

Rev. Timothy M. Crummitt

Sixth Sunday of Easter - Year A

Week 10 of Quarantine

St. Paul's Lutheran Church

Acts 17:22-31

Psalm 66:8-20

I Peter 3:13-22

John 14:15-21

05/17/2020

### Gospel

English Standard Version (ESV)

The Holy Gospel according to St. John:

**15** “If you love me, you will keep my commandments. **16** And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, **17** even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you. **18** “I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. **19** Yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. **20** In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. **21** Whoever has my

commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him.”

The Gospel of our Lord.

### **Prayer**

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.

### **“So Long, and Thanks for All the Fish!”**

Good morning! Years ago, the author and vlogger John Green introduced me to a wonderful book titled *Last Words of Notable People*. I never bought the book, because it’s \$90, but it set me down an interesting path of famous and interesting people. I was reminded of this earlier this week while watching *How I Met Your Mother* with Megan. One character, Marshall, had lost his father, and it seems like everyone else in his family had wonderful last conversations with him before he died. Marshall’s last words with his dad? “*Rent Crocodile Dundee 3, I caught it on cable last night and it totally holds up!*” The episode does a good job of capturing how much value we put in last words.

Sometimes last words are boring and mundane. Did you know Elvis Presley’s last words were “*I’m going to the bathroom to read.*” Or Marie

Antoinette, who after stepping on her executioner's foot said, "*Pardonnez-moi, monsieur.*" Others are humbling. Leonardo da Vinci said "*I have offended God and mankind because my work did not reach the quality it should.*" Well that certainly makes me feel bad about my own work!

Likewise, I have felt insecure about my singing but the priest at composer Jean-Phillipe Rameau's bedside was told, "*What the devil do you mean to sing to me, priest? You are out of tune.*" Sometimes the words are powerful and beautiful. Harriet Tubman's last words were "*Swing low, sweet chariot.*" Sir Arthur Conan Doyle turned to his wife before having a heart attack and said "*you are wonderful.*" Sometimes they're funny. Thomas B. Moran, a famous pickpocket who was nicknamed Butterfingers said "*I've never forgiven that smart-alecky reporter who named me Butterfingers. To me, it's not funny.*" Finally, sometimes they're just ironic. One of my personal favorites is from a Civil War officer who was reminded that he should crouch down so that he wouldn't be shot and replied "*Nonsense, they couldn't hit an elephant at this dist...*"

As the *How I Met Your Mother* episode explored, last words can often be a source of comfort and support for those of us who are grieving the loss. What we have today in our Gospel lesson is far more comforting. In one sense, this is the "last lesson" for Jesus. We pick up the text right where we

left off last week, with Jesus giving the disciples assurance and advice for the time after he leaves.

But one of the things that makes the Gospel text different from other last words is that Jesus is promising more than just words for those he will leave behind: the Holy Spirit. This work is made evident when we respond to God's love with love of our own. This change is illustrated by Craig R. Koester, the Chair of New Testament at Luther Seminary. By explaining another part of the text he points out that: *“Jesus also says that the world cannot receive the Spirit of truth because it neither sees nor recognizes it (14:17). Here he refers to “the world” as the realm where people are alienated from God. “The world” consists of those who are hostile to Jesus and his followers (15:18). Saying that the world cannot receive the Spirit does not mean that an unbeliever cannot become a believer. Rather, it means that “the world” estranged from God cannot receive the Spirit while remaining unchanged. For the world to receive the Spirit means that it is no longer “the world” in the Johannine sense. It loses its identity as “the world,” for it is no longer alienated from God.”*

If we encounter God, when we learn from Jesus, when we are supported by the Holy Spirit, we can't help but be changed. You can't be a Christian and remain everything that you once were. We live in this weird

time where a simple proclamation is all that is required for someone to be a “Christian.” And if you’re a die-hard Lutheran, I know the danger of what I’m about to say. Ignore works-righteousness, it’s a given that we’re not earning our way into Heaven. I’m trying to point out that sometimes our words betray a deeper truth. Here’s an example; I can say that I am a fan of cricket till I’m blue in the face, but that doesn’t change the fact that I don’t know a single thing about the sport. Likewise, the Holy Spirit is active in our lives when we take seriously the commitment that God, through Jesus, is asking of us.

But don’t think this is all about OUR action. Koester again points out that: *“John’s gospel calls the Spirit the parakletos or Advocate, a term for someone who is called to one's side as a source of help. In modern contexts someone may serve as an advocate in the court system, in the health care network, or in an educational institution, while other advocates may press the legislature to act on behalf of a certain cause. A quick reading of John may give the impression that the Spirit is the Advocate who brings our case up before God in the hope that God will do something merciful for us. But here the direction is the opposite. God has already given the gift of love unstintingly through the death and resurrection of Jesus, and such love is what creates genuine life. The Spirit is the Advocate who brings the*

*truth of that love and life to people in this time after Easter, which makes faith possible.”* And those are some comforting final words. Amen.