

Pentecost 6/9/19  
John 14:23-31 C

"THESE THINGS I HAVE SPOKEN TO YOU WHILE I AM STILL WITH YOU. BUT THE HELPER, THE HOLY SPIRIT, WHOM THE FATHER WILL SEND IN MY NAME, HE WILL TEACH YOU ALL THINGS AND BRING TO YOUR REMEMBRANCE ALL THAT I HAVE SAID TO YOU".

Each and every one of us is called to take up our cross and follow Jesus. And, as each and every one of us knows, that is not the easiest thing in the world to do.

Today, in the celebration of Pentecost, there is good news for those who do take up our cross and follow Jesus: the promised Holy Spirit has come to be our Comforter.

"These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you,"

Jesus says.

Wherever you go as you take up your cross and follow Jesus, the words of Jesus ring true, "In the world you will have tribulation (Jn 16:33)". For each and every one of us, there will be trouble. There will be anxious moments. There will be times when you will be afraid.

There is a reason for that. A simple reason, really: The devil, the world and your own sinful flesh hate the Lord Jesus Christ and they hate you because you deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow Jesus. The Lord Christ has already defeated these unholy three at the cross, so they cannot harm the risen Son of God. So what do they do? Miserable cowards that they are, since they can't hurt Jesus, they turn their anger and hatred and bitter scorn upon you. Be prepared: as a saint of God, as long as you live on this side of heaven, you will daily walk through the danger of

this valley of the shadow of death.

Satan, the father of all lies, will come as he came to Eve in the garden and our Lord in the garden. The devil will come offering you attractive, seductive temptation to sin. He will promise that your life will be more enjoyable, it will be filled with pleasure, that only if you “take and eat” will your life be complete. It might be to covet someone other than your spouse, cheat your neighbor so you come out ahead, spread that little bit of juicy gossip to defame your neighbor, especially to make yourself look all the better.

Then, when you have fallen, the great Accuser will remind and torture you with the guilt of your sin, until your very bones ache with shame and you will even doubt if God will ever forgive you.

As a sinner in a sinful world, there will be even more temptations in daily life. Something may provoke anger against your neighbor that leads you to wish harm and ruin upon them. There will be times when your heart swells in sinful, selfish pride, greed, or jealousy. You will endure pain -- the physical pain of illness and disease and the emotional pain of lost dreams, broken relationships and troubled families. You will encounter setbacks, disappointments, worries and fears.

Life in this vale of tears is not always fun. It can be annoying. It can hurt. It can leave you with scars. Sometimes, those scars won't even get a chance to heal. They will just keep getting reopened and remain festering.

All the while, you are daily reminded the worst is yet to come. As long as you have breath on this earth, there is but a step between you and death.

The great Accuser, this present age of death and decay, the weakness of your very flesh, will continually and daily try to knock you

down, to shake your faith in Christ.

This is exactly what the devil is counting on. The devil, the world and your sinful flesh can't lay a finger on Jesus, so they do their best to harm you. Every temptation to sin, every storm you encounter, every assault on your faith is designed to make you forget that Jesus is with you always; to make you doubt and forget the power and promises of Jesus' Word; to make you lose your faith in Christ.

If it's up to you to stand against the devil, the world, and your own flesh, you will fall! But, rejoice. It isn't up to you. Cherish and take heart in the words of Jesus, "the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you".

To God the Holy Spirit is ascribed the work of sanctification. "Sanctification" means "to make holy". The Holy Spirit makes us holy -- without sin -- by bringing us to faith in Jesus Christ. "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him," Jesus says (Jn. 14:23). When He says, "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word," what does He mean? What does it mean to "keep" Jesus' Word? It does not mean to "obey," as we obey the posted speed limit, or obey the law to pay our taxes by April 15th. To "keep" Jesus' Word means to "cling to" it, to "hold on" to it.

Faith is the means by which we cling to Jesus, the means by which we hold onto to Jesus. But, let us be clear so there can be no misunderstanding: Faith is not something you do. Faith is not a decision of your will. Faith is not a mental exercise of your own reason. Pentecost teaches us that faith is God's Work in you. Faith is a gift from God, through the work of the Holy Spirit. Through the means of grace, the Holy Spirit

works faith in us, so that we keep -- that is, cling to, hold on to -- Jesus' Word.

Our *Small Catechism* teaches us the work of the Spirit with these words,

“I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith. In the same way He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith.”

“Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ,” the Apostle Paul teaches us (Ro 10:17). The Helper, the Holy Spirit, works faith in your heart through the hearing of the Gospel. In the hearing of the Word with the water in Baptism, He cleansed you of all your sin, rescued you from death and the devil, and gave you eternal life. Through the hearing of the Word in absolution, He creates a clean heart within you and renews a right spirit within you. Through the Word in, with, and under the bread and wine in the Lord's Supper, He forgives you of your sin, gives you life and salvation, and strength to live a godly life.

The Holy Spirit, working through the means of grace, makes us brave to face the troubles of this present age and to bear up under the crosses God allows into our lives.

In our English Bibles, the Holy Spirit is referred to in several different ways: “Counselor,” “Helper,” as in our translation today.

But, the English word that I believe best captures the work of the Spirit is “Comforter.” The word “comfort” is a Latin word, which means “to make brave.” I'm not trying to bore you with words this morning, but I share that with you because it truly helps us understand the work of the Holy Spirit, our Comforter. The Comforter brings us to Jesus and, within His

sacred wounds, we find a stay and fortress when Satan tempts us, guilt and shame haunt us, and we are overtaken with tears and troubles. The Comforter comforts us -- makes us brave -- to face all the trials, troubles, and tears of earthly life, knowing that one day, we will wear the crown of life in heaven for all eternity and all that troubles and annoys us on this earth will be gone forever and ever, without end.

In this vale of tears, Jesus alone is our hope and stay. The Comforter, the Holy Spirit, brings to our remembrance His very words, "Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid".