

John 15:26–16:4
Exaudi
Kaiserslautern Ev. Luth. Ch.
May 21, 2023

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

Dearly bought hearers by the blood of Jesus Christ,

It's common in Christian circles to hear the phrase “in the world, not of the world,” which is a summary of some of Jesus's statements in the Gospel of John. You can read about this phrase in the Elders' corner of our April newsletter. “In the world, not of the world” reflects the clear divide Jesus makes between Christians and the unbelieving world, and between true Christians and those who wrongly assume they are part of God's people. In the section of John 15[:19–20] right before our Gospel text, Jesus tells the Twelve: “If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you . . . If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours.” Jesus cites Psalm 69:4: “They hated me without cause” to say that the unbelieving Jews despised our LORD for no reason. If our Lord, who is perfect, is hated and persecuted so much, even to the point of death, how will it fare for his Christians?

Then comes our Gospel text for today, Exaudi Sunday, the Sunday between Ascension and Pentecost, where Jesus again in the Upper Room, on the night He was betrayed, speaks about the coming of the Holy Spirit, who will stand as a witness when our most holy faith is put on trial. The Holy Spirit is a witness to the Word of Truth, as are the Apostles, and, as we'll see, you too, dear Christian, are a witness in this world on account of the Holy Spirit bearing witness in and through you.

Jesus says: “But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, He will bear witness about me.” As we heard a few weeks ago, the title for the Holy Spirit here is “Paraclete,” which means “Helper,” “Comforter,” or even “Advocate.” Think of the Holy Spirit here as an advocate in a court of law, a legal assistant with all the ins and outs of the court system’s proceedings, He knows the judge, and the case itself. This Advocate, the Holy Spirit, is sent by Jesus from the Father. We confess this every Sunday in the Nicene Creed: “I believe in the Holy Spirit, who proceeds from the Father and the Son.” Jesus is in the Father and the Father in Jesus, and together the Father and Son send the Holy Spirit. In God’s court, everything is now stacked in your favor. The Son paid for your sins in His death on the cross, so justice has been served. His resurrection from the dead means the verdict has been accepted by the Father. You are justified before God. And now, God’s court provides you with an Advocate to continually argue in your favor before God, before the world, and in your own conscience: the Spirit who intercedes for the saints according to the will of God (Romans 8:27).

Jesus says that the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth, “will bear witness about me.” The role of the Holy Spirit is always to bear witness to the Son, like a witness in a court of law. The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. He was with the Father and the Son from eternity and intimately involved in the creation of all things: the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. The Holy Spirit can testify about the Father and the Son because He always was, always is, and always will be with the Father and the Son. All three persons of the Trinity are always working together because they are one God. As Jesus testifies concerning the Father, so does the Holy Spirit testify concerning Jesus.

So how does the Holy Spirit bear witness about Jesus? In the first place, the Holy Spirit bears witness about Jesus in the very words of Holy Scripture. The Bible is the inspired Word of God. To “inspire” literally means to breathe or blow into, to fill with the Spirit, the breath of life. In 2 Timothy [3:15–16], the Apostle Paul says that “the sacred writings . . . are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is breathed out by God,” meaning all Scripture is given by inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Or as Peter says, “no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Pet 1:21). The Bible, the entire Bible, is the Holy Spirit’s affidavit, His written testimony about who Jesus is and what He came to do. That’s why Jesus says to the Jews: “You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me” (John 5:39). Both the Old and the New Testaments bear witness about Christ because the Scriptures were ultimately written by the Holy Spirit. From Genesis to Revelation, the Holy Spirit testifies to the coming of God in the flesh to shed His blood on the cross for the sins of the world, and then to rise again from the dead for you.

So the Holy Spirit bears witness about Jesus before the whole world in the words of Holy Scripture. But the Holy Spirit also bears witness about Jesus in your heart. In Holy Baptism “you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’ The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God” (Romans 8:15-16). The Holy Spirit who has called, gathered, and enlightened you also gives you to understand the words of Scripture. In 2 Corinthians 2[:12], St. Paul says that “we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God.” The Bible remains a closed book to unbelievers, but as baptized believers, you have the mind of Christ. The Lord opens your eyes to understand the Scriptures, where you see Jesus

everywhere. The spirit of the world scoffs at the foolishness of our faith, but the Spirit of truth, the Spirit of *the* Truth, constantly brings to remembrance the purpose and significance of Christ's death and resurrection in your life. It's only by the power of the Holy Spirit that you can believe and confess that Jesus is Lord (1 Cor 12:3).

The Holy Spirit bears witness about Jesus, externally in the Bible and internally in your heart. "And," Jesus continues saying to His disciples, "you also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning." The disciples were with Jesus since the beginning of His ministry, when He was baptized by John the Baptist in the Jordan river and the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in the form of a dove. The disciples heard Jesus's teaching and saw with their own eyes the healings, the miracles, the casting out of demons, and the raising of the dead. They witnessed our Lord's death and resurrection, and they interacted with Jesus for the forty days after His Resurrection. As He was ascending into Heaven, Jesus told His disciples: "you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." As the Holy Spirit bears witness about Jesus, so, too, would the Apostles. In fact, later in Acts 1, we are told how the company of the disciples found a replacement for Judas, someone to become a witness to the resurrection of Jesus (Acts 1:22). A "witness" in this New Testament sense not only saw everything that occurred; a witness was also commissioned for a specific purpose: to be sent as an apostle into the world, bearing the message of Jesus Christ.

Our Gospel Lesson continues back in the Upper Room on the night Jesus was betrayed, when He tells the disciples: "I have said these things to you to keep you from falling away. They will put you out of the synagogues. Indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God. And they will do these things because they have not known the

Father, nor me. But I have said these things to you, that when their hour comes you may remember that I told them to you. I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you.” Before Pentecost, the disciples were weak and timid. They fell away and fled when Jesus was arrested, like sheep scattering when the shepherd is struck (Matt 26:31, 56). The disciples then locked themselves away for fear of the Jews (John 20:19). Even when the resurrected Lord Jesus appeared to the disciples with a message of peace, the disciples were startled and frightened (Luke 24:37). But Jesus opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, that the Christ should suffer and rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all nations. At the end of the Gospel of Luke, Jesus then says to the disciples: “you are witnesses of these things. And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.”

All that came to pass at Pentecost, which we will celebrate next week, when the promised Holy Spirit was poured out on the disciples, clothing them with divine power to serve as witnesses, taking the Gospel message into all the world. Where before there had been fear, there was now joy. Where before there had been timidity, there was now, by the power of the Holy Spirit, a boldness to proclaim the risen Jesus to all creation. You see this new boldness all over the Book of Acts. For example, in Acts 5, the apostles were imprisoned after they made the High Priest and the Sadducees jealous. During the night, an angel freed the apostles and said: “Go and stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this Life.” The apostles did just that and were arrested again and brought before the council and the High Priest, who forbade teaching in the name of Jesus. Peter and the apostles then bore testimony about Jesus, they stood trial as witnesses of Jesus, saying: “We must obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging Him on a tree. God exalted Him at His right hand as

Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. *And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit*, whom God has given to those who obey Him.” The High priest and council wanted to kill the apostles, but instead only had them beaten and charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus. Of course, the apostles went forth teaching and preaching in the Temple and from house to house that Jesus is the Christ.

With the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, the apostles were made witnesses, testifying about Jesus before the world, before kings and all those in authority. The Holy Spirit bears witness to Jesus, the Apostles bear witness to Jesus because they have the Holy Spirit, and you too, dear Christian, become a witness to Jesus on account of the Holy Spirit within you. The apostle Peter writes to all Christians to “always be prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks for you a reason for the hope that is in you” (1 Pet 3:15). As Christians, you will often be called upon, whether in big ways or little ways, to confess your faith before the world. That could be in a situation of life and death, or it could be in little ways like sharing God’s Word with family and friends, in good times and in bad. Sometimes the Gospel message will be received, and sometimes you will be hated because you bear the name of Christ. But “If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you” (2 Pet 4:14). You are in the world, but not of the world, and for that, the world hates you even as it hates our Lord. Yet the Holy Spirit continues to bear witness about Jesus through the Apostles, and through the Apostles’ message which you, too, are given to confess before the world. In the world you will continue to have tribulation. But take heart; Jesus has overcome the world. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. We stand for the Offertory.