

Acts 1:1-11

Psalm 47

Ephesians 1:15-23

Luke 24:44-53

Sermon May 16th, 2021

Jesus Promises Us the Holy Spirit

Today is Ascension Sunday. A day in our church year where we reflect on the last words of Jesus to his disciples before he ascends into heaven. Words where Jesus addresses the challenges the disciples face when trying to understand and live out Jesus' teachings in the world. Words that reflect the grace, hospitality, and promise of God.

As we reflect on these last words of Jesus today, I invite us to take a closer look at two of the major challenges the disciples faced when trying to understand and live out Jesus' teachings.

First, the disciples struggled to make sense of Jesus' suffering and death (**Image**). When Jesus foretells his death on three different occasions during his ministry, the disciples are left feeling confused. When Jesus is arrested, they scatter. Afraid that they will die too. Peter denies Jesus three times. On the Sabbath after Jesus' crucifixion, the disciples are hiding out. Trying to make sense of this failed mission. When Jesus appears to them shortly after their witness to the empty tomb, they doubt. They still don't know how to make sense of all that has happened.

Remember, the messiah wasn't supposed to suffer and die at the hands of the oppressor. But, overcome the oppressor, inaugurating the kingdom of God here on Earth.

What we see developing in the early church, as the disciples try to understand Jesus' suffering and death is a belief that stated that what happened to Jesus was a sign of God's gracious love for humanity.

Unfortunately, this belief led to another challenge for the disciples. Why did God offer them grace in this way? And how do they live out this grace in the world?

Like the disciples, we too struggle to make sense of God's gracious love for us. We too struggle to live out this grace in our world.

Have you ever said or did something that hurt someone else? Something that you felt was unforgivable?

We can say some pretty nasty things to the people we love. We can do things or believe things that really hurt our neighbor (**Image**). I wouldn't be surprised if everyone

of us who has tuned in today has had a least one moment in our lives where we thought we didn't deserve forgiveness. Where we thought we didn't deserve God's gracious love.

Sometimes I think we worry a lot about the people we love who are struggling with their brokenness. We question whether God will love them. We question whether God will welcome them into heavenly glory.

Sometimes we think this way about people in our neighborhoods. We question whether God's grace will reach out to those who don't behave or speak or believe in ways that we think a person should for God to accept them.

We struggle to understand God's gracious love, and why we, our loved ones, and our neighbors could be recipients of this love. Yet, despite our doubts God goes on loving us. God goes on surprising us with God's grace. When we think we have crossed into that place of no return, God is there reaching out God's hand. Bringing us back.

God's grace is mysterious and challenging to understand and live out. Yet, Jesus in his last words wants to reiterate to us how important God's grace is to Jesus' ministry. God's grace shapes everything Jesus says and does, including Jesus' suffering and death.

This brings us to the second challenge. The disciples struggle to show hospitality to the Gentiles who want to enter the community of believers (**Image**). Jesus challenges the disciples to come to terms with Jesus' invitation that Jesus' gracious love isn't just for God's chosen people, but for all people. To the ends of the earth, they will go with this message of grace. This message of forgiveness.

Why does Jesus challenge the disciples here in his last words you may wonder? Well, every time Jesus encounters someone outside the Jewish community, the disciples show frustration and uneasiness. They are usually the first ones to ask Jesus to shoo them away, or at least quiet them down. So, Jesus wants to take this final opportunity to reiterate how important it is for the disciples to live out this hospitality.

But, even with these last words, we hear about the disciples continued struggles to be hospitable to the Gentiles. We hear about all the debates about what Gentiles will have to do to be part of the community. We hear about the struggles the disciples have when Peter baptizes Gentiles in Cornelius' home. We hear about their fears of eating food from Gentile tables. We hear about their concerns about being disconnected from their own traditions.

Like the disciples, we continue to struggle with living out the hospitality Jesus shows us. We too get in debates when new people who are perceived as different or even as sinful want to become part of our community. We too create barriers to make it harder

for people to feel welcome (**Image**). We too fear what we have to do to become more welcoming to the people around us. We too are concerned about becoming disconnected from our traditions.

It isn't easy to live out Jesus' hospitality in our world. We have fears, concerns, judgments.

What really speaks to myself in Jesus' last words to his disciples is the last part of his speech. Jesus promises us the Holy Spirit. And asks us to wait until we have received this Spirit.

Jesus knows that we cannot understand or live out this grace and hospitality on our own accord. Jesus promises to give us the Spirit that will give us the faith and the wisdom to believe in and understand God's gracious love. Even when this grace goes against all conventional wisdom.

For example, through the Spirit, the disciples will see that in the context of the cross, Jesus could have used his power to violently overtake the Empire. However, Jesus chooses to forgive his enemy, hoping to transform their hearts through this gracious love.

Jesus will give us the Spirit to help us live out this grace and hospitality in our world. With Peter, the Spirit will give him the faith to see that even Gentiles are welcome at God's table. With Philip, the Spirit will guide him to show hospitality to an Ethiopian person. With Paul, the Spirit will give him the wisdom and courage to share the good news of Jesus across the Gentile world. We see examples all over the New Testament where the disciples trust in the Spirit ends up guiding them to be more hospitable to others.

As we see the work of the church in the world today, we see that when we trust in the Spirit, we too, can be more hospitable to others. Whether it is participating in the reconciliation ministries that help us restore right relationships with our indigenous neighbours, and with other people we have wronged or hurt (**Image**). Or sitting with someone who lives on the street, listening to their story of suffering and marginalization. Giving them hope that someone cares. Whether it is creating a more hospitable atmosphere for people with mental health issues to gather or hosting an Iftar at the church (**Image**). Welcoming people of different faith traditions to gather with us. To share their traditions with us. To learn about our neighbor with the hopes of creating a harmonious and peaceful society. There are so many ways that the Spirit lives in and through us to reflect God's grace and hospitality in the world.

We just have to wait until Pentecost to see Jesus' promise come to fruition. One more week. Then we will come together again. But, this time, instead of hearing about Jesus'

promise. We will hear about the disciples receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit. We will see how this Spirit impacts the people who receive it.

We will remember our own baptism where we to become recipients of this Spirit. Being forever connected to the disciples on Pentecost. Being capable of understanding God's grace, and living out this grace and hospitality in our world.

Let us pray, loving God, we give thanks for the promise of your Spirit, that helps us live out your grace and hospitality in our world. When we struggle to trust in the Spirit, help us cling to your gracious love for us. **Amen.**

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