

May 18, 2025

Fifth Sunday After Easter

“Most Relevant”

John 16:12-22

This is a really tough Gospel lesson to preach on because most of what Jesus is saying to the disciples here really only directly applies to the disciples. Jesus is speaking to them on the night of Holy Thursday, mere hours before His arrest, torture and crucifixion. This little while of sorrow when they won't see Jesus and then that sorrow being turned to joy when they see Him is about the next three days—the lament of Christ's death and then the joy and wonder at His resurrection.

Even Jesus' talk about the Spirit of truth is aimed at these disciples when they are commissioned as apostles and, after Christ's ascension receive the Holy Spirit in power and then proclaim the truth of the Gospel. Only the apostles are commissioned to declare the Gospel with the authority of God. This is why when the biblical canon, our Holy Bible, organically came together, apostolic authorship was such a big deal as to what writings were considered to be Holy Scripture.

And yet we still have a great deal in common with these disciples. Every year in the church we cycle through this commonality. We go through the rather dark, contemplative season of Lent reflecting on our sins, our fallen nature and our inability of ourselves to do anything pleasing before God. This darkness culminates in our observance of Good Friday; the torture and death of Christ in order to pay the blood price of our failure. That Good Friday service ends on a very dark note, literally dark as we all exit in a somber, sorrowful silence.

But then comes Easter Sunday with the white paraments, bright lilies blooming, joyful anthems and of course the proclamation: Alleluia! He is risen! (He is risen indeed, alleluia!) Easter brings joy from sorrow.

And that isn't just some reenactment as if we're all part of some Christian renaissance fair. We live in the same salvation reality as those first disciples. We have genuine joy at Christ's resurrection because it has real, eternal impact on our lives.

We've lived this commonality of sorrow turned to joy already this morning. How did you feel as you confessed your sins? Sorrow and contrition, I hope. Guilt at how you in your sins betray your Savior also...kind of like those disciples felt about abandoning Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. And then you hear those words that I am humbled and privileged to speak on behalf of our Lord Jesus Christ: “I forgive you your sins.”

Our sorrow is turned to joy because the death our sins merit has been removed by Christ's death and His resurrection assures us that nothing stands between us and God's presence forever. The same in the Holy Supper—we come and kneel as penitent beggars, we leave joyful, having received full pardon and peace in the body and blood of Him who died but yet now lives.

We are called to live in this commonality with these disciples because, while there are some stark differences between their experience and calling and ours, we have the same promise, the same forgiveness, the same rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit as they do. We have the same Savior; Christ the crucified and risen.

One of our struggles as 21<sup>st</sup> century Christians is against letting our faith become a type of ritualistic remembrance of a time long past. It's not that hard to do because, well, it has been two millennia since Christ's cross and empty tomb. The world has trudged on through history and our lives are very different from those of the disciples. Our science and technology has

explained so much that they saw as mysterious. Our progress gives the impression that we are so much more intelligent than they were. The way we think and our worldview is so far removed from theirs. It's easy to say, "That was then, but this is now" and lose the wonder of Christ's work.

But here's the thing—our need for what Christ offers hasn't changed one bit over the past 2000 years; hasn't changed since nearly the beginning of time. You can talk up modern technology and modern philosophy all you want but people still sin, sinners still do evil and everybody still dies. The God of Creation is still God and He is still merciful and loving and desiring that you be saved for eternity. Only He has provided the means to bring that about—the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the benefits of His work delivered in Word and Sacrament—the same Gospel those first apostles proclaimed and distributed!

We all must guard against the temptation to think about the events described in the Bible, the messages of the Bible itself and the work of Christ's church as things of history, an age gone by, and maybe not so relevant to our oh-so-modern lives.

There is absolutely nothing more relevant to your life than the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Those first-century disciples glorified God and said, "*Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life.*" Is there anything of the new and modern world that brings about the elimination of sin? Is there anything of this world that can save you from age and decay leading to death? No! The world has tried for a long time to fix these things. Our philosophy and politicians envision utopian societies but we can't come close because we're evil and corrupt and human sin ruins everything. Our science and medicine has tried to end aging and death and in doing so often makes a mockery of itself. Some of these folks end up with faces that look tighter than the skin stretched over the top of a bongo drum. Despite our best efforts, everybody dies.

It is only the Gospel of Christ that removes your evil sin. It is only the Gospel of Christ that defeats death. You need the Gospel every bit as much as any and every sinner in all of human history.

Perceived rightly, all of this is a source of great comfort. You've received the same baptism as the martyr Stephen, who at his murder saw heaven opening to receive him with Christ standing at the right hand of God! You have a commonality with him that carries right into your own death to this life! The communion you enter in receiving the Lord's Supper reaches back into human history, joining you to all the faithful of every age in the very presence of Christ!

Yes, the biblical events are ancient. Yet the Savior revealed is living and active this very day delivering the same eternal gifts he has given since Adam first believed the promise of God. He gives them this day to you.

So yes, it can be tough sometimes to identify with and even preach on the events in the Bible because a lot of the nuts and bolts worldly stuff seems to only really apply to those people in history. But when you look beyond all that to the God at work in these happenings, you know that He is still working today because He has always been about the work of love and mercy—redeeming His people unto salvation.

If you ever get tempted to see God's Word as ancient and irrelevant, stop and look to the promises therein. You will see the gifts promised are for your present, and more so for your eternity.

Amen.