

SERMON FOR MAY 24, 2020

Easter 7A 2020 Acts 1:12-26 “The Now and the not Yet—Living in between” LSB 644

Dear brothers and sisters, throughout the Easter season our triumphant cry has been, Alleluia! Christ is risen! Today when can add, Jesus has ascended!

Today’s reading from the book of Acts tells us what the Church did in the time between Jesus’ ascension into heaven, which was observed last Wednesday and the sending of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (which we’ll celebrate next Sunday).

Jesus told them to wait in Jerusalem **until they had been clothed with power from on high**. And so, they were waiting. Ten days they waited. But it probably seemed much longer, as each hour and day dragged by. Waiting isn’t easy. I know that many of you have grown impatient with the church being forced to meet in small groups, but waiting is the way of it with God.

Our fallen nature **wants what we want when we want it** - but God gives his blessings in His own time.

He made Abraham wait 25 years for his promised son, Isaac. He made the people of Israel wait 430 years in Egypt before He brought them out of slavery.

He waited thousands of years before fulfilling the promise He made in the Garden - to send a Savior to bruise the serpent’s head. And now, we’ve been waiting nearly 3 months.

But all those years and the past 3 months are not wasted time.

God uses that time, working and preparing His people for the works that He will do. Work and preparation that isn’t always easy. Well, in comparison to all that, the ten days the apostles waited for the Spirit to come on Pentecost doesn’t sound too bad!

But what was the Church doing those ten days? Our text tells us they were praying. And what were they praying? The psalms. The prayer book of the Bible.

That is what they had learned from Jesus. That is why I’ve been preaching a Psalm a week at our small communion groups and encouraging the attendees to read the Psalms, so that God could teach us what we needed to do going forward.

In today’s text, it’s revealed that it was from praying the psalms that they hear of what happened Judas (Ps 69.5) and that another should take his place.

They had undoubtedly heard these words before, but now, in Christ, they heard them in a new way. And they were encouraged by them.

What a shock it must have been for them when Judas turned against Jesus, and so also against them.

Judas who had been their close friend, and who had learned with them and taught with them and baptized with them performed miracles with them, one with whom they shared everything.

They thought they knew him!

Yet here in the psalms they learn that while **they** were shocked, Judas’

betrayal was no surprise to God. He'd inspired those words a thousand years earlier. Judas had indeed gone just as it was written of Him.

But then they also learned that another should take Judas' place. The work of the Kingdom would go on. Their office as apostles would go on. God would not give up on them.

Though had Judas betrayed, Peter had denied, **and they *all*** struggled to believe - God was going to use them.

Though the men who fill it are sinful, the Office of the Holy Ministry would go on. And so, they turn to God in prayer to fill the office. And the lot fell to Matthias. And once again, the Word of God is fulfilled.

But it's not just the Church back then that lived in an "in-between" time - so does the Church now. For we live in the time in-between Jesus' first coming and His second coming in glory.

Luther called it, "***the now but not yet.***" Scripture says, that right now we're justified, right now we're sanctified, right now we're as good as in heaven, but we don't realize all the benefits of our status as God's children just yet, for we live in a fallen world.

And just like with the early Church, it isn't an easy time. There is waiting. There are trials and struggles of faith. There are doubts, tears and fears. We are betrayed and we are betrayers.

As Peter told us in today's epistle lesson, "**your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.**" The bad news for you today is that someone is you.

Oh, you don't see a red-suited guy with a pointy tail and pitchfork – Satan is much more subtle than that.

He bears his fangs ***at you through others*** - when those you thought you knew and could count on shock, hurt and betray you.

He bears his fangs ***through you at others*** - when you devour someone's reputation with gossip, or bear your fangs to get what you want.

Seeing all this betrayal in the world, in the Church, in others, and in ourselves, it can seem that perhaps God's not waiting at all, but has, in fact, left turned His back on you.

And with such thoughts, the devil is seeking to devour your faith and, like Judas, tempt you to seek another way than God's way.

So, what's a Church to do? Well, the example of the apostles is a good one; in this in-between time, we stay in the Word of God and prayer. For it is the Word of God that will sustain us in our faith, even when faced with the attacks of the devil; his assaults both from without and from within.

It is the Word of God that keeps us, encourages us, strengthens us, and teaches us that our Lord never is working for us and for our salvation, even, as Peter says, though for a while we must endure ***fiery trials.***

And in today's Gospel, we heard something else: **Jesus is interceding for us and praying for us.**

Jesus, who Himself was betrayed, who knew something of fiery trials, who knew how hard this in-between time would be.

He prays for those who have been given to Him by the Father - His disciples then, and His disciples now.

For the hour had passed: Jesus went to the cross and, as He says – **be glorified there.**

We don't usually think of the cross as glorious because we have been blinded by the false glories of this world, glories that fade away and aren't really glorious at all.

Riches come and go, power fades and fails, popularity and pleasure can vanish as fast as dew in the sun - but the glory of the cross is eternal, for it is the glory of God's everlasting love for sinners like us, that moved Him to come and die for us.

And, in fact, Jesus' time on the cross was His "in-between" time - when the holy and perfect One hung in-between two criminals, the sinner in place of us sinners;

and when the One who was both true God and true man hung suspended between heaven and earth, the once and for all, sacrifice for sin to reconcile us to our Father.

And precisely because of Jesus' in-between time on the cross, because of His death and resurrection, we are kept and protected in our in-between time.

And for this Jesus prays. He prays that the Father might keep you in the baptismal name that has been washed over you and into you.

He prays that you may be one with Him and with the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit.

He prays that you may be made holy in the Word which forgives your sin and declares you a child of the heavenly Father. And His prayer is heard. For these are the very blessings you have received in Christ and from the glory of His cross.

How else to explain how the Church is still here? The Church which is the object of the world's wrath and the devil's attacks; the church **by schism rent asunder and heresies distressed**; the church which is victimized by our sinful failures.

Surely not because of us, but because of Jesus, there is a Church and will always be a Church, where the glory of His cross is still proclaimed, the wonder of His forgiveness is still given, His Spirit is still bestowed, and His Supper still feeds and strengthens.

For though He is now ascended, Jesus hasn't stopped working for you, and is still praying for you, taking all our weak and faltering prayers and voicing them to His Father.

And in Him and for His sake, your prayers are heard.

Perhaps it does not always seem like your prayers are heard. Life in this in-between time is tough and seldom seems to get easier. But here again, the example of the apostles can help us, and remind us that the Word of God and prayer

aren't what we do - they are what transforms us.

For through the Word the Spirit strengthens, gives, encourages, and comforts. And when the trials and struggles and hurts and betrayals of this in-between time drive us back to the Word of God and prayer, then we are blessed.

In fact, we heard today: **Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings . . .** because in Christ's sufferings we find His glory.

And sharing in His sufferings. As we forgive and are forgiven and as we lay down our lives for others. As we pray for them. As we serve and love - even our enemies and those who persecute us, then God is glorified.

And so, we need to repent of our impatience, our desire to avoid suffering, our many and various sins, things I'm sure the disciples were doing an awful lot of also in their in-between time.

But when we repent, we can be absolutely certain of our Father's forgiveness and love! Absolutely sure, because of the cross; because His love and forgiveness is God's glory; and because for this very thing, Jesus is still praying for us.

He's praying that we would repent of our sins and know and receive **and trust** His forgiveness and love. For only with such trust will we love and forgive others.

And so now, to us, as we live in this in-between time and await Jesus' second coming - we who **have been** clothed with the Holy Spirit in Baptism - to us, Jesus says, **don't devour one another, devour Me.**

For by eating His Body and drinking His Blood, we receive His power from on high brought down to us here, and are strengthened to go out from this place, into our callings.

Not to make a name for ourselves, but bearing His name. That may mean suffering for a time, but be not afraid.

The One in you is greater than the one in the world. And He who has gone to prepare a place for you will keep you, until He comes again for you. When, finally, all the Word of God will be fulfilled, and we like saints before us will see Him face to face. **Amen**