

“JESUS LEAVES SO THE SPIRIT CAN COME.”

Rev. Robert T. Woodyard

First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden, WA

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Text for the Sermon: John 16:5-15

Introduction.

In the forty fifth chapter of Genesis we read about how the long and painful separation of Joseph from his brothers and father led to a great and rich blessing.

In the sixty first chapter of Isaiah, he prophecies of the year of the Lord's favor, when beauty would come out of ashes, and gladness out of sorrow, and praise out of sadness.

In the second chapter of Acts the sadness of the disciples over the absence of their closest friend and Lord and Savior, was turned to gladness as their eyes were opened to a far greater blessing that wasn't possible without the absence of Jesus' physical presence with them.

Jesus said to the disciples, “It is to your advantage that I go away.” “It is for your own good that I am leaving you.”

Jesus must ascend so the Spirit can come.

Last week I preached on the ascension of Jesus. Jesus ascended to bring to full completion His mission and the Gospel. He ascended to be coronated/crowned as King over the universe. He ascended to be our great High Priest and advocate before the Father.

But He ascended for another reason also, so the Comforter, the Holy Spirit could come.

Today is *Pentecost*, a day we remember Jesus sending His Holy Spirit to earth to indwell and empower those who believe in Him. Jesus is not absent from us.

Before Pentecost the disciples didn't understand the full benefit of Christ's departure. Just as it would be hard for a child to grasp a father's departure to a faraway country to do something that would be of great benefit to the family.

How could Christ's absence be a gain and not a loss? How could Christ's absence be good and not painful? In a way similar to surgery which is painful but good in the end.

Christ absence would actually mean Christ's greater presence.

Christ ascended to receive His heavenly glory and to gain possession of the highest possible authority, He sits enthroned at the right hand of the Father to advocate for us and to defend and protect us and provide for us, and to do all this through the sending of the Comforter, counselor, helper, advocate, friend.

This coming refers to a coming down with much larger power and influence. From Pentecost on we see a much larger work of God, no longer confined to one nation, but spreading over the whole earth. The age of the Spirit is marked by a greater empowering, a fuller work, and a more global impact.

Why did Jesus have to leave in order for the Spirit to come?

Is this a case of this town ain't big enough for both of us? This planet isn't big enough for Jesus and the Holy Spirit?

We know if Christ remained bodily, He could only be in one place at a time. If He was present in our worship here at First CRC, He would not be present in worship over at Bethel and the other way around.

By leaving and sending His Holy Spirit Christ is present wherever there are believers assembled in His name, everywhere in the world, at all times and at the same time.

We are not told directly why Jesus had to leave in order for the Spirit to come. All we know is in the eternal counsel and wisdom of the Trinity there is a connection between the ascension of the second member of the Trinity and the outpouring of the third member of the Trinity.

It was important in the purposes of God for Jesus to come and to live and die and be resurrected and be ascended and as a consequence of all of that then the Spirit came. What Christ did on earth purchased for us the gift of the Holy Spirit.

What is the benefit to us of Jesus leaving and the Spirit coming?

Now that's a great question and one we should know the answer to.

If Christ had remained the disciples would not have grown as much in their faith, trust and hope. They would not have had to exercise their faith and spiritual gifts as much. They would have had less opportunity to show the power of Christ to the world. Just think about what happened after Pentecost when the Holy Spirit was poured out on the followers of Jesus.

On the first day alone three thousand souls were saved. The church exploded across the Roman Empire and all around the Mediterranean. There was incredible change in the disciples, growth in knowledge, faith, courage, zeal and witness and the exercise of spiritual gifts.

They did far more for Christ in His absence than in His presence. They proved Jesus' statement:

John 14:12 Whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father.

Remember the astonishment of the people of Jerusalem:

Acts 4:13 When they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized they had been with Jesus.

Yes, it was and still is a very good thing that Jesus left and sent His Spirit.

Christianity is far better off without a Jesus that we can see and touch. Christianity is far better off with a Jesus dwelling in our hearts by His Spirit. In fact, were it not for the present work of the Holy Spirit in our world there would be no Christianity, no gospel, no faith and repentance, no New Testament, no church.

It is far better to be alive now and full of the Holy Spirit and to have all those things than to have lived when Jesus walked among us.

People will wistfully say, "Oh, what must have it been like to actually be with Jesus?" Jesus says not true. It is better to live in the age of the Spirit than in the age of Jesus on earth. It is far better to walk with Jesus by the Spirit than in the flesh.

Think of what happens when the *Pope* visits a foreign country, and how everyone flocks to get just a glimpse of him. Or how when people visit St. Peters in Rome hoping for just a glimpse.

My brother was in St. Peters many years ago for a service and he was sprinkled with holy water by the Pope as he walked down the aisle. Those kinds of experience might be special for a little while but quickly wear off. Like Muslims making a once in a life-time trip to Mecca. Can you imagine if being with Jesus was a once in a life time experience for Christians?

We have that every day, every moment of every day, living in the Spirit, filled with the power and presence of Jesus, filled with God's grace, filled with His life and power.

The work of the Spirit.

Jesus says the benefit of the Spirit coming is seen in the work the Spirit does when He comes.

He convicts of sin and convinces people they are sinners.

He convinces people they must be saved by Christ's righteousness and not their own.

He convinces people there is a judgment to come.

The word used for convict (reprove, admonish, expose) is a word used sometimes of believers and God's people and sometimes to reprove the world.

The Spirit's power isn't limited to indwelling Christians. The Holy Spirit isn't just closed up inside individuals. The Holy Spirit inspires and makes effective the preaching and teaching and witnessing of His people to penetrate the hard hearts and minds of the world. Divine power and authority flows from the throne of Christ by His Spirit through His people into the world.

Jesus' words here are directed at the Spirit's work in our world outside of the church, causing the world to acknowledge His power and authority and the defeat of Satan, even when they don't want to acknowledge it.

In the end the world and Satan will not be able to stand against the Spirit and the church. From Pentecost on we read in the book of Acts a constant opposition and persecution, but a total inability to stop the irresistible advance of the Gospel and the spread of the church.

The Jewish authorities couldn't stop it, the Roman Empire couldn't stop it, Satan and all his demons couldn't stop it.

Jesus' words here are meant to be an encouragement to the Christians, that in the face of opposition they have a Comforter, they have His presence and power in

them and with them. And this Comforter has all power and all truth and He will crush and silence all opposition and convince them in the end of Jesus, every knee will bow and every tongue confess, even without believing hearts.

When the Spirit works and convicts and convinces through His Word and the preaching of it, He does this *in two ways or in two directions*.

Some are convicted and humbly repent, they submit to the Word and surrender their hearts and souls to Christ's work in them.

Others are convicted and become harder, they hear the truth but they resist or deny it, they do not yield or submit to the authority of Christ.

There is a conviction that leads to salvation through repentance and there is a conviction that leads to persistent rebellion and judgment without excuses.

The world will one day be convicted and convinced of their sin of rejecting Christ and His Word. The world will one day be convicted and convinced the Jesus Christ was a righteous man and not a deceiver or liar. One day the world will confess as the Roman soldier standing guard at the cross did, "Truly this was the Son of God; certainly this man was innocent/righteous."

A pagan Roman centurion saw it, so will this pagan world of ours.

The Kingdom of God is being established, the church is being filled with believers coming in by the thousands all across the world, especially in South America, Africa and Asia. The dominion of the devil is being challenged head on. The ruler of this world has met his match. He may be winning his battles here and there, but the war is being lost.

Conclusion.

How then shall we live now that the Spirit has come?

Acts 1:8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.

The Holy Spirit gives *power to individuals* to turn them from sinners to saints, to break the bondage of sin and enable us to repent and believe.

No one has ever been saved from the power of sin without the renewing/redeeming/sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is holy, the power He gives is a power for purity, holiness, righteousness.

Titus 2:11-14 For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, 12 training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, 13 waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, 14 who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.

Romans 8:13 For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

Have we been with Jesus? Are our hearts burning within us when we hear and read His Word? Are our desires growing stronger in the direction of spiritual things, eternal things, things that are true and right and holy? Claim the Spirit's power, claim Christ's authority over your sin and against Satan's temptations.

The Holy Spirit also gives saints *power and authority in the world*, not just in us. God's people have Christ's power and authority to exercise jurisdiction over the whole world.

Convicting of sin, righteousness and judgment are not just for individuals, this is more than personal, this concerns the whole world. We see this in Acts when the empowered disciples went out into Israel and beyond with power and authority far beyond their own.

Jesus has all power and authority and dominion. He rules and reigns over all the universe and all the earth and over all nations and leaders and rules and dictators and terrorists and every enemy.

When Jesus ascended, "He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him" (Colossians 2:15).

Christ's enthronement means our enthronement. What the first Adam lost for us all, the second Adam has secured for us all.

This should leak out of us in our responses and reactions to everything that happens in our lives and around us and in our world. He is directing the course of

all events, He is causing all things to work for our good, He is providing and protecting, blessing and benefiting.

Don't be dismayed as this world goes against the will of God and His design for mankind, the ascension tells us that all will be made right.

Today Christians are being increasingly told our faith is a private matter and it's best if it's kept that way. We can believe what we want as long as we don't push it on anyone else. Christianity is being silenced and pushed out of the public square, out of science, out of education, out of the military, out of politics. Watch how faith is pushed out of the election debates. Watch how it is pushed out of Supreme Court decisions.

And Christians and the Church in America are letting its voice be silenced and increasingly we are bowing and compromising in the name of trying to win friends or be seen as nice guys. But it doesn't work, with every concession we only become weaker. When we deny the spiritual power and authority of the Word of God we have no other source of power or strength.

Friends, the ascension and Pentecost say that there is no secular and sacred, no spiritual and temporal, no public and private faith. The Christian faith isn't just for the home and the church. Jesus Christ is Lord over all. Jesus Christ has all power and authority. Those who resist or deny or reject Jesus and His Word on earth have only an allusion of power and authority. They may think they are in charge and they are winning the day, but they are wrong. Jesus Christ sits at the right hand of the Father, He's in charge.

We have Christ's authority to bear witness to Him in the public square, to call leaders to account according to the Word of God. Scripture is not just our opinion, it's not just our views, it is the truth of Him who sits on the throne. Don't let the world cause you to lose your voice. Don't let friends, neighbors and co-workers make you feel apologetic. Wherever God has placed you, seek the honor and glory of our King. We are His servants, may we be faithful whatever the personal cost. If we will humble ourselves for Him, He will exalt us even as He was humbled and then exalted.

We don't have to lose our voice. Our ruler and king is on the throne. We are His ambassadors; when we stand and speak, we honor Him. Even if we are beat down or persecuted or silenced on earth, we know that He will prevail, His truth will overcome, His light will shine in the darkness.

The work of the Spirit is to convict, reprove, influence and convince concerning spiritual truth. And we are conduits, vessels, ambassadors of this work on earth. It is the Holy Spirit through believers that turns the world upside down and brings a life-changing and life-giving influence to our world.

This table is strength for the battle and a reminder that Jesus has overcome and that the battle is already won.

Ephesians 1:17-20 [I pray] that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, 18 having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, 19 and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might 20 that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places,