

John 14:15-21
May 17, 2020

Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Grace and peace be with you from God our Father and our risen Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Happy Easter!

We're now getting to the end of it. Easter is almost over.

Two weeks from today is Pentecost, the day we celebrate the giving of the Holy Spirit. And, this Thursday is Ascension Day, the day we remember Jesus returning to Heaven.

As you may recall, according to the Book of Acts, the disciples walked around Jerusalem for 10 days after Jesus ascended into Heaven waiting for the Holy Spirit to show up. Ascension Day is 40 days after the resurrection and 10 days before Pentecost, just so you have an idea of where we are in the Church year.

So, today, four days before the Ascension, we hear part of what is known as Jesus' Final Discourse from the Gospel of John. This is Jesus' farewell speech to his disciples before he heads to the cross and in to the resurrection. So, on the night before he is killed, Jesus is telling the disciples, and us, that we will not be abandoned, the Holy Spirit will be with us always.

It's a promise, and God always keeps God's promises. Nearly 2000 years after the resurrection, we know that first hand. The Holy Spirit is with us.

But, the disciples had no idea what Jesus was talking about. They couldn't even get their minds around Jesus dying, let alone the Holy Spirit coming upon them. I can just imagine the disciples smiling and nodding – "ok, sure Jesus, hey Peter, can you pass the matza?"

It's not until 53 days after this meal that they're going to have any idea what Jesus is talking about, when the Holy Spirit, the Advocate, comes to be with them.

I kind of picture the Holy Spirit as being a security blanket that gets wrapped around us to keep us in God's love, but the Holy Spirit is much more than just a security blanket.

The Holy Spirit is bold and it sends us off on adventures that we would never take on our own. Like the wind picking up a kite and sending it hundreds of yards out into the stratosphere, the Holy Spirit takes us places – to the places God will have us go.

God comes to us and then takes us places (+), because, we are not orphans, we are children of God. Orphans have no one to call daddy, but we are adopted by God so that when God, our daddy calls, we go along.

That's the assurance we have in Holy Baptism where we are sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever.

We are God's children, and because of that, we are never alone, not even in the darkest of times, not even in the midst of a pandemic.

We are God's children and God is with us constantly thanks to the Holy Spirit, the one who has been called to be at our side. In Greek, the Advocate is translated from the word paraklaytos – para, beside, like parallel, and klaytos – to be called. The Holy Spirit has been called to be at our side.

You never walk alone. You have an eternal companion. We have an eternal companion, because the "you" in John 14 is plural, so it's not that just one of us has the Holy Spirit as our companion, but all of us do. All of us. All of us.

God loves all of us – like equally. No one is better than anyone else, because we all fall short of the glory of God. We all need Jesus, and the Holy Spirit, walking beside us to dig us out of the messes we get ourselves into.

Do you see the resurrection imagery there? In a hole, Jesus pulls us out.

And if we can take a trip back to Holy Week real quick, on Holy Wednesday, we heard about how the Adversary, satan, had entered into Judas Iscariot. That was in John 13:27. Now, a chapter later, Jesus is talking about the Advocate being with us, another advocate. Just as Jesus advocates for us, so the Holy Spirit is being sent to advocate for us constantly and eternally.

So, you have to imagine a huge court room with God, the Father as the judge, and Jesus and then the Holy Spirit as being our defense attorneys, with satan being the prosecuting attorney.

Throughout all of time, satan has been trying to get God to wipe people off the face of the Earth. Again and again satan puts forth proof for why human beings should

be destroyed, but God sends in Jesus to defend us, and as our defense attorney, he takes on our punishment and destroys it on the cross.

And so that we'll never forget that for God our slate is wiped clean, the Holy Spirit is called to be with us, constantly whispering into our ear that we are loved and that there is nothing to fear. God is with us and for us. All of us. Every one of us, no matter what ideologies we have.

We don't earn God's love, God gives it to us freely first. God comes to us first and gives us that love, the love of the cross and resurrection, eternally. All of us. All of us. The "you" is plural.

So, last week I got in trouble. Have you noticed how wearing a face mask has all of a sudden become a political thing? A friend of mine even got yelled at in a grocery store in Fremont, Nebraska, for wearing a mask. The man told her that she isn't supporting the president by wearing a mask. Needless to say, she was quite appalled and afraid. Her act of wearing a mask was an act of love for others.

So, I was on FaceBook and a friend had posted an article that was very divisive. Very much a – we're right and they are wrong type of thing. We're smart; they're stupid. I made a comment that politicians are trying to divide us, we need to stick together, "we're all in this together." Now, what I didn't know at the time was that that phrase had become very political as well. Who knew? I didn't.

When I think of that phrase, I think of High School Musical, a movie that came out in 2006. You know <singing> "We're all in this together, once we know that we are we're all stars and we see that..." You know – the Wildcats – all for one. Team work. Together.

I had been on a High School Musical kick last week – I watched the High School Musical the Musical the Series, and then followed that up by the first two made for tv movies. So, when I said, while talking about the pandemic, that we are all in this together, I was thinking in the sense that we're all in this this together. We're a team. We need each other to get through this as safely as possible.

Well – a friend of a friend took, "we're all in this together" to be divisive and that I was the one being divisive, because I'm not supporting the president. Kind of goes back to that grocery store in Nebraska, but I was just getting at the fact that we need to look out for one another and care about one another. I mean – that's what Jesus does, and as his followers, that's what we are called to do as well.

Oy. What a mess. Can love be divisive? Really?

Well – the answer to that question is yes. Yes – love is divisive – unconditional love is very divisive – which seems so backwards, but it’s exactly what got Jesus nailed to a cross. And today, on the anniversary of Brown versus the Board of Education, we can easily see where love for all can be totally divisive.

But, Jesus did not stay in the tomb. God says love is stronger than hate. That is the proclamation of the empty tomb, and the fact of the matter is that when we proclaim that love is for all people – all people - no matter who they are – that can make some people angry, but that doesn’t stop us from loving anyway.

But, God knows how hard it is to love, and so the Holy Spirit is called to be with us to constantly whisper, or maybe even yell, those words of love to us. I’m loved, you’re loved, that person is loved, we are all loved. We’re all in this love together, and being in that love can be a challenge, especially among those who think love is earned or deserved, but it’s not. Thank God, because none of us is deserving or worthy.

And once we realize just how undeserving we are of God’s love and at the same time know how greatly we are loved anyway - Jesus, after all, died and was resurrected for all of us while we were yet sinners - we can go out and love in the world. With the help of the Holy Spirit, we can keep Jesus’ command, which is to love one another as he has loved us. That’s Maundy Thursday – the command Jesus gave before his death was to love one another.

Love neighbor, love Jesus, love God. Jesus is in our neighbor, who is in God, who is in us. So, like I was saying, “we’re all in this together, once we know that we are, we’re all stars and we see that what we do to others we do to ourselves.

And since Wednesday is Rogation, we also remember that what we do to creation we also do to ourselves. We’re all in this together with all of creation. What we do to the Earth, we do to ourselves, and isn’t that how we’ve found ourselves here in the midst of pandemic in the first place?

I’d say so, but thanks be to God, our judge is lenient. Yes, there are ramifications for our actions, but God will not wipe us off the face of the Earth. Instead, God deploys us into the world to make amends as we ourselves have been forgiven.

The other night I was thinking, if we were in Old Testament times, we would be rolling around in sack cloth and ash right now, begging God for forgiveness. Like

– each and every one of us would be doing self-examination to see how we might be responsible for this pandemic, but instead there doesn't seem to be any remorse at all. It's always someone else's fault. I'm the victim here.

But, we really have to ask ourselves – are we really victims or are we partially to blame. I think we're all partially to blame. We're all in this together.

On my part, I have confessed my sin, and continue to confess my sin – the sin of greed and self-centeredness. I might like to believe that I have less fault than someone else, but that is also sin, because the fact is that we are all in this together. We all contribute.

And once we realize our sin, God forgives us, and if we have truly repented, we seek to do things differently. Instead of tripping over that same stone over and over again, we seek a different path, and every time we trip, we confess and are forgiven again and again and again. That keeps us humble, so that we can truly love one another, and instead of being divided, we are united in Christ. We are united in the Holy Spirit. We are united in God's love.

We are not individual orphans, we are together God's children. Perhaps a dysfunctional family, but blood is thicker than water – the blood of Christ that is. And water is actually pretty good too, because the water of baptism unites us into the blood of Christ through the gift of the Holy Spirit.

And so once again, I'll encourage you to sign up for the Golden Rule 2020 and take the pledge to love those with whom you disagree remembering that we are all in this together, because we are all united in God's love. So, let us do God's work by treating one another with respect and dignity.

Remember, Jesus didn't kill anyone – and killing doesn't just mean physical death, it also includes hurting our neighbor in anyway. We are to help our neighbor live and look out for their well-being in whatever way we can, which can be as simple as just wearing some sort of covering over our mouths and noses.

We are the body of Christ, together, and the Holy Spirit sends us out, together, into the world to live the good news of death and resurrection – death to self-centeredness and life in love for others.

Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Thanks be to God. Amen.