

18 April 2025
Easter 5

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“Old Truth, New Life”

Text: John 16:12-22; Acts 11:1-18; Revelation 21:1-7

Alleluia! Christ is risen! [He is risen indeed! Alleluia!] **Alleluia.**

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

[Jesus said:] “I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now.”

Jesus had just spoken so much to them. Their minds must have been drowning with everything He had said. Things like: the world was going to hate them and persecute them. That they would not only be put out of the synagogues, but people would kill them and think that by so doing they were offering service to God. That He was going away. That one of them would betray Him and another would deny Him. He wanted to prepare them for the hours and days and months ahead. But we can only take in so much, so fast. We need time to process, time to think.

But Jesus had so much more to tell them! Good stuff, too! He wants to tell them everything before the soldiers come, bind Him, and take Him to His death. But He knows they cannot bear it now. It's too much.

So, Jesus says, ***when the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come.***

So even though Jesus still has many things to tell His disciples - more things than He has time to speak and they have the capacity to understand - the Spirit of truth, the Holy Spirit that Jesus is going to send, will continue this teaching work. And, I would say, we heard two examples of this teaching today. But before I get to them, a disclaimer first . . .

And that is to disclaim what these words do NOT mean. Which I must do because sadly, these words of Jesus have been used to cause a lot of mischief, by pastors, churches, and even entire denominations, and not just now, but throughout the centuries, by people who have claimed that the Holy Spirit is giving them new

teachings, new doctrines that are not in the Scriptures, and that even contradict the Scriptures. And since they claim a revelation of the Spirit and the authority of the Spirit, you cannot deny it. You must accept what they say.

Except . . . what Jesus said here is that the Spirit **isn't** going to contradict the Scriptures, for He's **not** going to **speak on His own authority**, different than what Jesus has said before. **What He hears He will speak**. What the Father has said, what the Son has said, is what the Spirit will say. And if anyone claims differently, then what was revealed to them may indeed have come from a spirit, but not the Holy one! The Holy Spirit's job is not a *new* truth, but to guide them into all the truth - the truth that the one who IS the Truth has spoken. He will take from that and declare it to them. So if you hear someone claim a new revelation, and especially one that contradicts the Scriptures, run very quickly in the other direction!

So that's what these words do NOT mean. But what *do* they mean? What are good, right, and salutary examples of this?

Well, as I said, I think we heard two examples of this today. The **first** was in the First Reading, from the book of Acts, with Peter's vision. He needed to be taught, to be reminded, that Jesus had come for all people, Jews and Gentiles alike. This was not a new teaching. If you look, for example, in Romans chapter 15, you'll find there how Paul strings together a bunch of citations from the Old Testament about this very thing. But there was a lot of pressure on the early church, about how to have a church made up of a mix of Jews and Gentiles, and Peter needed the Spirit to teach, remind, and assure him of this truth. Not a *new* truth, but an old one that was coming to pass.

And **then** we heard in the Second Reading, the book of the Spirit's revelation to St. John (Revelation 1:10), of **a new heavens and a new earth**. And again, this is not a *new* teaching - we hear of this also in the prophet Isaiah. But a Church that is now going out into all the world, that is going to face the great opposition of the dragon and the beast, that is going to be tempted to compromise with the world for its own safety and promotion, needs to be taught and reminded that what we have here and now is not all there is. That this is all passing away. For *the wages of sin is death* (Romans 6:23). And just as sin brought death to men and women, so sin has brought death to the world. Our world IS dying, and we can stop it as little as we can stop our own deaths. And as the story unfolds in the book of Revelation, things may look petty bleak.

Except . . . in this battle of a Lamb against a Dragon and a Beast, an unexpected thing happens: **the Lamb wins**. For this Lamb is not just A Lamb, but THE Lamb - *the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world* (John 1:29). And in taking away the sin of the world, takes away the death of the world, shown in His own resurrection from

the dead and victory over the grave which we continue to celebrate this Easter season. **Therefore, there is a resurrection** - not just for Him, the Lamb, but for you and me, and for all of creation. A resurrection begun in Baptism, when we receive a new life, and completed on the Last Day with ***a new heavens and a new earth*** for new you, when, as we heard Jesus say today, ***He makes ALL things new.***

This is a teaching not just the Church in John's day, but we in our day, need the Spirit to teach us and remind us and assure us of. Because now, as then, things don't look so good for the Church, with heresy, compromise, worldliness, and sadly, for many, irrelevance. But what we need is not *new* teachings, to spice things up or in a vain attempt to become relevant, but a return to *old* teachings, to the truth once taught, never changing, and always relevant. To the hope we have in Jesus. That the Lamb wins! That *Christ is risen!* [*He is risen indeed! Alleluia!*]

And so as we heard Jesus say today, ***He is going away, He is going to the Father.*** The disciples (and I would say, the Church) ***will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice.*** There will be sorrow, but ***our sorrow will turn into joy!*** And the example John uses there is of a woman giving birth, which ever since the fall into sin has been difficult. Her labor can be long and painful. But ***when she has delivered the baby, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world.***

The sorrow and anguish and difficulty is what we are now in. Churches face persecution from terroristic acts or lawsuits. Christians face persecution to shut-up, compromise, and go along, or face losing your job and livelihood. The Church is mocked for what she holds dear and hated for what she teaches by a world that loves its sin and thinks it knows best. And while, at times, things may improve and the hatred and persecution lessen, do not be deceived. It will return. And maybe even worse than before.

But after the sorrow is joy! The joy of Easter. The joy of resurrection. A new heavens and a new earth. No more tears. No more death. No more mourning or crying or pain. Only new. And *always* new. Maybe that's the most amazing thing of all. For new we know. A new phone, or a new car - they're so nice! But they don't stay new, and these days get old pretty quickly. But how 'bout a new heavens and a new earth that are always new and never old? That's what John is trying to describe. But how do you describe the indescribable? That's one of the things Dr. Beckwith was teaching us a couple weeks ago. You have to start with what we know, namely, this world of sin and death, and then say: **not that!** All new. Only new. And *always* new. That's what waiting for us in Jesus and His resurrection.

And, John says, this new city, new Jerusalem, is so beautiful, like ***a bride adorned***

for her husband. So the lengths a woman goes to to look perfect on her wedding day - which these days includes just the right hair and make-up and nails and dress and shoes and probably a hundred more things that I, as a guy, don't even think of! - *even more than that* is what Jesus has done to make His Church His beautiful bride.

And not only is this *possible* . . . did you hear the good news today? **Write this down**, John is told, **for these things are trustworthy and true.** And then, He said, **It is done!** Completed. Finished. There is nothing in doubt here. As surely as the beginning, when God spoke and it was so, so is the end, when our Lord returns. And He will speak, and it will be so. He will speak resurrection and life, and it will be so. Forever.

That is our future, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, and it is not in any way in doubt. But it is not yet. There is sorrow now, hardship now, pain now, for there is sin now. But looking to the future, this sure and certain future, enables us to live new even now. Which means when the sorrow, hardship, and pain is caused by us and our sin, we repent. When the sorrow, hardship, and pain is caused by another's sin, we forgive. And when it all seems too much for us to endure and go on (which it often does! right?), we come here, to be fed and nourished by our Lord and His Body and Blood. And for the Spirit to continue to teach and remind and assure us of the truth - the one and only truth - and all the promises of God fulfilled for us in Jesus. **They are trustworthy and true**, for His tomb is empty.

So we prayed today, in the Collect of the Day, *that among the many changes of this world our hearts may be fixed where true joys are found.* That's the work of the Spirit among us today. Fixing us in the Truth. Fixing us where true joys are found, which is in Jesus. Even in the midst of an ever-changing and dying world. Even in the midst of persecution and hatred. For **it is done! Christ is risen!** [*He is risen indeed! Alleluia!*] And so the victory, and life, is ours.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.