

Discipleship in the Lectionary – 06/05/2022



A look at the week's lectionary through the lens of discipleship and disciple-making.

Day of Pentecost

Revised Common Lectionary Year C

Sunday, June 5th

John 14:8-17 (25-27)

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Happy "Birthday" Church!

The Gospel lection for the Day of Pentecost is part of Jesus' Farewell Discourse (13:31-17:26). Modeled around a classic Jewish farewell speech, Jesus is leaving, His followers are staying, and He promises the Holy Spirit to enable His community of disciples to continue His work on earth. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit on that Day of Pentecost, also known as the Feast of First Fruits, marks the Church's official "birthday." This day also marks the permanent presence of the Holy Spirit in the world. The same Spirit is given to us as Christ's disciples and thus the power of Pentecost is available to us in our daily lives.

John 14:8-17 (25-27)

The final discourse of Jesus is given privately to His disciples. It conforms to the common form of farewell speech seen in Judaism. Similar farewell speeches found within the Canon include Jacob (Genesis 47:29-49:33); Moses (Deuteronomy); Joshua (Joshua 22-24); Samuel (I Samuel 12); David (I Chronicles 28-29); Paul (Acts 20:17-38; 2 Tim 3:1-4:8); Peter (2 Peter) and Jesus (Mark 13). All these speeches conform to a similar pattern: (1) A famous figure is about to die and gathers his inner community around him. This may cause grief and requires reassurance from the hero. (2) The hero gives a farewell speech that includes a prediction for the future. (3) The farewell speech includes an exhortation on how to behave after the hero has gone. (4) The speech sometimes closes with a prayer for those left behind.

It is against this context as part of a farewell speech the lectionary text can be understood. The lectionary text itself forms part of a larger sub-section of the farewell discourse that when considered as a whole helps to appreciate the overall meaning. In 14:1-14 there are three promises made. First is a promise of a permanent future place with the Son in God's house (vv.1-3). The second promise is the way to God (vv.4-11). The third promise is of power for the believing community while still in the world (vv. 12-14). This third promise introduces the Holy Spirit and the supplementary verses in the lectionary text (vv.25-27) contain four characteristics about the Holy Spirit.

⁸ Philip said to him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us." ⁹ Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? ¹⁰ Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his

works.¹¹ *Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves.*

Philip's request for some sort of appearance by God follows the interaction between Thomas and Jesus: [Thomas speaking:] *"Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him"* (vv.5-7). If Thomas does not know where Jesus is going and how to get there, Philip's misunderstanding of Jesus is just as profound. Jesus is somewhat incredulous. Jesus then stresses His unity with the Father and that His words and works are not His own. Jesus is the revelation of God. Note that above Jesus challenges His disciples to believe three times in vv.10,11 and once more below in v.12. This is four times in only three verses.

¹² *"Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father.* ¹³ *Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.* ¹⁴ *If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.*

To those who believe will be given the ability to perform works (both signs and teaching) even greater than those of the Son. This introduces the coming of the Holy Spirit. The plural form of "you" used above implies this is addressed to the community of faith and the purpose of prayer is the continuation of Jesus' work. In addition to coming to God in prayer in the authority of Jesus, praying in Jesus' name essentially means praying in a way that is consistent with His will and character.

¹⁵ *"If you love me, you will keep my commandments.* ¹⁶ *And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever,* ¹⁷ *even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.*

In v.12 the condition for the ability to perform such works is belief in Jesus. In v.15 the condition for the gift of the Spirit is to keep Jesus' commandments which is a natural extension of love for Him. The Holy Spirit/*Paraclete* is rendered as "Helper" in the ESV. Other names commonly used are Advocate, Intercessor, Comforter, Counselor and Consoler. "Another" signifies Jesus Himself has been the *Paraclete* for His disciples during His earthly ministry. "Spirit of truth" refers to the Holy Spirit revealing the truth about Jesus, just as Jesus revealed the truth about God. There is nothing here for the casual believer or the passerby who lacks faith. Only those who accept Jesus can receive the Spirit.

²⁵ *"These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you.* ²⁶ *But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.* ²⁷ *Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.*

Here is the second prediction of the coming of the Holy Spirit and the second of five *Paraclete* references in Jesus' farewell speech. There are four things about the Holy Spirit communicated in v.26. First, the Holy Spirit is given, not gotten. God sends the Spirit. Second, the Holy Spirit is sent in Jesus' name. The Holy Spirit is thus not a separate experience of God independent of Christ but a continued connection to Christ. Third, the Holy Spirit as teacher is stressed. Fourth, the Holy Spirit preserves the memory of all what Jesus taught. This is important regarding the disciples' role in the future writing of New Testament Scripture.

With this assurance of the coming of the Holy Spirit, Jesus grants His disciples His peace. This is not the peace of the world that is often a temporary alleviation of a worldly stress. It is the peace of being free from the penalty of sin and united to God. This is lasting peace. Such peace cannot be disturbed by Jesus' coming departure.

Reflections

As we celebrate the Day of Pentecost, the official birthday of the Church, the message of John urges us to believe, believe, believe, believe! As a result of that first Christian Pentecost and Christ's promise of the Holy Spirit, we are empowered to keep Jesus' commandments. True love results in willing obedience. We can also rely on the Holy Spirit to discern the truth in our world as we interpret the Words of Jesus and apply to our context. We are called to continue the work of Jesus on earth, and it is the Holy Spirit that connects us to Christ, enabling us to be the fearless communities of peace demonstrating and proclaiming the message of Christ to the world.

No matter how imperfect we are, it is the Holy Spirit, the Advocate for Christ in our hearts, who urges us daily to the ideal of Christ. We are assured that we will one day dwell with God, but while we are on this earth, God dwells in us through the Holy Spirit. This is truly a gift worth celebrating!



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