

John 14:23-29

²³ Jesus answered him, “If anyone loves me, he will hold on to my word. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. ²⁴ The one who does not love me does not hold on to my words. The word that you are hearing is not mine, but it is from the Father who sent me. ²⁵ “I have told you these things while staying with you. ²⁶ But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and remind you of everything I told you. ²⁷ “Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, and do not let it be afraid. ²⁸ You heard me tell you, ‘I am going away and I am coming to you.’ If you loved me, you would be glad that I am going to the Father, because the Father is greater than I. ²⁹ “I have told you now before it happens so that, when it does happen, you may believe.

Sermon for Easter 6, May 9, 2021 St. Paul’s, Green Garden

Text: John 14:23-29

Theme: “Jesus Gives His Disciples Farewell Gifts”

In the name of Jesus, Dear fellow redeemed,

Have you ever known someone who knew you and understood you so well it was as if they knew your thoughts at the same time you were thinking them? Maybe it was a teacher; maybe it was a childhood friend or a grandparent or a close friend. But then, somewhere along the way it was time to say good bye. Maybe the school year ended and you would be in a different classroom. Maybe you had to move away from your friend. Or perhaps your grandparent died. And maybe you wanted to give that special person a farewell gift. But you couldn’t think of what to get for this person so you thought, “What’s the use? I won’t ever find anything that will be special enough for my friend, grandparent or teacher. But when it was time to say good bye, your friend had something to give you, something that once again showed how well he knew you and something that you could put to use all the time.

That is the way it was for the Savior’s disciples. He had been telling them he would soon leave them. This was something they really didn’t want to think about. But Jesus still kept telling them. We catch up with Christ and his disciples the night before he died. Once again he reminded them that he would soon leave them. But he told them that he would not leave them without comfort. No, instead he gave them precious farewell gifts. These gifts were not trinkets for them to remember him. No, much more than that, he gave them gifts they would need to use every

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day of their lives, especially when they could no longer see him with their eyes, but only their faith. And friends, Jesus gives those gifts not only to the disciples. He gives them to you and me, and to every one of his followers through the centuries. You see, Jesus knew that we would live in the time after his ascension and he wants us to be able to live our life under him in this world. So he gives us 1. God's abiding love, 2. He sends instruction through the Holy Spirit, and 3. He lavishes on us a continual condition of peace.

When Jesus spoke to his disciples it was never a matter of IF God would keep his promises. When he spoke he wanted his disciples to know that God's promises WILL BE fulfilled—there is no doubt. Jesus had his eye on the future, a future that was very clouded and unknown to these disciples especially because he was about to suffer and die and they really did not understand all of these things. They were still thinking that Jesus was going to conquer sin by building up a great earthly kingdom. This understanding of Jesus' kingdom comes out in the question of the disciple named Thaddeus who was also called Judas—not Judas Iscariot. He asked Jesus, **“But Lord, why do you intend to show yourself to us and not to the world?”** He seems to believe that Jesus will have to show himself to the whole world if he is going to build up his kingdom in this world. But the Savior really shows that his kingdom is not visible in this world.

“If anyone loves me, he will hold on to my word. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.”²⁴ **The one who does not love me does not hold on to my words. The word that you are hearing is not mine, but it is from the Father who sent me.**” The Savior is about to leave them and he tells them about the very best gift that he could give them. He is really saying, people who have heard God's Word, whose hearts are touched by the Holy Spirit and have been brought to faith, are people who now know that God loves them. They respond to his love with love for him. They show their love by obeying God's commands. In his first epistle John reminds us, **“This is love for God—to obey his commands.”** When God gives people faith he brings them into his kingdom of believers.

This gift of membership in God's kingdom is not visible to the human eye. But Jesus says, that everyone who is a member of this kingdom by faith receives the love of his Father. And what is more, he says, WE the triune God, will come to make our home with him. Yes, one of Jesus' parting gifts to us is the promise that the Lord who gives us the gift of faith brings us into his kingdom, and lives right in our hearts. The world can't see this. The world doesn't understand at all. But Jesus says, **“If anyone loves me, he will hold on to my word. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.”** You believe in

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Jesus your Savior. You love him. Do you want Jesus to live in your heart? Then, dear friends, DO NOT neglect God's Word. Stay connected to the teaching of Your Savior. Jesus has given us this parting gift—we are members of his kingdom—a kingdom that we can only see with the eyes of faith. But Jesus says, my kingdom is there in your heart and you are proof of it each time you hear God's Word and obey it.

But so often we give in to the desires of our sinful nature and make excuses for not hearing the Word of our Lord. We may not feel it, but we drift farther from our Lord. And the more we do so, the more staying away from worship and Bible Study becomes a habit. But you may ask, what, really is the danger? Let me tell you. Some years ago a late night news program aired a debate between 2 Christians and 2 atheists to prove or disprove the existence of God. But even before the debate began they showed clips of people who blatantly defied God. One man I remember said, "I deny the Father, I deny the Son, I deny the Holy Spirit and I willingly commit the sin against the Holy Spirit." Dear friends, you and I do not want to neglect, nor do we want to spit in the face of God's wonderful gift of faith, and being brought into his kingdom. Those who spit in God's face will be judged by their own words unless they repent.

You and I should view such brazen defiance of God with fear and trembling. We realize that if God had not come to us with the power of his forgiveness in his Word, we too, would be excluded from his kingdom because of our sins. We need our Lord's strength and the power of his Word. Jesus told his disciples that they did not need to fear. Throughout his earthly ministry He had told them what they needed to know and the Holy Spirit would be there to remind them of everything he had told them.

Have you ever needed to remember something very important? It can be easy to forget that important ingredient for the cake your wife is baking or the certain brand of motor oil your husband wanted you to pick up. Of course, I should write a note to remind myself. But sometimes I think, "Well, it's only one or two items. I won't forget them." But later I realize I should have written myself a note! The teachings of God's Word are something we never want to forget. Yet our sinful nature would like to forget God's truths and pretend they are not important. Jesus wanted to prepare his disciples for the time when he would ascend to heaven. When he was gone he wanted them to know that every one of his teachings is important. He did not want them to forget anything.

But how weak they were. How weak we are. We easily forget the importance of everything God says. But our Lord Jesus is so loving. He knows our weaknesses so well. He told the disciples, one gift you really need is the gift of the

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Holy Spirit. And what a gift he is. Jesus told them: **the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and remind you of everything I told you.**

Yes, Pentecost was coming. Soon they would understand much more clearly that the Holy Spirit builds Jesus' kingdom one converted sinner at a time. Soon they would understand and put into practice, that greatness in Jesus' kingdom is just as he said: It is service to God, to our fellow believers in God's kingdom. Greatness in the kingdom of God means carrying the message of the kingdom to the world. The Holy Spirit would bring all of these teachings to the minds of the apostles. How would he carry this out? Of course, we remember the great power the Spirit displayed through the disciples as they boldly taught and preached on the day of Pentecost. But the same Spirit was working in them, teaching them, reminding them, as they studied the O.T. Scriptures. They could see more clearly that their task was to preach God's law clearly and announce the gospel of God's mercy. But as time went along the Spirit also inspired some of those same apostles to write the N.T. Scriptures, the account of Jesus' life, especially his death on the cross for the payment of our sins.

What a precious parting gift our Savior has given us in the Holy Spirit. We see what a blessing his power is for us because we are so prone to forget what our God teaches us. When we see the hatred, the strife, the complete lovelessness in the world as we cry out, "Lord, what is all this? How can you let this happen? What is this world coming to?" Then the Spirit reminds us of what Jesus says. His kingdom is not of this world. His kingdom is in the hearts of those who believe in him. He is paying attention to everything that is happening in this world and using it in some way for the good of his church. What's more he is paying attention to everything that is happening in YOUR life, AND he is using it for our good. So when we dare to accuse God of not loving us because we are suffering, when we dare to blame him for all the sin and trouble in the world, then go to his word. Let the Holy Spirit teach you, and you can say with the psalmist: **Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.** Just hearing God say this to us renews our outlook that the future is not bleak, even if it may seem to be. You see, Jesus has a third parting gift for us.

He says, I want you to know that I have established peace for you with my Father. This is real peace, even if the world hates you and puts you to death. This is real peace even if Satan puts roadblocks in your path, such a depression, covid or family relationship issues. If you read in the book of Acts about Paul's mission journeys you will find that he was often persecuted and beaten for preaching Christ.

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Nonetheless those who became believers were filled with joy. No small part of their joy surely came from the peace they knew existed between them and God because they knew their sins were forgiven.

The peace that Jesus gives us is not simply a feeling of peace. It is a peace we have because God tells us he loves us for Christ's sake. This is so much different than the peace the world tries to convey—peace agreements or settlements based on human promises that can be and often are broken. God's peace is forever because Jesus established peace between God and us by his death on the cross. When Jesus said, "It is finished", he meant that he had made payment for our sins. The wicked thought you had just yesterday is paid for. When you were impatient with a co-worker or spoke abusively to someone, Jesus paid for it with his blood. God is NOT angry with you. The bottom is, he loves you.

And Jesus wants us to know that this peace means we are under God's continual protection. He had made it plain to his disciples that he would be going away—yes, to die, but then also to ascend to heaven. They really did not want him to leave. You see, their love for Jesus, his mission and his glory was still rather selfish. The thought of Jesus leaving them made them wonder what was going to become of them. But Jesus said, **"If you loved me, you would be glad that I am going to the Father, because the Father is greater than I."** How is the Father greater than Jesus? This is the night before Jesus died. He is still in his state of humiliation. This means that since he has laid aside the full use of his power and his glory that the Father is greater than he. Jesus is still under the authority of his Father because he came to earth to carry out his Father's mission for us. So He says, when I leave this world, I want you to know that you are still at peace with the Father.

The Savior knew this was a lot for them to absorb and understand. But he looked to the future for their sakes. He told them, I am leaving you with these gifts of God's love, the instruction of the Holy Spirit and God's abiding peace because I want you to be able to live in this world without fear. My word and my promises will protect you from the lies of Satan and the world. Then, when you receive these gifts, you will know and believe that they came from me, and you can rejoice because you know that my word is true and my gifts are genuine.

How well Jesus perceives and knows our needs. How well he prepared us for life in this world. How well he focuses our attention on every thing he did for us so that gladly we obey his word and willingly put it into practice in our own lives. Amen.