

Pentecost

May 23, 2021

John 14:23-31

About ten years ago, I attended a military school in Grand Prairie, Texas. Being in the Army Reserve, the schools required for military advancement often occur only once a year. You don't receive a choice when to attend school, and unfortunately for me, the school was throughout Holy Week and Easter; I was not able to participate in church services as I usually would have.

Lucky for me, as a chaplain assistant (Or Religious Affairs Specialist today), many individuals at the training are religious to some degree. But, they also come from varying backgrounds and denominations. What did this mean for me? It meant an Easter like no other!

As we sat down in an auditorium for the Easter service led by classmates, I experienced joy, sadness, fear, and relief. The relief came when it was over.

You see, what I learned as the service went on is that those leading the service, unannounced to me, were of Pentecostal flavors. It was an experience like no other with people speaking in tongues, coming at you as they climbed over chairs, and simply falling to the ground. Now, I want to take a moment to assure you that these were not chaplains, and none of our chaplains in the LCMS would do anything of this sort.

But, many people left this Easter service questioning whether or not their faith was strong enough, or if they even had faith, they did not share in the experiences those leading the service portrayed.

In the end, departing this Easter service provided no hope for those in attendance, no assurance for the daily battles of life and this world, no peace. The focus of the service was upon a subjective experience of each individual. The result was a gathering of individuals departing and heading into a world full of doubt, questioning their faith, and feeling hurt and sad.

The feelings of man are a gift from God the Father. We find joy in one another, sadness draws us to comfort one another, and remorse over sin draws us to confession with one another. Yet, faith is not dependent upon these feelings that are often fleeting and

changing. Faith is dependent upon Christ Jesus and Him crucified. It's dependent upon the Scripture which reveals this truth.

Now, we've all been to a gathering or event where we have not experienced or felt the same way as those we gathered with us. Maybe you saw the musical Hamilton and left being the only one saying, "Well, that was special." Or you attended a concert after not being to one for over a year and were quite honestly disappointed. Or you visit a friend's church, only to realize your version of church is very different from theirs, and they are sad you don't have the joy, joy, joy down in your heart. These situations leave you feeling like an outcast, like an orphan to the world around you.

In the verses before our Gospel today, Jesus says to His apostles, ***"I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you."*** (John 14:18) With these words, Martin Luther says, *"Christ is giving this promise and comfort (against our feelings and fear)."*

The apostles were not without feelings and emotions; they had been in a state of sadness as Jesus was crucified and buried. They were locked behind doors in fear of the Jews in the days following. Quite honestly, they believed they had become orphans without a Lord. But Jesus had said to them, ***"I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you."*** (John 14:18) With these words, Jesus was preparing the apostles for how the true Church on earth would feel and appear to the world.

Martin Luther went on to say, *"[Jesus] Himself shows how the Church appears according to its feelings and in the eyes of the world. It does not have the appearance of a beautiful, well-arranged, and constituted government, but it is a torn-up, scattered little flock of poor, miserable orphans, who have no head, protection, or help on earth. All the world laughs and scoffs at them as great fools for regarding themselves to be the Church and God's people."*

What is it that makes us, along with the apostles, the Church? It is Jesus' Word today; he says, ***"If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him."***

There is no room for subjective interpretation here. The teaching and instruction of Jesus Christ are the objective means by which faith is created and nourished in the children of God.

The objectiveness of God's Word gives focus to our worship within the Divine Service. It then informs us through Scripture, the Catechism, and the table of duties as we carry out our vocations as fathers, mothers, sons, daughters, brothers, sisters, columnists, Vice Presidents, musicians, teachers, and pastors.

However, a challenge occurs for each of us that when we depart this sanctuary on Sunday and head into vocations and face the struggles of each day, one can feel abandoned and alone. Your confession of faith does not align with the world's reliance on the subjective nature of "If it feels right, do it."

This world is a lonely place for the Christian.

On this day of Pentecost, we give thanks for sending the Holy Spirit and how the Spirit proclaims faith into our hearts.

Some see the Holy Spirit as a force that should produce out-of-the-body experiences or fill your mouths with new words as I experienced one frightful Easter morning. But, today in the Gospel, Jesus says, *"The Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you."*

The Holy Spirit will bring to "remembrance" all that Jesus had taught to the apostles. Not new things, but old things.

These words were meant to prepare the apostles for Jesus' crucifixion and ascension. Words meant to assure them they would not be orphaned or without hope in this world. Instead, to remember how their teacher cared for the lame, the sick, widow, the dead.

The same assurance is given to you; you are not without hope in the world. The Holy Spirit reveals the will and mighty works of God to you through the Word. That Jesus not only died for the sins of the world but rose again from the dead for you.

Today, you will not be given a new word. Even while you will experience times of fear and sadness, joy and celebration, and simply days of blah – none of these emotions remove the unwavering comfort and assurance the Holy Spirit reveals and gives to you now in the Holy Scriptures. A Word that creates and nourishes faith within you here throughout the Divine Service.

Week in and week out – the Divine Service remains consistent, and, in this objective consistency, the Holy Spirit continues to reveal to you true peace and brings you to the comfort of reconciliation and forgiveness with your Father in heaven.

Contrary to the thoughts of many, the Holy Spirit is not an elusive force; instead, He is the One who brings you the knowledge of Salvation.

So, don't feel alone or abandoned in this life. Don't fret if your feelings or emotions don't match those of your neighbor. Instead, meditate upon the Holy Scriptures. That is where the Spirit of understanding is promised to be and how He will gather you into the Church on earth. And then receive the consolation and comfort of Christ's peace through the proclamation of Jesus Christ today and in the days to come. For He is with you now and forever. +INJ+

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