

Easter 7 / May 12, 2024

John 17:17-18

“Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.”

Christ is in the world through the church

The last Sunday of Easter commemorates Jesus’ ascension, the withdrawal of His visible bodily presence from the Church and also the commission of the Church to make Him known in the world as God and Saviour and to call the nations to faith in Him. Jesus withdrew His bodily presence from the world on the Friday of His death, when His body was taken from the cross and buried in the Garden Tomb. Only believers saw Him raised from the dead. He showed Himself only to the Church. He showed Himself only to the Church, because it is through the Church that He shows Himself alive in the world. Jesus’ last words to the world while in His body were, “Father forgive them...into your hands I commit my spirit...It is finished.” He finished the work of human salvation. He offers forgiveness for all to receive. All who commit their spirits to Him in faith are in the good hands of the Father in time and for eternity. Jesus now speaks those words to the world through the Church on earth!

The world will not see Jesus again bodily, until He returns on the clouds in divine glory in the presence of the Father and the holy angels. The world sees Jesus now through the church, His body on earth. Jesus speaks the gospel of forgiveness and the promise of eternal salvation through the body of believers. In our gospel this morning Jesus prays for the Church on earth. He prays it may be one in the Spirit. He prays it may be sanctified through the word. He prays it may be faithful to fulfill the commission He has given it: to make His name known as the only Name given under heaven by which we are saved; to proclaim forgiveness and eternal life to the nations in His Name. Jesus makes Himself known to the church through the word. His word is truth. We see Jesus in the scriptures. Jesus washes our spirits with the word in the water of Holy Baptism. Jesus nourishes our souls with His body and blood in the bread and wine of Holy Communion. Jesus shows Himself to the church through the word, so the church may show Him to the world as its only God and the Saviour of all who believe.

Jesus came into the world, taking on human flesh through the working of the Holy Spirit within the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary. John wrote, “The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us.” Jesus came into the world through divine conception and human birth. He was in the world, but He was not of the world. The world was created through Him, but through sin the world was alienated from Him and did not receive Him. The world resisted Him spiritually and physically, despising His word and putting Him to death on the cross. Nevertheless, Jesus loved the world. Everything He did was meant to bring salvation to a world in bondage sin, manipulated by the devil and under the condemnation of physical and eternal death. People dying on crosses spat upon and cursed those who mocked them from below. Jesus prayed for their forgiveness. Though in the world, He was not of the world. Jesus came to save the world in the forgiveness of sin.

Jesus called women, children and men out of the world; out of the darkness of sin and alienation from God and into fellowship with the heavenly Father, through faith in Him. Jesus called through His words. Jesus’ words are spirit and life. Jesus speaks the word of God in accordance with the scriptures. Jesus’ words interpret and fulfill the Scriptures. Before He sent the apostles into the world to proclaim salvation in His Name, Luke says “He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures.” Especially the scriptures that spoke of Him. His sinless life, suffering and death to make atonement for the sin of the world. These words are of critical importance! Jesus is with us through the word. Jesus calls us to faith through the word. Jesus encourages our spirits and nourishes our faith through the word. Jesus gives the church His word. Jesus empowers us to witness to the world of His presence and the promise of forgiveness, through His word. Jesus gives forgiveness, faith and life to all who believe His words.

To that end Jesus prayed, “Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.” Sanctify can mean two things: To be holy and to set something apart for a holy purpose. Jesus was holy in His person by nature of His divine being. The church is holy through His word. Jesus was set apart for our salvation. The church is set apart to proclaim His salvation. Jesus is our righteousness. Jesus sanctifies us, makes us holy in the forgiveness of sins, through the word and washing of Holy Baptism, through the word in the bread and wine of Holy Communion, through the working of the Holy Spirit in the hearing of the word. We are in the world and a part of us will always be of the world, because of the sinfulness that remains in us. We need to daily and constantly turn to Jesus in the word in

order to abide in Him and in relationship with the heavenly Father. We need to be in the word to be renewed by the Holy Spirit. In order to withstand the resistance of the world, the attacks of the evil one and our own sinful nature, we need to clothe ourselves in the holy armour of God's word. Jesus withstood the temptation of the devil with God's word. How much more do we need to be in the word and seek God's power and protection in it!

Jesus prayed to the Father, "Just as you sent me into the world, I am sending them into the world." The church is set apart for this holy purpose. Jesus sends the Church to speak God's word in the world. There will always be children, women and men in the world who will gladly hear the voice of the church and believe in the gospel. God's word is amazing in its power. It never returns empty. It always creates faith in the hearts of some who hear. It always gives forgiveness and life to those who believe. In the book of Acts, Paul goes to an unlikely place to preach the word of Jesus, the Roman colony of Philippi. A most pagan city, almost entirely bereft of any foundation in the words of Moses and the prophets. But in that fallow soil the good seed fell on the heart of a woman named Lydia. The Holy Spirit in His marvelous and mystery way, made good soil through the word and opened her heart to believe in Jesus as her God and Saviour. Jesus sends us into the world to proclaim His word, the word about Him as the Saviour of all people. There is nothing of greater importance than being in the word, understanding the word and speaking the word with understanding. It is the power of God to eternal life in the hearts of those who believe. It opens hearts and creates faith to believe.

Jesus sanctifies us by His word. He makes us holy in the forgiveness of sins through the word in the washing of Holy Baptism and in the bread and wine of Holy Communion. Jesus reveals His mind to us in the word; spoken, read, meditated and prayed upon. Jesus sanctifies the church through the word. He sets it apart from the world, so that it may witness to Him in words and actions. Believers are sanctified, set apart and made holy, for the purpose of expressing the truth of the gospel, both in our words and in our kind actions towards one another and all people. The church is set apart to proclaim the gospel of salvation in Jesus' Name; to make disciples of all nations, teaching the truth of God's word.

On the fortieth day of His resurrection Jesus gathered the disciples on the Mount of Olives, outside of Jerusalem. He reaffirmed His continuing presence among them through His words. He promised the Holy Spirit, who would manifest Himself powerfully on the day of Pentecost. The Spirit would lead them into the truth by leading them into the scriptures and by bringing Jesus' words to their remembrance. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, they would speak His word to the nations, beginning in Jerusalem.

When He was taken from their sight, an angel assured them He would return. He will return and while we wait, He abides with us through His word. We see Him in His word. His word is truth! We hear Him through His word. His words give forgiveness and eternal life! He prayed, "Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth." He sanctifies us through His word. We sanctify Him by speaking His word in truth. His word reveals Him as the God and Saviour of all people. His word calls the world to faith in Him. God bless us to hear His word, speak His word truthfully and to embody His word in our lives in the world that others may see Jesus through us, hear Him speak, believe and have life in His name. Amen.