

## Sermon for Rogate (Easter 6) – John 16:23-30

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

“[Jesus said], ‘I came from the Father and have come into the world, and now I am leaving the world and going to the Father.’” It was only a little while before Jesus would leave His disciples. Soon they would see Him no more. The personal contact would be broken. A sad gap we would see in the despair and fear of the disciples after the crucifixion. It seemed as if the bottom had fallen out of everything. The disciples had staked it all on Jesus. Fishermen gave up their boats and nets. A tax collector gave up his wealth and livelihood. They left it all to follow Him. Their lives had come to revolve around Him. Where Jesus went, they followed. The disciple’s lives were given to Him. But when Jesus was gone, the heart was taken out of their lives. Their lives had changed and it was painful.

But God knew how far the disciples would get on their own strength without Him. So during the forty days between Easter and Ascension, He prepared them for His departure. And yet, the risen Christ did not fit back into the lives of the disciples just as He previously had. Something changed. Before Calvary the disciples had leaned heavily on Him. Jesus had carried them as lambs, as children. Now He wanted them to stand upright like men and go forth into all the world with brave hearts and voice, proclaiming Him the crucified and risen Savior. The visible presence of Christ was soon to be withdrawn. Jesus was going on ahead, and He encouraged them, “Follow Me!” Through all their lives, they were to know that Jesus was leading them forward. “I am with you,” He said. The disciples walked in His steps. Following Christ, their journey was set from earth to heaven. As this change in how they would know Jesus came about, they learned to walk by faith, and not by sight.

As Jesus’ modern day disciples, we walk the same path: by faith and not by sight. And it’s not easy. The world has changed much, mostly for the worst. We live a society where life, both young and old, is less and less valued. Or, to put it more accurately, life’s value is determined by man and not by God. The devastating tidal wave of the sexual revolution may take one more degenerative step in this summer’s Supreme Court decision regarding an attempt at defining marriage as what marriage is not. Perhaps even calling today “Mother’s Day” is too gender exclusive! The world is changing before our very eyes. Do you not also fear what your children will see throughout their days?

Today, as at the time of Jesus’ first disciples, much ridicule is heaped on Christians by the Christ-less: “Do you suppose that a puny individual like you can stop the change in laws that govern this land? Can you, who are so sadly shoved around by others, influence the course of this world or interrupt the chain of gigantic events? If there is a God, do you suppose that He is going to pay any attention to you?” Before this barrage of contempt, we Christians have weakened and backed down. Does God care? Where is He when we are weak and without comfort and the world seems turned upside-down?

While it may seem that God has left the world, He never has. His promise is sure: “Behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” His Word remains with us. It’s a Word that is read and learned to be sure, but it’s a Word that is most effectively prayed. That’s the way God effects His own real change in the world and stems the tide of disaster.

Today is the 6<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter. It's called Rogate Sunday. Rogate is a Latin word of command which means, "Ask!" How do we ask? We pray. We pray in Jesus' name and that means to pray in the spirit, in the manner, and in the character of Jesus. Our prayers must be of the Jesus sort. Just as faith is created in our hearts by the Holy Spirit through the Word of God, so by the Word are we given guidance and example in the art of prayer. There we find our Lord in His life so rich in prayer. As we come to know Him better and are drawn closer to Him, our prayers will take on more of His character. We often take on the manners and speech of those with whom we associate.

An example? A child doesn't learn to speak initially by reading a book or studying language theory. He imitates his parent's speech in words, pace, and even inflection. Do we not also learn to pray by the very words of Jesus? Traveling closer to Jesus and His Word, our prayers will be more and more pulled into the purposes for which Jesus gave Himself. In the name of Jesus is the name of Him who is our Savior. Our prayers in His name will change others. Our prayers in His name will change us. Our prayers in His name will change the world.

Jesus teaches His disciples to pray the Lord's Prayer. It is the most simple, yet comprehensive prayer to pray. It is first prayed by Jesus, then by His disciples. We must remember that it is not always necessary to pray in our own words. When our words seem inadequate and ineffective, we need to use those words of others. Your children do this already. We as adults need the same kind of help. The Gospels testify that Jesus Himself uses the prayers of the Psalter regularly, just as other Jews did then, and Christians do today. Even on the cross Jesus used the prayers of the Psalms. Does "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" (Ps. 22) ring a bell?

What else? Our Lord insists further that it's important not to give up after a few first attempts at prayer. However great the frustrations may seem to be to us, we must continue. We must stand and knock like the man who needed to borrow bread in the middle of the night; or like the widow who would not give up until she had been heard and answered. Jesus repeats constantly the promise that he who asks shall receive, and he that knocks shall find the door opened. In prayer, Jesus opens the hearts of others to His redeeming death for forgiveness. Jesus even opens our hearts to purify us from our sins by His death for us. Now that's real change!

That's why prayer is first and foremost an act of worship. We open ourselves to God. Guided by His Word, we point ourselves in His direction. Prayer is an answer to God's word of saving, life-giving love in Christ. In prayer we make reply to Him, giving Him back our love, our adoration, our praise, our loyalty, our lives – all of which He first gave to us. Even if we feel lonely or weak, as we pray we are in contact with God our Father through Christ, and therein we are made strong as His children.

We can only breathe out as often as we breathe in. Prayer is the heartbeat of the Christian life. As we are alive in Christ, we pray. Amen.

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

*This sermon was taken in part from the Bishop Bo Giertz in "Preaching from the Whole Bible" (Lutheran Legacy Publishing) and in part from "The Selected Sermons of Norman Nagel" (Concordia Publishing House) both for the appointed Gospel of the day.*