

MAY 22, 2022-HOLY SPIRIT

Our Gospel comes from John 14:23-29

So today, we're gonna talk about my all-time favorite subject.

Forget the news, forget the weather, forget the game, because today we have reached the top of the mountain, the hall of fame of subject matter. Because today we're gonna be talking all about the Holy Spirit, which is the oil upon which the Christian machine runs.

The great church father, Augustine, teaches us that God the Father is the **sun** in the sky.

Jesus, the Son, is the **rays** that bring the good news to the earth.

And when those rays hit the earth, they create heat.

And that **heat** is the Holy Spirit.

Begging the question, do you have the heat, my friend?

That's what we're gonna talk about today, the heat, the third person of the blessed Trinity, the Holy Spirit.

We find ourselves today in John 14, which is my favorite chapter in my favorite Gospel.

So, this is a deep pool, my friends.

We could no doubt do 10 shows on this Gospel alone, with leftovers.

So, let's stop wasting time and get into it.

We're picking up where we left off last week.

If you recall, we are in John's Last Supper discourse. The end is nigh, and Jesus knows it.

So, knowing that Calvary is looming, He is gathering His disciples around Him to talk about the **most important** of things, which for Jesus is the coming of the Holy Spirit, which is just a couple of weeks away. June 5th and we will have a Baptism that day here at First UCC Richmond.

Next week some will be celebrating the Ascension, and then after that, we will see the Holy Spirit make its arrival on Pentecost, which is a favorite Sunday of the liturgical year.

Now today, like I said, we're in the Last Supper discourse. And just last week, Jesus had given His **disciples**, which, by the way, is **you and me**, in case you're wondering, one simple commandment, "**Love one another as I have loved you.**"

And of course, we talked all about that last week. But today, Jesus continues, as He says, "Peace I leave you. My **peace I give** to you. Not as the world does, but I give to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid."

Now, given the fact that He's in the middle of telling His disciples that He has to go away, this seems like a rather odd thing to say.

Because let me tell you, my friends, while the disciples might have had a lot of things on their

mind at the time, I can assure you, that peace did not make that list.

But you know, speaking of peace, seems like peace is in short supply these days.

We live in a world of great uncertainty. We live in a world filled with **anxiety**.

So, these words in our Gospel today are as relevant today as they were the first day they were spoken.

"Peace I leave you, my peace I give to you, not as the world gives do I give to you."

So, here's my question.

Given all that's going on in our world today, and there's a lot going on, **can we have peace?**

Well, according to Jesus, the answer is absolutely, we can.

But getting back to our disciples today, they have been following Jesus for almost three years.

They had left family, they had **left** lands, they had **left** careers, they had **left** everything.

And now Jesus is saying that He's gotta go, He's leaving. So understandably, they're confused, they're full of fear, they had thought that Jesus was gonna be the one, you know, the promised Messiah, the warrior King, the one who was going to save Israel and restore it to its former glory as a shining city on top of the hill.

Now all of a sudden, He's talking about having to go to Jerusalem to suffer and to die at the hands of the religious leadership, which made zero sense.

So, they start asking questions, starting with, "Where are you going?" To which Jesus responded, "**I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may also be.**"

This is a reading we hear often during funeral liturgies. So, the next question, it's logical, they ask is, "Well, can we go with you?"

Which, like I said, makes sense, because they had been following Jesus for some time now.

But Jesus responded, "Where I am going you cannot come." So, they ask, "Well, how long will you be gone?"

And the answer that Jesus gives is rather cryptic. He says, "In a little while you will no longer see me, and again in a little while, you will see me."

Which is when a very impatient **Philip** blurts out, "Just show us the Father, Jesus, and that'll be good enough for us."

Which I can only imagine must've kind of irritated our Lord.

As He said, "Have I been with you so long, Philip, and yet you still have not seen the Father?"

So now the disciples are in full panic mode.

And they're wondering, "Well, **who's gonna take care of us?**"

To which Jesus responds, "I will not leave you orphans. I will ask the Father to give you another advocate, and he will be with you forever."
And boom there it is.
I mean, it's hard, it is very hard to pick your favorite Bible verse.
Kind of like picking your favorite kid, it's hard to do.
It's hard to pick your favorite section of the Bible, for a lot of reasons.
Probably the biggest reason is that the Bible, unlike any other normal **book**, is not a normal book, because it **is alive**.
The Bible is very much like moving water.
Consequently, as you move through the different seasons of your life, different Bible verses speak to you in different ways.
Consider the Prodigal Son.
As we move through life, sometimes we're that prodigal son.
But you know, other times, we're the older brother.
And sometimes we might even be the father.
So, the Bible is elastic, it's moving, it changes.
But I mean, that's not true, the Bible doesn't change, 'cause the Bible's immutable, it never changes.
But you know what does change?
We change.
And that's a good thing.
In fact, the greatest response you can give the Gospel is change.
But getting back to what we're talking about, my favorite Bible verse, if I was pressed, if somebody were to say, "Well, Pastor Katie, we're gonna hold you down, we're not gonna let you up till you tell us your favorite part of the Bible".
I would say, "Okay, okay, okay".
"If you love Me, you'll keep My commandments.
And I will ask the Father to give you another advocate to be with you always, the Spirit of truth, which the world cannot accept, because it neither sees it nor knows it, but you know it, because it remains with you and it will be in you."
That's my favorite part of the Bible.
But particularly that part, "**And it will be in you,**" because that's the Spirit of truth.
And that's why Pentecost is a favorite Sunday of the liturgical year.

But understand this, these disciples, when they first heard these words, they didn't get it, no.
They don't understand.
I could only imagine they were looking at each other and "What, what, what is He even talking about?
What is He talking about?"

"Whoever loves Me will keep My word and My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our dwelling with him."
What does that really mean?" Well, actually, it means a lot.
It started with the fact that this kind of divides our world into two kinds of people, really.
There are those who keep His word and those that don't.
There's those who **love Jesus**, to whom He reveals Himself to, and there's those who **don't love Jesus**, to whom Jesus does not reveal Himself to.
That's kind of it.
Because if you notice, the revelation of Jesus Christ, to know Him comes with a condition.
Because if you wanna know Him, you gotta keep His word, which begs the question, how?
How do we do that?
How do we keep His word?

Have you ever read a really good book, and then you get to the end and it just kind of runs off a cliff, you know what I mean?
The ending's just kind of anti-climactic.
It was a great book and gets to the end, and you're thinking, "That's it, really? All that for this?"
And as you close the book, you're kind of wishing it would keep going.
Well, that's kind of where our disciples are today.
I mean, **it's the end, it's over, He's leaving, and they wished it would keep going.**
But guess what, it does.
Because the Bible, as I said, is very different than any other book.
It's much more than a book, certainly much more than one book.
In fact, we can look at the Bible as a **trilogy**.
The first book is what Christians call the Old Testament, or what our Jewish brothers and sisters call the Hebrew Scriptures, 'cause I can assure you, there is nothing old about it to them.
So, these Hebrew Scriptures are the first part of the Christian Bible, because we are **Judeo-Christians**.
So, the Hebrew Scriptures were written between 1200 and 100 B.C., and it is composed of **the law, the history, the prophecy** and the **wisdom** literature of the ancient people of Israel.
Now, the second book we call the New Testament [Christian Scriptures]. And it was principally written in Greek.
And it's all about the life and the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth, and His early followers.
And it is composed of the four Gospels, the Book of Acts, 21 letters from Paul and various other people, and then it ends with the Book of **Revelation**.
But it doesn't end there, because there's a third book. And the third book has no end.

It's like a flowing stream that continues to move forward.

And kind of like life, when we step into this stream, sometimes it's calm and peaceful.

Other times it becomes white water rapids, other times even waterfalls.

But all the while, the stream continues to move forward, because you see, this book is the book of the Holy Spirit.

And the Holy Spirit writes not in words, but **in your heart**.

"I have told you this while I am with you. The Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, will teach you everything and remind you all that I've told you. Peace I leave with you, my peace I give you, not as the world does, I give it to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid."

Again, this is a message that our world desperately needs to hear, because we desperately need peace.

And what is the source of peace? Well, Jesus tells us, it's right here.

He calls it the Advocate.

So, what's the Advocate?

Well, the Advocate, in short, is the Holy Spirit.

It's the third person of the Holy Trinity.

It is the oil upon which the Christian engine runs.

It is the eternal pen that is writing the third book of your trilogy.

Now the Greek word is Paraclete, which means to call to one's side, or asking somebody for help.

And that's really probably the best description of

Paraclete.

Advocate.

The general translation is **helper**.

But getting back to that word Advocate, that's a legal term, it's kind of a like a spiritual lawyer or a **spiritual counselor**.

It means one who **speaks for another**.

And that's probably the best way of looking at the Holy

Spirit, one who speaks for another.

Jesus makes it very clear that the Advocate will speak on His behalf, which is a good thing.

Something that we would all want. So how do we get this?

Well, Jesus tells us, we keep His commandments.

Remember, "whoever loves Me will keep My commandments, will keep My word."

Which gets back to the question, how do we do that?

How do we keep His word?

How do we keep His commandments?

Well, if you remember that time when a man asked Jesus, "What's the greatest commandment?"

In case you forgot, Jesus said, "To love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself."

Which is a very, very hard thing to do.

Even the most profound believer is repeatedly embarrassed as to how poorly they pull that one off.

"Whoever loves Me will keep My word."

What does that look like?

What does it mean to keep His commandments?

Well, let me tell you.

If I had a dime for every time I heard, "Well, **you know, I'm not really a religious person, but I'm very spiritual.**"

You know what's wrong with that?

Let me tell you what's wrong with that.

What's wrong with that is it means that you have bought into the big lie, a lie that was first whispered by Satan to Eve in the garden of Eden.

You don't need God, because you can be your own god.

You can be one with nature, you can be one with the cosmos.

Now here's the problem.

Rather than listening to the quiet voice, you know what voice you're listening to?

Your voice.

And that's what our world does.

We live in a world that follows our own voices and look at where it has brought us.

As a result, there is no such thing as right or wrong, because the truth becomes what we decide it's gonna be.

So, what we end up doing is worshiping the creature and not the Creator.

Meanwhile, Jesus the whole time saying, "If you love Me, if you love Me, you'll keep My word."

Again, how do we do that? How do we keep His word?

Well, I guess it all starts with understanding that in and of ourselves, we can't.

I can't do that, it's impossible.

I mean, let's just start with loving my enemies. I can't love my enemies; I can't do that.

But the Jesus inside of me can.

I can't, He can, and I'm gonna let Him.

"Peace, I leave with you, My peace I give you. Not as the world gives do I give it to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled. You heard Me tell you I'm going away, and I will come back to you. If you love Me, you would rejoice that I'm going to the Father. For the Father and I are one, and now I have told you this before it happens, so when it does, you may believe."

Wow, I mean, "if you love Me, you would rejoice that I'm going to the Father."

That seems like a rather odd thing to say. Why would they rejoice?
I mean these disciples right now are going through the biggest storm of their lives.
And now they're supposed to be rejoicing?
Remember now, they have no idea what's going on. They don't have a clue as to what Jesus is talking about.
When He starts talking about the "Comforter", the "Advocate", and the "Paraclete," and the "Father and I" will come to you, they don't get it at all. I mean they will in time, but not now. They're clueless.
But then came a **strong wind, tongues of fire**, we'll be talking about it in a couple of weeks.
Oh, they get it then.
And that spark spread like wildfire and continues to burn all over this world today.
Jesus said, "You know it, because it's with you and it will be in you."
And boy, once it was, it was there, they got it then. And in that moment, the Holy Spirit picked up its eternal pen and began to write.
And my friends, it continues to write till this day on the hearts of all believers.

"Whoever loves Me will keep My word and my Father will love him. And we will come to him and make our dwelling with him."
My friends, the Holy Spirit will come to you, and help you and guide your ship through the storm we call life.

A story is told of a ship at sea in the middle of a violent storm.
And as the ship was approaching a rocky shore in the middle of night, the wind was howling, and the lightning was flashing, and as the night sky lit up, you could barely see a rocky shore bouncing up and down through the ocean spray.
It was terrifying.
And the deckhands were all hunkered down below, and in the midst of the terror, they sent up one of the crew on deck to check it out.
And as he made his way through the rain and the wind, he came to the wheelhouse.
And as he looked through a foggy window, he could barely see the pilot's face.
And he was smiling.
So, he returned below deck to his fellow crew and announced, "All is well, the pilot is smiling."
"Peace I leave you, my peace I give you, not as the world gives it."
My friend, who is at your wheelhouse as you struggle through this storm we call life?
Who is your pilot today?

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*On Sunday I will preach about Revelation and not this Gospel story. Now, for those who have chosen to not be in-person for a long time; did you ever consider that someone might need to see you, maybe see that you are okay, are surviving a tragedy that maybe happened in your life. Sometimes others need to see that with God all is possible. Just your being there is a **'shout out to God'** and somebody just may need to see that.*