

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

God would keep His promise to the house of Israel. This is what the prophet Ezekiel said. God was intent to rescue His people from the idol worship which had led to their exile in Babylon. And those Babylonian lies were not a little enticing for the Israelites: “We’re not asking you to give up on your God. No! Far from it! But why not cover all your bases? Just offer the occasional sacrifice to Molech. One can always use a little extra help in this world! And why not set up a few Asherim poles and sacrifice— they will give you blessings along with what your God gives!” But when the going got tough in exile, the Israelites didn’t go to the One True God, they would go to the idols.

And so we too are all too prone to find comfort outside of God when the going gets tough. It’s easy to react with contempt and hostility when we’ve been wronged. It’s easier to turn to an addiction and numb the pain than to face the problem at hand with God only. Or to put our trust not in the Giver, but rather in the gifts God gives and hoard them, rather than being a good steward of God’s varied grace. Our idols still abound.

The going would get tough for the disciples after Christ’s Ascension. He said it would be so. He told them that the world would be against them because of the Gospel they would proclaim. The world would not accept them. In fact, the world would do the opposite, not only despising their preaching and words as foolish, but hating and persecuting the men themselves. After all, their hope rested on a crucified man! They should expect no friendship or kindness from the world. They will learn by painful experience that Christ’s kingdom does not come into any kind of agreement with the world. How did the disciples respond? They thought: “What kind of life will this be? Why should we preach if no one will listen to us? If our fellow kinsmen are hostile to us, what will other nations do? Let’s be silent and let this world go its way. Let the world live and believe what it wants. What can we poor, despised few do against the entire world’s wisdom, power, and might?”

So Christ gives them the promise: “... [T]he Helper... whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, He will bear witness about Me. And you also will bear witness, because you have been with Me from the beginning.” The devil wants you to cower and be quiet. He wants to suppress the truth. But when by his instigation, people become angry, laugh at, or mock God’s Word, the Holy Spirit will not shut up! Proceeding from the Father and sent by the Son, the Holy Spirit dwells in you and plants courage and boldness where it did not exist before. There is no comfort for us Christians in this world except what the Comforter gives. The Holy Spirit points the world to Jesus.

But who would ever think that such a preposterous, not to mention offensive, symbol as a dying man on a cross should bring peace to the world? How could apostles losing their lives in utter shame give birth God’s people and the Church? Why must

eternal and lasting joy come only through such sorrow and suffering? So that we too, like the disciples, can be freed from the delusion that friendship with this world and its treasures, popularity, power, and peace are our goal. Rather, we aim at faithfulness to the Crucified and Risen One which earns us shame, suffering, and death in this world. Without this truth, who—out of His disciples past and present—could believe that this crucified, cursed, and excommunicated Jesus is the true Son of God, the Lord of life and eternity?!? Believe it!!! Look to the cross as a symbol of violence! How do we react? How does it change our relationship to God? How does it change our relationship to one another? “Do we pass that cross unheeding, Breathing no repentant vow,/Though we see You wounded, bleeding, See Your thorn-encircled brow?/Yet Your sinless death has brought us Life eternal, peace, and rest;/Only what Your grace has taught us Calms the sinners deep distress.” (LSB 423:2)

Christ’s Kingdom opposes the devil’s kingdom. It started with the first promise of the Gospel for man against Satan: “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed. He will crush your head and you will bite His heel.” This enmity continues in the world. It remains a perpetual fight. When Christ comes preaching and meets the serpent, Satan quickly begins to rage against Him and to bite and sting with his venomous teeth, because he is afraid for his head. And yet, under Christ’s heel his head remains. His poisonous venom and wrath are used up on Him so that the devil’s power is nothing and he can do no eternal harm. And even though we suffer from his murderous bites and stings which hurt our flesh and blood, the serpent’s head still remains under Christ’s heel.

For this Christ is God’s Son, sent by the Father to become the sacrifice and payment for the world’s sin through His own blood. Christ takes away God’s wrath and reconciles us, so that we are redeemed from sin and death and obtain eternal righteousness and life through Him. No one through his own work or holiness can atone for his sins or put away God’s wrath. There’s no other way or means to obtain God’s grace and eternal life except through the faith that takes hold of Christ. He alone bears our sin, apart from any of our works or worthiness. God is gracious to us and saves us only for the sake of His Son. No one comes to God except through Him who is our Sin Bearer and Mercy Seat. He crushes our idols and makes us clean again. God has kept His promise to you.

So you are free. Be self-controlled in all confrontations and temptations. In the problems you face, be sober-minded; find strength in God’s promise of forgiveness for you. Love the people God has put in your life and cover their sins. Be a good host and show hospitality without grumbling. Serve each other with the gifts God has so richly provided you. Then, God will be glorified in you. To Him belong all glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

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