

The Sunday after the Ascension & Saude Confirmation – Pr. Faugstad sermon  
St. John 15:26-16:4: “What Can a Christian Expect to Have?”  
May 20/21, 2023 | Saude, Jerico, & Redeemer Lutheran Churches

**In Nomine Iesu**

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Heavenly Father, help Your weak children. Give us life and grace to bear witness. Give us the great honor of standing in the ranks of Jesus’ witnesses and suffering evil for His name’s sake. Keep us from all hypocrisy. Let our mouth and our life proclaim truth from the heart, and bless this testimony until Your kingdom comes. Amen. (Laache, *Book of Family Prayer*, p. 357)

*Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. (Rom. 1:7, etc.)*

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*The sermon text for today is taken from the fifteen and sixteenth chapters of the Gospel according to St. John. We read selected verses in Jesus’ name:*

[Jesus said:] “But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, He will bear witness about Me. And you also will bear witness, because you have been with Me from the beginning. / “I have said all these things to you to keep you from falling away. They will put you out of the synagogues. Indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God. And they will do these things because they have not known the Father, nor Me. / “But I have said these things to you, that when their hour comes you may remember that I told them to you. I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you.” (ESV)

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*These are Your words, heavenly Father. Sanctify us by Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen. (Joh. 17:17)*

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In Christ Jesus, who is constantly interceding for us at the right hand of God and pouring out His blessings on the Church, dear fellow redeemed:

This past Thursday marks the day of our Lord’s ascension, forty days after He rose from the dead on Easter Sunday. St. Paul writes in Ephesians 4 that *“When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men”* (v. 8). Everybody likes to receive gifts, so what gifts come to us from Jesus’ ascension?

Some people teach that the gifts we receive from Jesus are all about our life in this world. “If you give your life to Jesus,” they say, “you will receive great blessings. You will be more successful at your job and become more secure financially. Your family life will improve. You will have a more positive outlook, and your life will be happier.” Those are all wonderful things, but Jesus never promised to give them. Many people have been misled and frustrated by these false promises.

The gifts that Jesus did promise to give are tied directly to the work of God the Holy Spirit. Just before He ascended, Jesus said to His disciples, *“you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you”* (Act. 1:8). And what would they do with this power? Jesus told them, *“you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth”* (v. 8). The Holy

Spirit would be poured out on them, and they would boldly proclaim the truth about what Jesus had done for all sinners.

In today's reading, Jesus called the Holy Spirit the "Paraclete," which is often translated as "Helper" or "Comforter." The Holy Spirit would come to guide them along the way and give them strength to do what they never could on their own. He would teach them the truth which He received from God the Son and God the Father. He would bear witness about who Jesus was and what He had accomplished. It is obvious that the disciples of Jesus received these gifts, because they went from huddling together in locked rooms to openly preaching about Jesus in Jerusalem from the day of Pentecost onward. Their attitude changed from fear and doubt to confidently and eagerly speaking the truth.

And what reward did they receive for their faithful work? They were put out of the synagogues—excommunicated from the church. They were often beaten for preaching the truth. And of the apostles who were sent out to preach the Gospel after Jesus' ascension, church tradition indicates that all but one of them were martyred for what they taught.

That seems like a questionable bargain. If I were to start a club, and I told people that membership in the club would not benefit them in any obvious external way, how many would want to be part of it? It would not bring them more respect in the community. It would not make them more likely to be chosen for important positions. It would not make them more popular, and in fact, it would probably bring them trouble and hardship. That wouldn't be a very popular club. But this is something like membership in the Christian Church.

Now you could find a church that would not compromise your standing in society at all, because many churches have changed their teachings to fit the trends in society. The biblical and historic teaching of the Church, for example, is that no one should receive Holy Communion unless he has been properly examined, but many churches open Communion to everyone regardless of what they understand and believe. The biblical and historic teaching of the Church is that only qualified men should be pastors, but many churches allow unqualified men and women to preach and administer the Sacraments. The biblical and historic teaching of the Church is that all sex outside of traditional marriage is sinful, but many churches say that God supports whatever personal choices anyone makes about when and with whom to have sex.

If you do hold to the biblical and historic teaching of the Church, you will find that society and a significant part of the church in the world is not very friendly toward you. You may have heard disparaging comments from people in the community or even from your own friends about how the church you attend is too judgmental, too strict, or too old-fashioned. "That's why your church is so small," they say. "Why don't you just attend one of the larger churches around?"

It all comes back to what we are expecting to receive from the ascended Lord Jesus. We can't expect to receive approval both from Him and from the world, because Jesus said that the world hated Him and persecuted Him (Joh. 15:18,20). Ultimately Jesus was nailed to a cross, even though He had committed no crime and had healed and helped many who were sick and

hurting. The people who crucified Him thought they were doing it in service to God, and Jesus said this same belief would also motivate those who would persecute and kill His followers.

So why would any of us want to follow Jesus if we know it will cause us pain and trouble in the world? We follow Jesus, because He has the words of eternal life (Joh. 6:68). The world cannot give eternal life. All the world can offer is temporary wealth, temporary fame, temporary pleasure, temporary peace. But as soon as we die, everything we built up, everything we enjoyed in this life, goes away. It would be one thing if we just ceased to exist when we die. If that were the case, then why not live it up now? But God says that all who die in unbelief, rejecting the salvation Jesus won for them, are consigned to eternal punishment in hell.

That is not the case for believers. You and I will not be punished eternally, because we are justified in Christ. To be justified does not mean that all the things we have done and said are reasonable and right—far from it. We have sinned just as greatly as everyone else in the world and deserve damnation just like they do. But by faith in Jesus, we are declared right with God, innocent of any wrongdoing. That's what justification means. It means that through Jesus' atoning death and victorious resurrection, we are counted righteous before God, forgiven of all our sins, heirs of eternal life.

Because Jesus gave Himself for you, you can expect to receive tremendous spiritual gifts through the means He has established. Through Holy Baptism, you were washed clean of all your sins and made a child of God. Your life and your future were tied to Jesus, who "is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty." Because He lives, you live. Because He reigns, you reign. And He promises to come back again in glory to take you and all believers with Him to His heavenly kingdom.

Jesus has also promised to bring you His gifts through the preaching of His Word and the administration of His Holy Supper. Even though He visibly departed from this world, He is very much present in all His power and glory. After Jesus ascended, the evangelist Mark wrote that the apostles *"went out and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by accompanying signs"* (16:20). Jesus is still at work among us. He imparts His righteousness, forgiveness, and life as we listen to His Word, and as we eat His body and drink His blood with the bread and wine of Holy Communion.

Here we are, so often weak, faithless, stubborn, and lacking in love toward one another, and Jesus comes to us with mercy and grace. "Peace be with you," He says. "I forgive you all your sins. I am not angry with you. All that is Mine is still yours." And the Holy Spirit works through these powerful promises to comfort us and strengthen our faith.

The Holy Spirit convinces us that what Jesus has won for us and what He has stored up for us are greater treasures than we could find anywhere else. No one else has atoned for sin. No one else has conquered death. We proclaim what Jesus has done, not to cause trouble in the world, but to save the world. Our merciful God wants *"all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth"* (1Ti. 2:4), and so do we. That won't happen if we water down God's truth and compromise our teachings with the times.

But we know that boldly speaking the truth will cause friction, just as Jesus and His disciples met opposition and persecution. We can expect to have trouble in the world, because we are not of the world. Jesus chose us out of the world (Joh. 15:19). He wanted to give us so much more than the world ever could.

As we follow Jesus by faith, we know exactly what to expect. He has told us clearly about the gifts that are coming our way. He gave the gift of the Holy Spirit to guide us into all truth and to comfort us through His saving work. He also warned us to expect hostility and trials in the world. These things do not come to us as punishment from God, but as signs of His faithfulness.

We are not meant to stay in this world any more than Jesus was. After completing His work to save us, He ascended to the throne of His Father, where He rules over all things and continuously blesses His Church. With Him as our Lord and King, we cannot lose, even if everything we have in this life is taken from us. With the psalmist we say, *"The LORD is on my side; I will not fear. What can man do to me?"* (Psa. 118:6). Soon the sufferings of this present time will come to an end, and we will join our Savior in the glories of heaven.

*Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, forevermore. Amen.*

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