

St. Luke's Evangelical Lutheran Church – Watertown, WI
Pastor Mark Gartner
Sermon for Pentecost – May 12th and 15th, 2016

John 14:15-21

"If you love me, you will obey what I command. ¹⁶ And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever -- ¹⁷ the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. ¹⁸ I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. ¹⁹ Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. ²⁰ On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. ²¹ Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him."

Dear members in Jesus' Church, Amen

When friends say good-bye, especially close friends, emotions run high. Friends mean a great deal to us and we don't want to be separated from them by any amount of distance. Close friends support us in good times and bad. We have great memories of our friends. Perhaps it was that time spent in school, that road trip we took together or maybe it was just having them close by which made us feel secure. And yet, graduations, jobs, or retirements make it necessary to move across the state or even across the country. It's times like this that it is often customary to exchange "farewell gifts." We say: "Here is something to remember me by." It may be a memorable picture that speaks a 1000 words, a piece of artwork, or a plaque engraved with names and dates. Gifts like these are gladly received and dearly treasured. Still, saying "good-bye" is never easy, is it?

In our sermon reading, we hear Jesus saying good-bye to His followers. And it wasn't any easier for Him either as the Son of man. It was an emotional time for Him. Our reading takes place in the Upper Room on Maundy Thursday of Holy Week. This is the place we usually think of Jesus instituting the sacrament of Lord's Supper. Jesus sure busy that night. He knew what events would soon take place over Holy Weekend: how He would be betrayed, condemned, crucified, buried, and raised from the dead. Yet, He wasn't thinking of Himself. In love, He cared about His followers. He knew that His disciples needed assurances. After all, He had been visibly with them for 3 years. Now, they would no longer see Him. So, after the Lord's Supper, He gave them words of comfort. About to depart, our Savior gave them the perfect farewell gift. But it was not a mere picture or plaque. This gift was the Holy Spirit, the 3rd person of the Triune God.

In the Upper Room, Jesus wasn't just thinking of His disciples. He was thinking of you and me. Even though God's plan to save the world put Jesus on earth over 2000 years ago, we, like the disciples, need assurances. We get spooked ... we get scared ... and we long for the assurances of our Savior. God's Word today assures us that we share in His farewell gift. We'll discover how Jesus gives us:

Theme: The Holy Spirit -- The Best Farewell Gift Ever!

- 1. It meets our needs**
- 2. It manages our needs**

Jesus' farewell gift comfortably met the needs of His first century followers. And their needs were great. They needed someone to do for them what Christ had been doing all along. That sure was asking a lot! Christ had given them reliable help in all kinds of situations. They depended on Him to be physically with them. Think about the 3 years they spent in His company! Specific examples come to mind. When the disciples were faced with feeding 5000 men plus women and children, they didn't have a clue what to do. How could they feed so many people? They didn't know how, but they knew who did. They came right up to Jesus, and He solved their problem. Or what if they had a spiritual question that was on their minds? 11 verses before our text, Thomas had one. He wanted to know where Jesus was going and how he could follow. So, He came right up to Jesus, and Jesus told Him those famous words: I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through me (John 14:6). With these words, Jesus clearly revealed the one way to Heaven. But, now, with Jesus leaving? What were they going to do? How would they keep going without Jesus by their side providing comfort and answers? Jesus' farewell gift met their needs.

Listen to what Christ promises His disciples. **“And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Counselor to be with you forever -- the Spirit of Truth.”** In other words, Jesus promised the disciples something, I should say someone, who would do for them what He had been doing all along. This someone was the Counselor, the Comforter, the Holy Spirit. The word, Counselor, means: "one who gives aid or help." The disciples had already experienced this Counselor's help when they were brought to faith in Jesus. The Bible says, **"No one can say Jesus is Lord, except by the Holy Spirit" (1 Corinthians 12:3).** The Holy Spirit gave spiritual life to their stone-cold dead hearts. Now, He would transform them from being scaredy-cat disciples to be willing servants of the LORD, willing to give up their lives to spread the saving message of Christ.

But, how would they recognize the Holy Spirit? Our text reads: **“The world cannot accept Him, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him. But you know Him, for He lives with you and will be in you.”** The world doesn't accept anything it doesn't see or understand. Since the Holy Spirit is invisible and beyond human reason, the world cannot accept Him. The disciples would recognize the Holy Spirit because they believed Jesus' life-saving words. The Spirit lives within the hearts of all Christian believers. What a Savior! When things looked hopeless, Jesus had everything under control. His gift was the Best gift ever because the Spirit comfortably met their needs.

Did it ever occur to you that we share in Jesus' farewell gift? His gift comfortably meets our needs. Even though the styles have changed from togas and tunics to designer suits and customized polo shirts, our needs really haven't changed. Despite our best efforts to claim we're fine, our needs are great. Imagine walking down the tall, narrow aisles of your local Wal-Mart or Target only to find a child crying for their mother? With a loud voice and with many tears they cry: "I want my mommy!" A child is so much more open than an adult. We may not get lost in a Wal-Mart and cry out our troubles. But sometimes, deep down in our souls, we do express that basic fear: "What if I'm all alone? What if there's no one to come to my side and comfort me?" When physical and spiritual doubts overwhelm us, we need to remember that we have a Savior. Simply put, the Son of God Jesus saved us from our sins when He sacrificed His perfect life on the cross in our place and rose victorious from the grave. Jesus has freed us from our eternal enemies: sin, death, and the devil. Yes, our Redeemer Lives! Romans 8:35 asks: **“Who shall separate us from the Love of Christ?”** The answer, is no one. You and I live knowing we have a Savior, and He loves us.

But, how do we know this for sure? It's because we share in Jesus' farewell gift. Jesus gives us

something to remember Him by right in our text! He actually gives us the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit meets our needs today by comforting us. Through regular contact with His Word and Sacrament, He assures us: our guilt is really gone, our sins are really forgiven, our home is really in heaven, and until we get there, the Holy Spirit really changes our hearts from being self-centered to Savior-centered. The Holy Spirit connects us to Christ.

Receiving a farewell gift meets our needs now is great. But, receiving a farewell gift that carefully manages our needs in the future is even better. This describes the Holy Spirit. Our text continues: **“I will not leave you as orphans. I will come to you. Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. On that day, you will realize that I am in My Father, and you are in me, and I am in you.”** Jesus' farewell gift carefully managed the disciples' needs by pointing them back to Jesus on a daily basis. Jesus didn't orphan His disciples. The disciples sure felt orphaned. For, they would no longer see Him face-to-face. But, the Holy Spirit would remind them daily of Jesus' plans and eternal presence. His plans were to physically leave them for a time, but then He'd return. The Holy Spirit carefully managed their needs by enabling them to believe what their minds couldn't comprehend- that Jesus was their Savior in good times and bad.

Our text concludes: **“Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves Me. He who loves me will be loved by My Father, and I too will love him and will show myself to him.”** The Holy Spirit carefully managed the disciples' needs in another way. He would work in their hearts to enable them to love their LORD Jesus and to show that love by willingly carrying out His commands. Think how the Holy Spirit would enable these ordinary men to do extraordinary things pleasing to God.

Jesus gives us "The Best Farewell Gift Ever." His gift, the Holy Spirit carefully manages our needs by strengthening our faith. He does this by giving us the Bible. Our faith is strengthened every time God's Word is proclaimed. That's why we all are here to celebrate Pentecost today: to hear God's Word. The Holy Spirit is speaking to you today – through the words of the liturgy, through the sermon, through the hymns and prayers, whenever God's Word is proclaimed either converting hearts or strengthening faith. And the Holy Spirit empowers us to love Jesus by showing love to the people God brings in our lives: to that son or daughter, mom or dad, that person at school or work. You'll be surprised who God bring into your life this week. Just remember to follow the Holy Spirit's lead as he wants us to lead others to Christ. He blesses our witness to others.

Isn't it great to have Jesus, the Son of God, as our best and closest friend? And isn't it great that Jesus has given us THE HOLY SPIRIT - "THE BEST FAREWELL GIFT EVER." May we continue to appreciate and make use of His gift, the Holy Spirit, both in the spoken Word and in the sacraments of Baptism and Lord's Supper. Remember, His gift comfortably meets our needs and His gift carefully manages our needs. Amen.