

Sunday, May 16th, 2021
The 7th Sunday of Easter

The Three Joys

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, Amen. May 16th is a unique Sunday. It is a unique Sunday because it is the 7th Sunday of Easter which makes it the last Sunday of Easter. Next week we celebrate Pentecost. As you heard in our New Testament reading this morning, it is also a celebration of Ascension Day, which was this last week on Thursday. Jesus had told them, in a few days you will be come upon by the Holy Spirit. So, what's a pastor to do? Do we celebrate Ascension Day? Or do we celebrate the 7th Sunday of Easter? The answer is, yes! Let's do them both. Combine them, while still keeping the sermon a reasonable amount of time.

Let's first focus on Ascension Day because it will lead us into our gospel. As we read in Acts 1:1-11, following the resurrection Luke records what Jesus had done. He had taught His disciples, He had opened the scripture to them, which we've been focusing on the last six weeks. He also presented Himself to them alive. And He did this after His suffering, for 40 days. And He showed them many proofs, Luke records. What kind of proofs? Well, He ate with them, allowed them to touch Him, and He spent this time speaking about the Kingdom of God. So often we hear that, and we think, oh He must have been talking about heaven. The Kingdom of God is a phrase that is used throughout the Old Testament. Jesus picked it up and continued to use it in the gospels. The Kingdom of God is a phrase that speaks about God physically present and at work in this world. And so, He was talking about how God had been actively present and working in the world throughout the Old Testament, and through His ministry over the previous three years.

And Luke records that Jesus gave His disciples three things. He gave them a command, "Stay in Jerusalem until the promise, until the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you will receive power when that Holy Spirit comes on you, which leads to the third thing; command, promise, commission, and purpose; "And you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea, Samaria and to the very ends of the earth. When you think

about what Jesus told His disciples, it's a pretty tall order, and let's be honest, it's a pretty scary order to be told you are to be witnesses, you were to testify to the very ends of the earth.

However, that's what leads us into the gospel. On the night that Jesus was betrayed, after the Lord's supper, after identifying Judas, after telling Peter he's going to deny him three times, and after the teachings that we have looked at over the last several weeks; Jesus prayed. It is the last thing He did before going into the garden of Gethsemane with Peter, James and John. This prayer we call His high priestly prayer. Why? Well, let's think about what the high priest did. It was the high priest who once a year would offer up the atoning sacrifice. A sacrifice for the people, a sacrifice for the priests, to make atonement for both. With the blood of those animals, he would sprinkle the altar, sprinkle the people, the priest, and when he went in to the Holy of Holy's, would sprinkle it on the mercy seat. Then he would offer up prayer for the people.

When you look at that, Christ offered Himself as the atoning sacrifice. He shed His blood for us, and we're told that we're not sprinkled with it, but that we are covered with it. And He prayed. He prayed for His people. When we look at this prayer, you could also call it the I prayer. Capital letter I, not EYE. Because in this prayer, Jesus defined or described His ministry and in so doing, He defined the ministry of the disciples and the ministry of the church in each one of us to this day. It begins by saying, 'I glorified You on earth,' and this is again He is praying to His Father, God the Father. "I glorified You on earth." And we are reminded in first Corinthians 10:31, that in whatever we do whether we lie down, get up, eat, or drink, we are to do all to the glory of God. He continues saying, "I have manifested Your Name to the people you gave me from out of this world." Some of you maybe have seen that bumper sticker with the letters NOTW. It stands for not of this world. Because God gave these people to Jesus, out of this world and into His world, into His realm, into His reign, and I have manifested Your name to the people you gave me, out of the world.

What does manifested mean? Well, it means readily perceived by the senses; easily understood. How did Jesus make God manifest?

Through the parables which made it so much easier to understand God. Manifest, it also means making evidence by showing or displaying something that makes people understand. That would be the miracles. There was no misconception, only God can do these things. God is in Jesus. Jesus is in God. And a manifest is an invoice or a list. Jesus gave a list of all that had been taught about Him in the Law, the prophets, the Psalms and how He fulfilled each and every one. You see this is what Christ was doing, and He makes it clear to us, and He made it clear when He prayed and his disciples heard this, 'I have manifested Your Name;' I've made it clearly seen and readily understood that I am your Messiah, their Messiah.

And then He continues: "I have given them the words that You gave me." And this is repeated two times, (which again repetition in the Bible, that draws focus, makes it an exclamation). Why is it so important that Jesus gave the disciples and us God's word? Well, He tells us why. Sanctify or set them apart in the truth. Your word is truth. So, part of Jesus' ministry was taking this Bible and showing His disciples, 'here is truth, trust this, set yourself apart in this.'

And then He continues; "I am praying for them. I am not praying for the whole world, but for those you have given me." He is interceding on behalf of His disciples, who He's given this word to, who He has made God manifest to, and "I have kept them in your name." It is a very focused ministry that Jesus had. He was here to do His Father's bidding, redeem mankind, show them the truth, and He did that. He didn't stray off into the political realm, though He was oftentimes tempted. He didn't stray off into arguments with the chief priest, the scribes, the Pharisees, the Sadducees. He nipped those things in the bud so fast because He was laser like focus on His ministry. "I have guarded them, and not one has been lost, except the son of destruction." And then Jesus tells us why that had to happen, 'to fulfill the scriptures.' All along God knew Judas would not have true faith. Then he prays, this probably upset the disciples a little to hear it. "I am coming to You, and yet He says and for their sake, the disciples sake, I consecrate myself."

What does it mean to consecrate? Consecrate means to dedicate to a sacred purpose, to continue in all that one has been doing. Jesus was

going to continue in all that He had been doing; working for the redemption of mankind and yet He had more to give, and He was going to give them the Holy Spirit. And He concludes this section by saying; “and these things I speak in the world that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves.” Joy, Jesus refers to my joy, and that His disciples might have that joy. So, it became their joy.

But I want you to hear the very next words of Jesus's prayer. “I did not ask for these only, that is the disciples, but also for those who will believe in me through their word. That's us! Christ has atoned, redeemed, protected, given His word, God's word, the Holy Spirit and saved the disciples and us. And it was His joy to do it. He was joyful. He got joy in seeing this, in seeing their joy, the disciples joy, our joy!

And we should be joyful because in a world that is chaotic with things constantly changing, He has given us clear instructions. Glorify, His name in all we do! Make Him manifest, readily perceived by others! He has given us His word and told us sanctify yourselves in it. Set this apart to be the guide in your life. And He prayed for us and continues to intercede on our behalf at the right hand of God the Father!

Christ is praying for us now and He continues. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, through coming to us in the sacraments, and through His word, He continues to keep us in His Name. In faith through the Holy Spirit, He continues to guard us, to keep us from the evil.

So, as we come to the end of Easter, as we think and ponder Christ rising into heaven, let us be joyful, and thank and praise Him for all that He has done, and all that He is doing right now, right here, in this church and in our hearts.

In His Name, Amen.