

John 14:23-29/Acts 16:9-15 – Graduation
May 26, 2019

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.

Today is the 6th Sunday of Easter. Today we continue in the celebration of Jesus risen from the dead as we look forward to Jesus' ascension into heaven and the sending of the Holy Spirit.

According to Acts, on the 40th day after the resurrection, Jesus ascended into heaven, which is this coming Thursday. And then, on the 50th day, the Holy Spirit was sent to us – the day known as Pentecost - which we celebrate on June 9 this year.

In the reading we have from John today, Jesus, prior to his crucifixion, is already promising the disciples the gift of the Holy Spirit, the Advocate. Jesus promises us that the Holy Spirit will keep Jesus' teachings in our hearts and give us the gift of peace.

As you may recall, on the day of the resurrection, Jesus appeared to his disciples who were locked up in a room out of the fear that the Jewish authorities would seek them out to have them killed. In to the midst of their fear, Jesus enters and gives them peace. It is at that point in the Gospel of John that Jesus gives his disciples the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Those of you who were on the ball caught that five weeks ago. Yes – there are two different tellings of the giving of the Holy Spirit.

Matthew, Mark, and Luke are all what we call the Synoptic Gospels, as in being a summary of Jesus life. They all seem to have the same sources, with pretty much the same chain of events. John, on the other hand, is kind of off on his own. So we see differences in John that we do not see in the other three – like when the Holy Spirit was given.

Luke and the other synoptic Gospels were written earlier than John. And, it's important to remember that none of the Gospels were written by any of the actual disciples. They were written by those who followed those disciples and two of the Synoptic writers, Mark and Luke, also hung out with Paul.

Paul's letters are actually the earliest writings in the New Testament. First Thessalonians was written around the year 51.

Up until the year 70, Jesus' teachings and activities had just been shared verbally. Mark is actually a theatric production that was memorized and told to an audience. If you go on You Tube, you can see it for yourself done in English. That's why it is the shortest Gospel – it only takes about 2 hours to read it straight through. It was likely also the first one written down, because it had been so well rehearsed.

As we hear in the beginning of Luke, he says that he has heard all of the stories about Jesus and decided to write them down for all people to be able to have for all of eternity. After completing his Gospel, Luke then wrote Acts.

Luke was also written around the year 70, but John was written around the year 90 and it is more theological than the Synoptics. It's almost like John's sermon. He doesn't just tell us what happens, he interprets it.

So for John, the Holy Spirit and Peace go hand and hand. He wants us to be sure we understand that the Holy Spirit comes to us to assure us of God's love for us and God's unending relationship with us. It is something that cannot be broken, even by death.

And so John calls the Holy Spirit the Advocate to assure us that God is with us, not against us. An Advocate, after all, seeks only the best for the people it's advocating for. And when you break down the word in Greek, it means the one who is called to walk beside us. The Holy Spirit is God walking with us. That's quite a gift!

God is with us – always. That's the proclamation of the resurrection and it is the gift of the Holy Spirit. With that, we have peace. There is nothing to fear. If God is for us, who can be against us?!

And as we see in Acts, the Holy Spirit isn't just hanging out with us, the Holy Spirit also sends us out into the World to bring the good news of God's love to the World.

The peace, God's peace, is not just for us. It is for everyone. It is something we are to share in the World.

As you know, we live in anxious times. Although compared to other times in history, we've got it pretty easy, but never the less, people are naturally anxious.

That's part of our survival mode. We've always got to be on the lookout for the next thing that might kill us.

The Holy Spirit reminds us that we have nothing to fear, not even death, because nothing can separate us from the love of God as found in Christ Jesus our Lord. Nothing, because the Holy Spirit is with us.

So, just as Jesus comes to us and gives us peace, so we are sent to share that peace in the world with everyone who is anxious, and there are a lot of anxious people out there – and maybe in here too.

Today in Acts, we hear about Paul's jump from Anatolia, modern day Turkey, to Macedonia, which is in modern day Greece, to share God's message of peace.

In a dream, Paul sees an anxious young man from Macedonia begging him to come to them and share God's good news with them. Knowing that he was being sent by the Holy Spirit, Paul crosses the sea and enters Macedonia.

The funny thing, though, is that the first person Paul meets to share God's peace with is neither a man nor a Macedonian. Lydia is from Asia Minor, where Paul just came from, and she is a woman!

Paul thought he was being sent to do one thing, but in reality the Holy Spirit was sending him to the same place to meet up with someone else. Lydia! Lydia who is the founding member of the Church in Macedonia.

Paul was sent to start the Church in Macedonia, but it did not happen as he thought it would.

And Lydia, she was just in Macedonia to sell her purple cloth. She clearly had no idea what was in store for her. With a chance encounter with Paul, she became the chief evangelist of Macedonia. She would go on to travel the region sharing God's good news with all sorts of communities.

Had Paul only been looking for a Macedonian man and Lydia only looking to sell her textiles, you'd have to wonder where we would be today.

So, just remember, dear graduates, that you never know how or where the Spirit may blow, and you never know to whom the Spirit may lead you, or vice versa.

It was so appropriate yesterday that it was windy during the graduation ceremony, and also that your school colors are red, because both are symbols of the Holy

Spirit. And, the Holy Spirit will definitely be a part of your future, because the Holy Spirit is walking beside you – always.

An Episcopal priest friend was telling me that his daughter was driving to a concert on her college campus on a really rainy night. She saw a woman with a cello and guessed that she must be going to play in the concert she was going to. So, she pulled up alongside her and asked her if she would like a ride. She told her she was on her way to the concert and just wanted to give her a ride.

The cellist gladly accepted the ride and the chance to get out of the rain. As they were driving along they got on the topic of Church. The cellist told the driver that she belonged to an obscure church body known as the Episcopal Church and that she couldn't find a church she liked.

The driver just about fell over. She told the cellist that her dad is a priest and then she invited her to come with her at St. Jame's, which she loves and is sure the cellist would enjoy also.

You never know where the Holy Spirit is going to pop up. You never know how you might be an answer to prayer. And, you never know how your own prayer might be answered.

The Holy Spirit blows as it chooses and if we are open to it, it will set us off on a journey that we can't even imagine.

I went to college to study field biology. I wanted to be a field researcher. I thought that was my call, but God had other plans. Little would I have guessed that volunteering as the youth director at my home congregation would lead me here.

Bishop Rob often talks about how his college roommate invited him to chapel, which resulted in him becoming an Episcopalian, then a priest, and then he ended up landing the big gig of Bishop of Colorado.

And I'm sure that every one of us older folks here today can tell stories of how we didn't end up where we thought we would when we graduated from High School.

Now, I'm not saying don't have a plan, all I'm saying is to keep your eyes open. Keep your eyes open for where God may be sending you. You might be Paul or you might be Lydia, you might be the friend or you might end up being the bishop. You might be Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John. Who knows?

But, I guarantee you that the Holy Spirit has great things in store for you - things that you can't even imagine right now. Your story is just getting started so don't even think about writing the end just yet.

And always remember that you are not alone. The Holy Spirit is beside you giving you God's peace. And the Holy Spirit will manifest itself in the flesh through the friends and family who love you, and even through perfect strangers whom you've yet to meet.

God is with you everywhere you go. And should you ever doubt it, just trace the mark of the cross that was made on your forehead in Baptism. God promises to be with you through it all and God never breaks a promise!

So don't be anxious about trying something new. Don't be anxious about what other people think you should do. Don't be anxious about status symbols or peer pressure. You just be you. That's who God made you to be and that's who God wants you to be.

One of my favorite adages is – How does a mountain praise God? By being a mountain. Not by being a tree or a bird, or anything else, but by being a mountain.

God created you in love, walks beside you in love, and is advocating for you. So, go with your gut and your passions and let the Holy Spirit blow you into your life's great adventure.

And, be at Peace. Christ, through the Holy Spirit, is with you always. Always!

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

Thanks be to God. Amen.