

²⁵“All this I have spoken while still with you. ²⁶But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. ²⁷Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

Graduating

Big changes are in the air. Suddenly graduates will wake up to the realization that they don't have to get out of bed and go to classes. If they aren't off to college their education is done, finished forever. It's a great feeling. Because it's over. At the same time graduation can be terrifying because that means - work, a career, moving, the unknown. There are the questions, “Will I make it? What will happen? Where will I go? What if I'm a failure or end up in a van down by the river.” (Not that there is a problem living in a van down by the river.) There is so much excitement and yet so many questions. And you're not alone. The disciples are in the same van.

Our lesson takes us back before the death and resurrection. John takes us back to Jesus' pre-graduation pep talk. Boot camp is over. They've studied for three years under Jesus. They've passed the tests. They've completed their coursework but before they receive their diplomas and they're gone for good - Jesus has a gift for them. He even gives them his Word, his Promise, and the Holy Spirit, the counselor, the advocate, to remind and teach them everything that he has said.

That's the same message for us whether you have graduated, are graduating, or you're making a career out of school. We are often afraid of what the future may hold. We know bad times will come. Real problems will find us. But we are not alone as God gives us his word, his Spirit, his promise which stand whether we succeed or fail in the future. Regardless of whether we live or die, graduate or do remedial coursework - we have peace with God.

Jesus prepared his disciples before his death and resurrection for what would happen so they could have hope. He would be tortured, killed, placed under a curse by being hung on a tree. On the third day he rose from the dead. 40 days later he ascended into heaven, taking up all authority, his rule, reign, and now 50 days later - that promise comes. The Holy Spirit is poured out on all people signalling the arrival of a new age the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy.

The class of 33 AD is about to embark out into the world and make their mark. Something is different. It's not that the disciples no longer have to get up in time for school. It's not that they have nothing more to learn. But the Nation of Israel is no longer needed. Life is different. There is no sacrifice for sin needed. *Jesus is the atoning sacrifice for sin and not only our sin but the sin of the whole world* (1 John 2:2). That means the dietary restrictions have come to an end. The rituals and rites of

Judaism are no longer needed and or necessary. In fact in just 40 years time the Temple was destroyed by the Emperor Vespasian's oldest son Titus.

You can only imagine how it must have felt to see this sacred institution come crashing down. And yet just two years after Jesus' ascension - Stephen was torn down by being pelted with rocks. There were problems. They suffered and struggled along the way. Paul writes, ²⁴ *Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. ²⁵ Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was pelted with stones, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, ²⁶ I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my fellow Jews, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false believers.*"

They weren't graduating from anything. They were graduating into work. It wasn't time to forget everything they had learned along the way. It was time to make use of their instruction and education. It would be imperative to remember all that Jesus said and did so as a parting gift Jesus promises to send his Holy Spirit to teach and remind them of everything.

Many are graduating. Some already have. On that day, did you make it your goal to forget everything that you had just paid for and would continue to pay for - for the next 10-15 years? That would be foolish wouldn't, a waste of time, money, and well life. But it's not just students during summer break but graduates as well vacate useless bits of information that will never be used.

Which is sad especially when people consider confirmation a graduation from the church, a rite of passage rather than a way of life. It's sad because many believe they don't need any further instruction. That in two years pastor has taught me everything I need to know... but Christianity is not that shallow. Catechism is the bare minimum for that it means to be a Christian (which is why it is less than 10 pages.) If you don't know what Jesus taught or what he did - why would you call yourself a Christian? If anything confirmation should be seen as a graduation from pre-K.

Will such a faith stand when the pressure and problems of this world come? Will we survive? Will we too struggle and suffer along like Jesus, the apostles, the majority of Christianity?

Instead of going back to the words and promises of scripture and finding our hope in them we may look to our hearts, dreams, and deep dish pizzas for comfort and guidance. Feelings are not a valid source of truth. God has not promised to communicate with us outside of his written word. What he has told us is, *"The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure, who can understand it?"* (Jeremiah 17:9). Your heart will lie to you. Feelings will fail you. What happens when a soldier stops training, doctors quit practicing, athletes quit moving? Muscles atrophy, hands get sloppy, and poor decisions are made quickly. How much more serious when we remove ourselves from the body

of Christ, the word of God... you may end up dead spiritually and separate from the church. How often haven't we despised God's Word? How often do we gladly hear and learn it? I'm afraid to say, "Not as often as I should." Even I shouldn't be called a Christian and yet that is what God has called me.

Just as he's called Caesar and Chiago children of God this morning at their baptism. That is what you are.

We need constant reminding, teaching in the Law and Gospel of God. We need to be refocused on Jesus and his work for us. That's really the point of any and every sermon. Not to teach you new things but to point out our need for a savior and then draw our attention back to our Savior.

That is what the Holy Spirit would do for them. Remind them of the peace of Christ. This is not the peace of Rome which operated with threats of violence to any who stepped out of line. This is not the unachievable world peace - greed, violence, and death are a problem of every culture and every age. But there is peace. And that is found in Jesus' work, Jesus' words, and Jesus' teaching. But what did he teach?

God sent his Son to save the world. He came to take the place of mankind, to live in our place, and die in our place. Not because God was so angry that he just had to kill someone... that would be Rome's peace. But this, this is the peace of Christ that does not come by our action or earning, but by his proclamation, *"My peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid."*

That means that no matter where this world carried them, no matter where they would go in life or death: they had peace with God. They had peace knowing their sins were forgiven and heaven was their home. That peace sustained them when they lost everything, were hunted down and hounded, beaten, tortured, and killed for doing exactly what Jesus called them to do, proclaiming repentance, life and salvation as the gifts of God through Jesus Christ alone.

Well . . . what about us?

It is Pentecost Sunday. It comes around every year. It is like a graduation ceremony as we move from the Life of Christ to the Life of the church. Today we graduate into the work that he has called us to do. *"Make disciples of all nations" - how? Baptizing, teaching them to obey everything Jesus commanded.* Letting the Holy Spirit work through Word and Sacrament and carrying that message of peace.

Scary. Afraid of what the future might hold? It sure can be. But are we afraid we aren't at peace with God? No. Although we are weak, sinful, foolish (don't have all the answers). Though we have doubts and fears, health problems, stress, bills - we have the Spirit. He changes everything. He grants truth, reminds us of what Jesus did and all the promises God made to us. That truth is in our hands

today. How can we be sure? Moved to tears, goosebumps, angel feathers, tongue speaking? No, God has made it much easier for us.

We know the Spirit is among us and he as work when we confess the truth as God has revealed in his Word. *“No one can say Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit.”* When we hear the Bible and sermons these are the words of God spoken to us and they always work with the Spirit. When we receive Baptism or Lord’s Supper - God is once again coming to us reminding us of his forgiveness freely given. Here we touch, taste, and see what God has done. The Holy Spirit walks with us. Guiding, leading, and growing with us. To share with others our great and amazing God.

Graduation may be here. You’ve reached a milestone. Celebrate because your studies are over for now. Forget everything during summer break if you want to. But don’t forget the words and promises of God. They are here for you weekly in his Word and his promise is that through Word and Sacrament the Holy Spirit works teaching and reminding you everything won for you in Christ. Amen.