

Seventh Sunday of Easter, Exaudi, May 29, 2022

Readings: Ezekiel 36: 22-28, 1 Peter 4: 7-14, John 15:26–16:4

The Spirit of Truth Bears Witness to Jesus

The Spirit of Truth bears witness to Jesus, who is the truth. But the world does not receive the truth. It loves its own and hates those who are of the truth. Just as Jesus was scorned, so is His Church. *"The hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God"* (John 16:2). Yet it is by Jesus' suffering and death that we are saved. Therefore we rejoice to share in His sufferings, that we may also share in His resurrection glory (1 Pet. 4:7–14). Through the ministry of the Spirit of Truth, we are cleansed from the deceit of our idols and given a new heart and a new spirit, the heart and Spirit of Christ (Ezek. 36:22–28). He now works in us fervent, self-giving love for one another, love which covers a multitude of sins, *"that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen"* (1 Pet. 4:11).

Sermon Transcript

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Now, our Gospel lesson doesn't sound like much of the Gospel in its narrow sense, the Good News. He says, "I'm going to send the helper ..." which is good, "... and he proceeds from the Father. He will bear witness about Me because you've been with Me from the beginning. However, you're going to be kicked out of the synagogues. In fact, your time is coming when people kill you they think they're going to be doing God's will. And they would do this because they do not know the Father. I've said these things so that you might remember them." In other words, He's warning us this time is coming. Now, where in the world is the Gospel in all of that? The Gospel is that the Spirit is with us, that the Spirit strengthens us and preserves us.

Last week we talked about, "In this world you will have tribulation, but take heart, I have overcome the world." In other words, Jesus is giving us a focus that we might learn how to stand firm on the foundation that will stand firm when the trials come, because, like it or not, whether we're Christian or not, trials and tribulations and hardships are going to come in this world. Everybody deals with suffering in some way, shape or form in this world. And every single one of us is going to face the ultimate trial and tribulation, and that is death. Not a single one of us is going to escape it. And so, rather than just being Pollyanna and saying, "Oh, life will be good and you'll be happy and everything will go smoothly," Jesus, instead, addresses life straight on in its full reality. There's going to be trials and tribulations in this world. In fact, there are going to be people who are, literally, going to hate you simply for the reason that you confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

Now, how in the world are you and I going to stand up in that time of trial? How do we stand firm when we are being mocked and ridiculed for what we believe? Can we stand firm when, not only are we going to be mocked and ridiculed, but we might be thrown in jail, we might be beaten, we might even face execution as a result of our faith in Christ? There are more Christians today who are facing that reality, facing martyrdom, than there were in the first century when Christianity was first getting started. There are numerous nations in this world where it is illegal to be a Christian, where you can be arrested and killed simply because you confess Jesus Christ is Lord.

How do they stand firm? I remember a story from an article, from The Voice of the Martyrs, and it was talking about this couple that was in a Muslim country somewhere and they were facing persecution. And they were

trying to figure out how to tell their children about how to stand firm in the faith when they knew that they were actually being hunted down and that they might be killed very soon. How do you talk to children about that? And they were, pretty much, honest. They said, "When it first happens it's going to be scary and it's going to hurt. But the next thing you will see is your Savior, Jesus Christ, and you'll be free from the pain and the sorrow of this world. I pray that you and I have the strength of faith of that young woman teaching their child what it means to stand for the faith of God.

But lest we think that we all are left to our own devices we have Ezekiel coming to tell us that He will vindicate His own name and He will act. It's interesting the way he describes this. Now, Ezekiel's one of the last prophets towards the end of the nation of Israel before this intertestamental period where they lose their leadership, they lose their kingship, the son of David no longer sits on the throne, and they say, "I'm going to act, but not for your sake, not because you've lived holy and righteous lives. In fact, you've profaned the name of God in the nations where you've come." In other words, God says, "I'm going to act in spite of your rebellion, in spite of your failure to live up to My Word." Again, Ezekiel is facing the reality of the world head on.

We, as human beings, are fickle creatures and we cannot stand firm in the Word of God. We cannot stand firm in the face of tribulation and trial, in and of ourselves. We will falter and we will fail. That's human nature. But God says He will act in us and for us, and in that we have our strength, in that we have our hope, in that we have our courage. We can boast of our strength of character, not because we are strong, but because Christ is strong within us and we put our hope and our trust solely in Him. And Ezekiel makes it clear what exactly that is going to be. He is going to gather us from the nations. He's going to bring us into our own land. Now, when we think of bring us back to our own land, do not think of the nation of Israel, but think of God bringing His people together. Because what he's talking about, what Ezekiel is talking about here later on, is not just a people group, a nationality, an ethnic organization of people. What he's talking about is all who call upon the name of the Lord.

Listen to this and see if this doesn't remind you of something, "I will take you from all the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land." And here's the part: "I will sprinkle clean water on you and you shall be clean from all your uncleanness. And from all your idols, I will cleanse you and I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes and be careful to obey My just decrees." What does that sound like? Hopefully, if you were paying attention, that sounds like baptism, that God is going to sprinkle us with water and we will be cleansed, we will receive a new Spirit within us, we will receive the Holy Spirit Himself.

Now, next week we're going to celebrate Pentecost where the disciples received an extra special, unique presence of the Holy Spirit, which moved them to speak to all these people and everybody heard in their own language and the Spirit came to them in a miraculous way. However, you and I celebrate and remember our own Pentecost every time we remember our baptism, because in our baptism God did exactly what He said He was going to do. He takes the heart of stone, our sinful heart, our sinful nature and He makes it a heart of flesh, a heart that is filled with the Word of God and salvation and forgiveness of sins. And He does that through the sprinkling of water and the presence of the Holy Spirit.

When you were baptized, you were baptized, "In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," and through those words, through the power of the Holy Spirit, you became a new creation. You died that day and you were made alive again in Christ. This is why Christians no longer face death because we've

already faced it. We've already died. Every single one of you has died already in your baptism and you were made alive in Christ and you are now part of the kingdom of God. The land that you live in is God's kingdom and it is wherever the church resides. You might call this place that we gather together the embassy of God. This is where the kingdom of God rules. This is where His Word is the authority. And in this embassy, we are under the protection of God. But we are called not to dwell in this embassy, but we are called to be emissaries and ambassadors to the foreign lands out there, i.e. our neighbors and everybody else that dwells in Parrish and Palmetto and Bradenton and Sarasota and Ruskin and Sun City and wherever else we might be. That's a foreign land to us because our home is in Christ, is in the kingdom of God. Now, we don't physically have a kingdom. This is not sovereign land in the same sense of an embassy, but it's better because here we receive the Word of God, the power of God. Here, we are reminded that we are His children, that we have been given the authority of God. Here, we not only receive the authority of God and the Word of God, we receive God Himself in His body when we eat and drink the body and blood of Christ. Christ is here now. He has shown up. He has declared to you, "Your sins are forgiven." He has told you, "I'm with you always to the very end of the age." And, in fact, that very end of the age is now.

Notice, 1 Peter said, "The end of all things is at hand." Peter knew that he was living in the end times then, and we are today. The end of the world is near. When it comes, who knows? But we are living in two times. The world is facing only destruction. We have life. And our goal is to bring people who are living in destruction to living into life. Our goal is to proclaim the Word of God, to declare the glorious victory of our King and our God, our Savior, to a world, because He has covered over a multitude of sins, not just the sins of the world, but our sins, as well. We're not hypocrites by saying we are holy and righteous before God. We just understand that God has forgiven us. And it's not to our credit that we can say we are holy before God, but it is the credit of Christ in us through our baptisms.

And so what are we to do with His great gift that He has given us? We're to share, share with all, with each other, all good things. We're to serve and to speak because it is only through the presence of Christ and only through understanding that we do not need to hold onto the things of this world. Nothing in this world will give you ultimate security. Your wealth will pass away. Your health will pass away. Your life will pass away. But the Word of God will remain forever. That is the firm foundation upon which we stand. That is the only thing that will never leave us or forsake us. And so that is what we hold onto, that is what we cling to, that is what we seek every moment of our lives, that the Word of God might dwell in us richly, that we might be strengthened because there are fiery trials coming our way and maybe we're already experiencing some of them ourselves. I don't think this is something strange. We can even go so far as to say, "We can rejoice in our suffering." There's something amazing about standing at the bedside of someone who knows the Word of God and the assurance of salvation. Even though they know they're facing the their last moments here on earth, they are at peace and you can see it and you can hear it because even though the trials and tribulations are beating them down and they are facing the end of their life here on earth, they know that it is not the end. They know that they have already faced death long ago in their baptisms and so this is nothing to be afraid of because now they're going to sleep in Christ. And the next image they see will be their Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. And whether that comes at the point of a sword or the will of the government or after a life well-lived, either way we can rejoice that God is with us and His Spirit is upon us and as His children, we can take heart no matter what we face, no matter what tribulation, we can take heart for He has overcome the world.

May His grace and mercy and peace be and abide with you always, now and forevermore, unto life everlasting. Amen.