**6th Sunday of Easter – Year C – Sunday, May 22, 2022**

**Pr. Morgan Gordy – Assistant to the Bishop for Disaster Ministry – Southeastern Synod**

**The Holy Gospel according to John 14:23-29**

23Jesus answered [Judas (not Iscariot),] “Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. 24Whoever does not love me does not keep my words; and the word that you hear is not mine, but is from the Father who sent me.  
 25“I have said these things to you while I am still with you. 26But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. 27Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid. 28You heard me say to you, ‘I am going away, and I am coming to you.’ If you loved me, you would rejoice that I am going to the Father, because the Father is greater than I. 29And now I have told you this before it occurs, so that when it does occur, you may believe.”

**The Gospel of the Lord! Praise to you O Christ.**

Once on my way home from a hospital visit, I stopped by the local car wash.

While I was there one of the men working there saw my collar and came up to me and asked “hey, are you a minister? I see that… [pointing to the collar around my neck] …I nodded…. “I thought you must be” he said… Then he told me something that has stayed with me ever since…

He said he was “trying to stay close to the Lord, stay in the Book.”

He said his mom made him go to church when he was young but he hadn’t gone to church for a long while…. but he had decided to change that not too long ago, because he has two kids now, one 5 and one 14…

What captured my heart was when he said “I have seen my share of troubles, I want them to know that when it gets bad or if they find themselves in trouble, and I am not around, that they are not alone” ...

“I want them to have that peace… that peace …. you know, you can’t really describe it…. you just know that it’s gonna be alright…you are gonna be alright”

Peace, I leave you. My peace I give you. Jesus says to the disciples in his farewell discourse in today’s Gospel.

Peace.

Peace – not a mere feel good feeling- but a peace that speaks…that reveals…

a peace that opens you to a new awareness of the depth and breadth of God’s love and your place held within it and encompassing of all…

This is a peace that sustains and holds you up in the face of trouble, suffering. It is a peace that let’s you know that you are never alone, that God’s with you…

A storm is brewing… Changes are a coming…. and the disciples will have to walk on without Jesus physically by their side.

They will face unbelievable trials and persecutions ahead. Just in a few days from this conversation - they will fail Jesus as they betray and abandon him as he is arrested and crucified. And they will suffer too, in the times ahead when they too would face persecutions and suffering and death as world will reject them, too.

Jesus is preparing them for his leaving, preparing his loved ones so that they will know what to do when he is not physically present, so they will have strength,

and peace.

Like the loving father I met at the carwash, Jesus wants the disciples to know they will not be abandoned. They will not be alone - that God will be there.

Jesus wants them to have this peace - this knowing - this assurance..

This text speaks so loudly to me of company and presence of the Triune God.

The solidarity found in the flow of God’s love, God’s life eternal – now and forever. And within it God’s love for the whole world, for all of us.

The Triune God comes and makes home with us.

Jesus said: Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and **we** will come to them and make **our** home with them John 14:23

Those who love me will keep my word.

Keep is an interesting word in this passage.

We often hear it defined as ‘obey’ and then we are tempted to understand it in the context of ‘living right’ – as it is defined by our current context – how we see it …

But looking back, haven’t we seen that often our interpretation of the Word has fallen short of God’s intentions for us and for the world.

How many times have we erred on the side of drawing lines to exclude others because of faulty Biblical or theological interpretations or cultural or societal preferences and norms.

Consider the church’s silence in Nazi Germany, or the endorsement of slavery, or the interpretation of marital relationships which allowed for domestic violence against women and children… and I could go on…

Scripture has been bent to human desires throughout history…intentionally or unintentionally, we become skilled at manipulating the word – instead of keeping it.

And when we do, we keep dividing ourselves in strata of worthiness and unworthiness..

To keep in these ways is inconsistent with God’s word of love and inclusion of all in the kingdom…it is inconsistent with the love manifested on the Cross…

In Greek where we come closest to the meaning of the word at that time, keep is more accurately understood as holding dear.

*Holding dear… Treasuring….*

When you hold something or someone dear they are with you always. Their actions, their words, their loves continue to speak to and through yours. You become one, you abide, and it abides in you…

Jesus wants them and us that close.

And Jesus wants the disciples to know that this Word they are to keep, this word that they hear and hold dear is of God, coming to them through him, abiding with them.

And when they have a hard time, Jesus promises that they will have a helper, an advocate tohelp them remember his words and understand. They will not be alone.

Guided by the Spirit’s presence, as they face the hard days ahead, they will be able to endure whatever comes.

There is peace, there..

Living in that peace opens us to the Triune God’s love for all the world, to our neighbors, to all God’s children, seeing all as beloved by God.

it is a love that breaks boundaries and gives us the desire and the courage to bear that powerful love to all.

It moved the spread of the Gospel from the Jews to the Gentiles, as we heard last week of Peter’s vision opening him to the unlimited expanse of God’s love and inclusion and his dining with those who were uncircumcised. And today we hear it as Paul after having a vision, moved his ministry to Greece and there he meets Lydia whose heart was opened by God and who was instrumental in founding the church in Philippi. Philippi – a place that was founded by Roman soldiers and their offspring.

No place is too outside for the Word to touch, the Holy Spirit to move and to transform!

By the power of the Holy Spirit we too are sent to share the Gospel of God’s love for one another…in good times and most importantly in difficult ones, ones like the loving father at the carwash was worried about…times of great tragedy.

This past week we saw again another horrific racially motivated massacre of God’s children- this time in Buffalo, NY. We pray for their families and friends as we commit to work for end of racial hatred in our land. Lord in your, mercy…

As were the martyrs of Mother Emanuel in Charleston, SC – these beloved children of God were murdered because of racist motivated hate and bigotry… it was reported that the 18 year old man espoused a belief in the conspiracy replacement theory…and therefore people of color he perceived as threat, his enemy, thereby, validating his actions in his mind.

Hate flowed from the perpetrator’s fear of loss of status and power. Hate of the other was emboldened by and rooted in extremist ideology of white supremacy.

Sadly some of those who share these beliefs have provided encouragement and support for these perpetrators of acts of hate… they act as though they do not recognize those precious souls who died as beloved children of God..

Jesus knows how a crowd can turn its affections - from adulation to crucifixion…

The crucified God knows this horror and pain– this hate - and suffered and died at the hands of it. God knows suffering and is with those who suffer and calls us to be there too..

It is the same Crucified God that gives us his peace…

And this peace that Christ gives seeks to change the hate filled hearts of those who seek to destroy it. For God loves them too.

We are the Body of Christ called to bear love into a very divided and hurtful and hurting world full of grief, anger and pain.

In the face of it all, Jesus tells us: “Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.”

Jesus breathes peace and sends the Spirit so we can remember and understand his words – his Way.. and be about the work that we have been called to do - to work for justice, peace, mercy and compassion, to stand with the brokenhearted and suffering, to bear the love of God to all. Even at personal risk.

We will face trials and persecutions. But when we encounter hard times - if we listen carefully we may hear Jesus say:

“I have seen my share of troubles, I want you to know that when it gets bad or if ya’ll find yourselves in trouble, and ya’ll don’t see me around, that ya’ll are not alone... “

Jesus wants us all to “have that peace… that peace ….you know, you can’t really describe it…. you just know that it’s gonna be alright…that you’re gonna be alright”

Because God is with you.

May the Spirit empower us to spread God’s love so that all may come to know and live in God’s peace….

And May the peace that surpasses all understanding be with you all now and forever. AMEN