As Christians, we bear the world’s mockery and destruction. As Christians, we have those who hate us in this world. When they mock us and seek our harm, we must be on guard. We must be on guard not so much against their hate (we know it’s coming), but against our retaliation. For the Old Adam in us loses patience and wants an eye for an eye. But Christ says clearly to love your enemies and to do good to those who hate you. One of the earliest Christians named Justin Martyr (who was commemorated in the church yesterday, June 1st) once said about these words, “Love your enemies and you’ll no longer have any enemies.”

Nevertheless, Christians bear the world’s hate. God desires it to be so because it cannot be otherwise. But lest we are offended and impatient; lest we lament the hardships we receive in reward for our faithful toils and struggles, Christ tells us this must be so. Horrible things will happen to us for being Christians. But we also know that our cross and suffering ultimately come from God and are laid on us by Him, not to harm, but for our good, for God is with us in the midst of cross and suffering. How?

Christ does not leave us as orphans. He does not leave us to be on our own. He sends the Holy Spirit who bears witness to the Son. The Holy Spirit is the Comforter who is given to us that we may also bear witness.

Christ does not leave anything to chance. He didn’t teach His disciples and hope that they got it right. He taught them and then He sent them the Holy Spirit to confirm them in His teaching, even as He confirms disciples today. The Holy Spirit reminded the apostles and us of what Jesus taught so that we would confess Him boldly.

The Holy Spirit is the Comforter. He comforts us sinners with the message of the forgiveness of our sins. Jesus calls Him the Comforter and says, “He will testify of Me.” That’s how the Comforter comforts us. He tells us about Christ. He tells us we are forgiven in Him.

The comfort of the Comforter is not a temporary emotional high. It’s not like a hug from a loved one when we’re sad. It’s not like the presence of a faithful pet when we’re lonely. It’s not like the feeling of satisfaction you get in eating a good home-cooked meal on a rainy day. These are all

good and blessed things coming from God, but the comfort that comes from the Comforter isn't physical comfort. He provides spiritual comfort. The comfort of the Comforter is Christ coming into our world to confront our sin and death, to tear down the devil's kingdom, and to defeat these enemies by His holy obedience, innocent suffering, and death in our place on the cross. This is the spiritual comfort that lasts forever.

Our life and everything we are is given us through this comfort. We depend on Christ. We need Him. Without seeing our need, we can't know Him. To know Him, we need to know that we are by nature spiritually blind, dead, and helpless. This is true of us physically as well. Even if we're "completely healthy" it's only a matter of time until our next illness or injury strikes. The dying bodies in which we live are immutable evidence of God's convicting verdict upon the human race: the soul that sins shall die. We deserve to die. We don't deserve God's blessing, we deserve His curse. We have not loved God as our greatest good. We have misused His name, and we have despised His Word. We have dishonored legitimate authority. We have not loved our neighbor as ourselves. We have lusted after what we have no right to have. We have taken what wasn't ours. We have repeated things about our neighbor to make him look bad and make us look good. We deserve God's punishment, both now and forever.

This is the truth. This is the truth and it makes people angry. For the biggest obstacle to God's righteousness is not sin; sin can and will be forgiven. The biggest obstacle to God's righteousness is man's self-righteousness. It is the world's religion. People can't tolerate admitting their sin, so they dismiss Christ and embrace lies instead. They lie about how good they are. They prop up the façade about how sincere their motives are. They construct the veneer about how they deserve better than what they've gotten. They talk about spirituality as if it's their own achievement. And they remain blind to the sin within them. They are impressed with the good things they do and they want to rejoice in themselves. They trust in who they are and what they do. Their trust is false. The words, "I, a poor, miserable sinner ..." never come across their lips. Our Lord describes them as whitewashed tombs: beautiful on the outside, but on the inside filled with dead men's bones.

Christ is for us who know our sin, hate it, and want to be delivered from it. For us, the truth the Holy Spirit reveals about Christ is more treasured than anything else we possess because it reveals God's love for us that is greater than our sin. Where sin abounded, grace abounds much more. Christ's life was perfectly free from the hatred, the lust, the distrust, the pride, and every other infectious sin that poisons us. He gave His life of purity and innocence to God to replace our lives of disobedience and sin. He has washed away our sin so that it is gone forever. For Christ's sake, God sees us as pure, holy, spotless, sinless saints. As surely as there has never been any sin in Christ, so surely are we perfectly sinless through faith in Him.

This is the truth that the Spirit of truth reveals to us. It is the truth that the world hates and therefore persecutes us. The Holy Spirit changes our hearts. We are forgiven. This is our comfort that the Comforter gives us. It says that everything offered us in our own works, in our own dignity, and in our own pride is useless. We trust in nothing of these. We trust Christ only. Amen.

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