

Sermon for June 8, 2014 - Pentecost

John 14:15-21 (NKJV)

Theme: We are not alone.

- 1) *The Father has given us the Spirit. (16-17)*
- 2) *The Spirit keeps us believing in the Son (18-19)*
- 3) *Through the Son we are loved by the Father (10-21)*

¹⁵ "If you love Me, keep My commandments. ¹⁶ "And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever-- ¹⁷ "the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. ¹⁸ "I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you. ¹⁹ "A little while longer and the world will see Me no more, but you will see Me. Because I live, you will live also. ²⁰ "At that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you. ²¹ "He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him."

Wouldn't it be great to have - right now - the relationship Adam and Eve had with God the Father before they fell into sin? Imagine what that would be like: being able to talk to God directly, in total love, with not even the slightest fear of provoking his anger. Imagine having a perfect, Father/son or daughter relationship with God. Sadly our sinful state prevents this from being a reality, right?

Wouldn't it be great, then, to have the relationship Jesus' disciples had with him: to be able to ask Jesus any question we want, to go to him for comfort and support, and to feel secure under his watchful eye? Sadly, Jesus ascended into heaven – so we are prevented from having that wonderful relationship with him, right? Wrong!

The truth is that, by faith, we have the loving relationship the disciples had with Jesus. We even, by faith, have the same loving relationship Adam and Eve had with God the Father before they sinned. "But how can this be?" you might ask, "since we certainly neither see nor hear Jesus, let alone God the Father." Just because we can't see or hear God doesn't mean that he can't see, hear and love us. Just because we can't touch him, doesn't mean he can't touch us, hold our hand and guide us through all of life's trials and triumphs.

Let us take comfort in Jesus' wonderful promise: **We are not alone.** 1) *The Father has given us the Spirit.* 2) *The Spirit keeps us believing in the Son.* 3) *Through the Son we are loved by the Father.*

Part One: The Father has given us the Spirit.

Our text takes place during the Passover meal, on the night before Jesus' crucifixion. He used this Last Supper with his disciples to prepare them for what was about to take place: how he would accomplish his Father's will and reunite them with God.

Sin is the reason mankind is separated from God. What is sin? Basically it is disobeying God – doing what we want instead of what He wants. And what does God want? Jesus once said: *You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.*' ³⁸ "This is the first and great commandment. ³⁹ "And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' ⁴⁰ "On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets." (Mat 22:37-40 NKJV)

To sin, therefore, is to lack love. By nature we are all selfish and sinful – having inherited this condition from Adam and Eve. Sin separates us from God and each other. And the wages of sin is eternal death in hell.

But God did not want us eternally separated from him. No, *God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.* (Joh 3:16 NKJ) Jesus' perfect life, innocent death and glorious resurrection won for us the forgiveness and righteousness we need to stand before God. Everyone who grabs hold of this righteousness through repentance and faith has a restored relationship with God. They become His dearly loved children – loved even more than Adam and Eve were before their fall into sin. And why? Because whenever God looks at a believer, He sees His Son, Jesus.

Jesus encourages us to bask in God's saving love for us by showing love to each other in return. He says: *"If you love Me,"* that is, if you look to me as your Savior and rejoice in the fact that I have washed you clean from all sin, then live as the dearly loved child of God I declare you to be and *"keep My commandments."* And what does Jesus command? Earlier, on this very same night, He said: *"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."* (Joh 13:34-35 NKJ)

Now let's be clear: Jesus is not saying that our love earns God's love. No, *We love Him because He first loved us.* (1Jo 4:19 NKJ) In other words only Jesus' love for us enables us to love each other. We can't do it on our own.

Jesus knew this fact about us, and this is why he told his disciples: *And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that he may abide with you forever--¹⁷ "the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you.*

We don't have to wonder what it would be like to walk with God like Adam and Eve, or to have Jesus beside us like his disciples. The truth is that, ever since Pentecost, God the Father has sent his Spirit to abide with us forever. He is our heavenly helper, counselor, guide and friend. Just as the disciples could ask Jesus anything, so we can call upon the Spirit at any time, and he will listen. Just as Jesus protected his disciples, so now the Holy Spirit protects us from all harm. Just as Jesus instructed his disciples in God's Word, so also the Holy Spirit instructs us. And just as Jesus prayed for his disciples, so also the Holy Spirit prays for us – asking God the Father to preserve and protect us in Christ Jesus until the day he comes again.

The world thinks we're crazy for believing in the Holy Spirit because it can't see Him. But we know he is with us. How so? Because, *no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit.* (1Co 12:3 NKJ). In other words, if you believe in Jesus Christ alone for the forgiveness of sin, then you can be absolutely certain that God the Father has poured the Holy Spirit upon you because only the Holy Spirit, can produce such a faith in a person's heart.

Part Two: The Spirit keeps us believing in the Son

Jesus has not left us alone. God the Father has sent the Holy Spirit to lead us in the use of his Word and Sacraments so that we may grow in faith.

Our text continues: ¹⁸ *"I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you.* ¹⁹ *"A little while longer and the world will see Me no more, but you will see Me. Because I live, you will live also.*

The world considers Jesus dead along with the countless others who have gone before him – buried in history's grave. But we know the truth: Jesus rose from the dead, ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God. And because Jesus is alive and at his Father's side, we are convinced that we too will live with him forever in heaven. His resurrection is our guarantee that all our sins have been forgiven, that we are at peace with God, and that he will come again to raise the dead and grant all believers eternal life.

Again, the only reason we believe these things, is because the Holy Spirit is with us – working in our hearts through the means of grace.

I mentioned at the beginning of this sermon how wonderful it would be to be able to ask Jesus anything and listen to his response. Well, we can ask Jesus anything, and the Holy Spirit will answer us through Scripture. This doesn't mean that we will always get the answer we wanted or even understand everything the Spirit shares with us in Scripture. Even the disciples didn't understand everything Jesus taught them. But the Spirit, just like Jesus did with the 12, will tell us what we need to know. In all things he will point us to the love God the Father has for us in Christ, as our sermon text continues:

²⁰ *"At that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you.* What day is Jesus referring to? The end of time? Possibly, but – remembering that Jesus promised the gift of the Holy Spirit – I believe Jesus is referring to Pentecost, the day Jesus fulfilled his promise and had God the Father pour His heavenly Spirit over his church so that they might be his witnesses in this wicked world. And God the Father continues to send his Spirit through the waters of Baptism to reassure us of the great love he has for us through His Son. He has chosen all of us to glorify His saving name. How? By keeping his commandments.

Part Three: Through the Son we are loved by the Father

Jesus continues: *"He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him."*

Please understand this verse correctly. Jesus is not saying that God won't love us unless we first love him. No, the Bible is clear on this point: *We love Him because He first loved us.* (1Jo 4:19 NKJ) What Jesus is saying, rather, is that God's love for us grows as we show our grateful love to him by keeping his commandments.

Let me explain it this way: Parents, regardless of whether or not your children love and obey you, you still love them, right? Of course you do; but you love them even more if they show their love to you by listening to what you say, right? And this is how it is with our heavenly Father. God loves us regardless of whether or not we love him back. Proof of this is seen in the fact that he sent Jesus to suffer and die for the sins of the whole world. But those who listen to God's Word, repent, trust Him and, in grateful love, try to live according to his commandments - these God the Father loves even more. Why? Because God is pleased when we listen to his Son and respond to his love with obedience.

Those who trust, love and obey Jesus are loved by God. They know the truth about Jesus because he reveals himself to them in the Scripture they study. According to their new man (the new attitude God place in their hearts through faith in the Gospel) they are like Adam and Eve before the fall: united with God in love.

This does not mean that believers are perfect. We will never be fully free from sin on this earth. But we are forgiven – forgiven with the purpose of glorifying Christ in this world through our word and actions,

as Jesus himself encourages: *"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven."* (Mat 5:16 NKJ)

We are often tempted to feel alone on this evil earth – separated from God because of our sins. The truth, however, is that **we are not alone**: *The Father has given us the Spirit. The Spirit keeps us believing in the Son. Through the Son we are loved by the Father.* May these facts comfort us in every trial we might face and lead us to trust in Christ's forgiveness, the Spirit's presence and our Father's love. He will make sure his name is glorified name through us as we confess his saving love to the world. He will also keep his promise to deliver us from every evil attack, and bring us safely to himself in heaven. *To Him be glory forever and ever. Amen!* (2Ti 4:18 NKJ)