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Easter 7 Series C 2019

Phillip L. Brandt
Concordia University - Portland, pbrandt@cu-portland.edu

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Seventh Sunday of Easter – June 2

We have come once more to this really strange Sunday. It is sort of the advent/lent of Pentecost. Jesus has ascended; his disciples are left gaping as they stare into the sky, hoping to catch one last glimpse of him. Just before he left, he told them to wait in Jerusalem for the Spirit, the Gift from the Father. The Spirit has not yet been poured out; at least in our liturgical practice we would remember those ten days between the Ascension and Pentecost, when that had not yet happened. This is how I think it is a little like Advent. In that Christmas prelude we remember the time before the birth of Jesus when the children of Israel had to rely upon this promised Messiah.

This remembering and waiting are a salutary things for Christians to do. If nothing else, this Sunday could give us a reason to focus on our need for the Holy Spirit. And we likely need to remember just how much we depend upon that Spirit. We could perhaps be excused for taking the Spirit for granted. He is a gentle member of the Trinity, he does not assert himself or his own worship, but is always pointing us toward Jesus. As my Systematics professor once said, “The Holy Spirit is shy.” He much prefers to stand behind something or someone, rarely does he show himself outright, lest he detracts or distracts from Jesus.

But the Spirit is so necessary. I like to compare him to an extension cord. Without that bit of wire and insulation, my light, my radio, my tools don’t really work. They are capable of functioning just fine, but not empowered. But the Spirit does not make the forgiveness or the life which I need. He brings it to me. It is Jesus who died on the cross, not the Spirit. But without the Spirit the Cross and empty tomb are but an historical events, a truth which happened long ago, in a distant place, for people other than myself. It takes the Spirit to make me into one of the folks for whom Jesus died, to connect me to Calvary and the Word which gives life who died there. It is the Spirit who makes my heart sing in praise of Jesus, who plants and tends the relationship we label faith.

This Sunday is about imagining what it might be like without that Spirit, so that next week when we proclaim the feast of Pentecost and read the account of that first outpouring, and the beginning of this thing we call the Church, we are ready to hear it. But while we remember the days between the Ascension of Jesus and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, we don’t preach the absence of the Spirit, we preach in the Church which has been empowered by that Spirit. We must imagine what it was like because we cannot actually go there. The Spirit is poured out, our hearts and minds are energized and resurrected by that Spirit in the waters of our Baptism and in the Word and Sacrament which impact our senses. In those moments as Jesus prays, we are made one with God, united with him far more intimately than if Jesus were standing right before us. Indeed, he has come “in us.”

We wait these uncomfortable ten days between the fortieth and the fiftieth day, when the house was shaken and tongues of flame blazed on the heads of the disciples. But while we imagine the discomfort of those days, we don’t really know them, for the Spirit is given to us, fully,

beautifully, and completely. We really are the citizens of that heaven John describes in the second reading.

Collect of the Day

O King of glory, Lord of hosts, uplifted in triumph far above all heavens, leave us not without consolation but send us the Spirit of truth whom You promised from the Father; for You live and reign with Him and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

The prayer and the readings are predicated on the festival which is observed on Thursday of this week, Ascension Day. Few congregations observe it with a service any more. My Father's parish always did in Missouri, in fact it was one of those weird times when they historically always celebrated the Sacrament, even when they used to do so only four times a year. This day was always one of the four, along with Maundy Thursday.

We pray to the king of glory and the Lord of hosts, uplifted...that's Jesus. Notice the conclusion of the prayer. This is unusual. Normally the prayers are addressed to the Father, but sometimes we get these prayers addressed to the Son. This actually dates back to the times of Charlemagne, when the communication between the various regions of Christianity was sparse. The Gaulish Christians who lived in what is today France were ruled by the powerful king Charlemagne. He was a pious man who sought to bring integrity and some uniformity to the wildly various Christian expressions inside his realm, many of which were simply a thin veneer over pagan practices.

He sought materials from Rome so that he might standardize the worship within his realm, but the Pope only sent him a portion of the material he sought. His own bishop advisors filled in the gaps, and they brought this practice of praying straight to Jesus which was the practice of the Gaulish Christians.

The prayer begs Christ not to leave us without consolation. The Seventh Sunday of Easter falls between the apparent departure of Jesus and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, a bleak prospect of a community without Jesus and without Spirit. So we remember those drab ten days and we beg Christ not to leave us without consolation and comfort.

Of course, this begging is also based upon a promise. Jesus promised in chapter 14 of John that he would not leave us as orphans but would send the Holy Spirit. The opening words of Acts also repeat that promise as Jesus sends the disciples to Jerusalem to wait until the gift of the Holy Spirit is poured out.

This Spirit is named the Spirit of Truth here. Which of course makes one wonder what is the truth? Pilate famously asked that question too, but cynically. Of course the Christian turns to God to define that truth, and he speaks a marvelous truth about you. He says you are his child, adopted in the waters of baptism. He says you are going to heaven, despite what your sins scream, despite all the ranting of Devil, and despite what your own conscience might suggest. He declares with all the power that called creation into being that right now you are engaged in

meaningful life, even though the world measures meaning in dollars and power, God measures in love and forgiveness, in relationship and Gospel. This poured out Spirit speaks the Truth which defines our lives and our ministry in the permanent terms of heaven.

Readings

Acts 1:12-26 *I have included the first 12 verses. If you did not read them at the service on Thursday or note this on the prior Sunday, I would recommend that you start your worship on Sunday with a reading of the Ascension account.*

¹ *In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, ² until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. ³ He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.*

⁴ *And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, “you heard from me; ⁵ for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”*

⁶ *So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” ⁷ He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. ⁸ But 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.” ⁹ And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. ¹⁰ And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, ¹¹ and said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”*

¹² *Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey away. ¹³ And when they had entered, they went up to the upper room, where they were staying, Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot and Judas the son of James. ¹⁴ All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.*

¹⁵ *In those days Peter stood up among the brothers (the company of persons was in all about 120) and said, ¹⁶ “Brothers, the Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke beforehand by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus. ¹⁷ For he was numbered among us and was allotted his share in this ministry.” ¹⁸ (Now this man acquired a field with the reward of his wickedness, and falling headlong he burst open in the middle and all his bowels gushed out. ¹⁹ And it became known to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the field was called in their own language Akeldama, that is, Field of Blood.) ²⁰ “For it is written in the Book of Psalms,*

“‘May his camp become desolate,
and let there be no one to dwell in it’;

and

“‘Let another take his office.’

²¹ So one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, ²² beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us—one of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection.” ²³ And they put forward two, Joseph called Barsabbas, who was also called Justus, and Matthias. ²⁴ And they prayed and said, “You, Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which one of these two you have chosen ²⁵ to take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place.” ²⁶ And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias, and he was numbered with the eleven apostles.

This is a marvelous text which never ceases to amaze me. Of course you can see why we get it today. This is the only story we have of the time between the Ascension and the events of Pentecost recorded in Acts chapter 2. There are some really interesting things in here.

First of all, Peter gives us the church’s take on the whole Judas tragedy. He received what he deserved. He had guided those who arrested Jesus. He was a betrayer of trust. But all this was fulfillment of Scripture. There is a terrible tension inside this. Judas did a terrible thing, and yet God foresaw, and it was even a fulfillment of what God had said. Here is one of the essential conundrums of Christianity. God has saved the world through a terrible injustice. The greatest breach of justice is when that system of law and courts is corrupted and an innocent man is executed for the crime which he did not do. Yet, that is exactly what we celebrate! Judas was instrument in all this, we deplore what he did and yet we also rejoice in the outcome of the events which he betrayal set in motion. Don’t feel too compelled to explain this. This is what Scripture and Theologians wisely call a mystery. There is no single part of this that doesn’t make sense but when you take the whole it boggles the mind. That is alright, it is supposed to do that and you won’t ever really get your head around this. If you do, you are either in heaven or self-deluded. We are here running up against the limits of our understanding and intellect. It bothers systematicians and academics of all stripes and so they have written any number of books which have afflicted the faithful for hundreds of years. Don’t let them bother you too much either. Of course the best guy to read on this is Luther when he starts talking about the theologian of the Cross. God reveals himself to us in weakness, not in power. Our human understanding gets power, we understand that. God, however, does not save us through power but through the powerful love which is revealed in weakness. Jesus the incarnate died unjustly and with all intention to do so because he for some strange reason loves this world and all its creatures.

Peter proposes a solution to a dilemma which we don’t really see. Peter seems to think that the number of disciples needs to be filled out. We might just wonder why he thinks that 12 disciples

are somehow more important than 11. Ancient Jewish law, however, helps us out here. It seems that if one had 12 witnesses to a crime there was no need for a trial. The number 12 of course has come down to us in trial by jury. In our law a full jury is always 12 people. The prosecutor has to convince 12 folks that the accused committed the crime. Just one person who sees a reason to doubt hangs that jury. It takes all 12.

In this case, the 12 are witnesses to both a crime and an act of God at the same moment. When you hear Peter's sermons in Acts, remember he is always accusing those to whom he preaches. He is witness against them as much as he is witnessing to Christ. His first sermons are always an accusation that they killed the Christ and he has 11 men standing behind him when he says it. That meant something to the folks in the Jewish community. His words carried a legal power when he spoke them. It is also really interesting that Peter's proclamation of the Resurrection was both terrible Law and terrific Gospel.

What astounds me is that Peter sets up rather difficult criteria for the replacement. The man whom they will label as witness had to have been a companion since the baptism of Christ and a witness to the miracles, ministry and resurrection of Christ. What I find amazing is that he finds two! Joseph Barsabbas who is also called Justus, and Matthias. Where did these guys come from? They are never mentioned in the Gospel accounts.

This has given me occasion in the past to preach a message of grace. God has disciples hidden in the wings. What resources does he have for our church and our mission which we are not using nor even recognizing? What Joseph's and Matthias' are sitting out in the pews, witnesses to great things but who have not been tapped yet? What resources of time, treasure, and talent are lying untapped in the lives of the people that God has gathered here? What gifts are out there in the larger community of Christians which our own parochial viewpoints have kept us from seeing and realizing? Sometimes I think we have too small a vision of what God can do and get very discouraged. This reading of the text gives hope.

Of course, this also gives me an occasion to address a valid intellectual point, and it allows me to respect the intelligence of those who sit in the pews on Sunday. They are not stupid and can ask some pretty penetrating questions once in a while. What else did Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John leave out? There were apparently more followers of Jesus than their sparse accounts let us know. Of course, this should give any reader of the Gospels pause. First of all, there is a bunch of stuff we don't know about what went on. It is also pretty clear that the Gospel writers did not set out to tell us everything, like a historian would be obligated to tell us everything. In John's own words, he only told us about seven miracles and left many things out of his account. But this material is what we need to believe in Jesus and have life in his name. That is rather targeted writing. I think that a great deal of the squabbling about the historicity of the Gospels is misplaced on the part of all involved. These are clearly portraits of Jesus which are shaped theologically and pastorally by the authors. They are not lying to us, but they are also not giving us a photographic image of Christ and the events surrounding him. I think of the healing of the

demoniac in Mark 5:1-20. When Matthew tells the story, there are two demoniacs. Does Mark make a mistake when he only speaks of one? No, but he doesn't talk about the other one because it doesn't seem to serve his theological purpose. He is not writing a history, but a theological portrait of Christ.

Another interesting point has been raised in relation to this text. Did Peter make a mistake? We never hear of Matthias again. He drops out of the record of the NT entirely, but then again so do most of the disciples. Did God have another man in mind for this job? Did God have his eye on a young man from Tarsus who was right now studying at the feet of Gamaliel, a member of the Sanhedrin which had condemned Jesus a few weeks before they draw lots for Matthias? Some have suggested it, I don't know what to make of it, but it is an intriguing thought which we will never really be able to answer this side of heaven.

The other issue which sometimes comes up is the whole idea of lots. Why do they introduce the idea of a random selection process? Notice, only qualified candidates are able to stand. This was not uncommon in the OT, Joshua and the Israelites drew lots to determine who had disobeyed the ban at Jericho and finally landed on Achan and his family who were all slain as a result. This just seems to have been a way to let God into the decision making process. The idea that random rolls of the die were not so random, but that God was guiding the process seems to be at the root of it, but many find it strange. Do we find it strange? Why? Some have suggested that we conduct elections at our district convention this way. I think this denies that the Holy Spirit works through the intellectual gifts of the assembled people. But I am also attracted to the idea of getting the politics out of the system. I think that is what those who suggest this are after.

Psalm 133

Behold, how good and pleasant it is
when brothers dwell in unity!
² It is like the precious oil on the head,
running down on the beard,
on the beard of Aaron,
running down on the collar of his robes!
³ It is like the dew of Hermon,
which falls on the mountains of Zion!
For there the LORD has commanded the blessing,
life forevermore.

I think they purposely choose this psalm to hit this year as we gear up for a Synodical convention!

The psalmist is delighting in the unity of brothers. He likens it to a scene which we might find strange, the anointing oil of a priest running down his hair and onto his robes. This is a sacred moment he describes and it is one of opulent fullness.

Mt. Hermon is one of the few places that pokes high enough in the Levant to get regular snowfall. The dew of Hermon would be cool and wet in a dry and hot place.

Unity, brotherhood, fellowship, all the wonderful words we use to describe this reality, point each of us to something which is deep, rich, and sacred. Too often we imagine that unity is one of emotional or willful states. We have unity when we all agree and we all get along. But is that really unity or is that conformity? Is that brotherhood or is that a fundamental denial of the differences which we have? Brothers, and I have four of them, do not always get along, but they are always brothers. Sometimes my brothers and I fought when we were younger. Did that destroy or diminish our brotherhood?

The preacher who is attracted to this text may well want to speak a message of unity, the unity which Christ creates at an altar when we commune together, a unity which is found in baptism, a unity which lies in the universal declaration which Jesus made to all of us. That unity can be pretty interesting. It means I am united to all sorts of sinners, even some whom I may find to be a problem, whose sins I find very troubling. To deny their humanity/brotherhood/unity is to make a terrible claim which we need to be very careful about. We can urge them to repent. Indeed, we should. We can rail against their sin but this unity and brotherhood cannot be assailed. God has made it.

This has enormous implications for the world in which we find ourselves today. On all sides of political and cultural debates it has become acceptable and normal to dehumanize and debase our opponents with labels. But that man or woman with whom I disagree is not a homosexual or a homophobe, liberal or conservative, pro-choice or pro-life, he/she is a human being for whom Christ has died and whom God has made. It is easy to deny them their humanity and see them only through this lens. Recently a group of students at Harvard rose up in horror and indignation that one of the Law faculty who continue to practice law had taken on Harvey Weinstein as a client. Apparently legally defending a man accused by the #Me Too movement means you are now a threat yourself. But doesn't Weinstein, for all his crimes, deserve a fair trial and the best legal representation available to him? Or have we said he is not really human? Would Jesus be found with the Weinstein's and Cosby's of the world today to make this very point?

Revelation 22:1-6 (7-11) 12-20

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb ² through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the

tree were for the healing of the nations. ³ No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. ⁴ They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. ⁵ And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.

⁶ And he said to me, “These words are trustworthy and true. And the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, has sent his angel to show his servants what must soon take place.”

⁷ “And behold, I am coming soon. Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book.”

⁸ I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I heard and saw them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed them to me, ⁹ but he said to me, “You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers the prophets, and with those who keep the words of this book. Worship God.”

¹⁰ And he said to me, “Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near.

¹¹ Let the evildoer still do evil, and the filthy still be filthy, and the righteous still do right, and the holy still be holy.”

¹² “Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay each one for what he has done. ¹³ I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.”

¹⁴ Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates. ¹⁵ Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and the sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.

¹⁶ “I, Jesus, have sent my angel to testify to you about these things for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star.”

¹⁷ The Spirit and the Bride say, “Come.” And let the one who hears say, “Come.” And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price.

¹⁸ I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, ¹⁹ and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.

²⁰ He who testifies to these things says, “Surely I am coming soon.” Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!

²¹ *The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen.*

Why did they leave off that last verse I wonder?

These are the final words of John’s Revelation, which we have been hearing for the past several weeks. He starts off with a description of heaven, which we probably have a hard time relating to. You might want to look at your LSB or LW for a couple of hymns which might help you understand this passage. “Jerusalem the Golden” and “Jerusalem, My Happy Home” come to

mind, but there are others. This passage has often spoken to Christians who come from a mystical tradition which is too alien to our post-enlightenment, American Lutheranism. Bernard of Clairvaux, a 12th century mystic wrote “O Jesus, King Most Wonderful.” If you are in LSB, you can find this at #554. He also wrote “O Sacred Head Now Wounded” LSB #449/450. You might find equally interesting the designation of the author of hymn #675. It was written by Peter Abelard whom Bernard hated with a passion, in fact Bernard convinced local authorities to summon a council to have Abelard declared a heretic, and Abelard would die on a journey to Rome in order to have his name cleared from this charge. Both of them would interestingly pen hymns about heaven and Jesus, both of which show up in our hymnal. Is there perhaps a message about just how large Jerusalem and Jesus kingdom are in all this? Does this have something to say about the Psalm today? Is there perhaps wisdom in the idea that God put three gates on each side of Heaven, thus Abelard might come in from the south, and Bernard from the North and not stumble over the idea that his mortal enemy is loved by the same Jesus and has entered the same heaven?

Admittedly, this is not really the point that John is stressing here, but history sometimes helps us make it anyway.

John speaks to Eden restored to us. The tree of life lines the river which runs down the middle of that city. Did you see the National Geographic from several years ago which featured urban parks? The picture on the right is the Cheonggyecheon River which had been completely covered up in Seoul, South Korea as that city grew. It was uncovered and converted into a gorgeous park. This is kind of what I imagine when I read this bit in John. The river runs with the water of life, which of course, John’s gospel tells us is Jesus. Don’t try to make this make too much sense here, simply experience it. Our lives in heaven will be infused with Christ, that means we will be infused with life itself.



But here, and I think this is the point that John is really making, John would also assert that in faith this moment and all the moments since my baptism, are infused with Christ, the river runs through my life right now. The sign of which he speaks has already been written on my forehead. John was speaking to a persecuted community and he was certainly pointing them toward a future in which their persecution ended, but he was basing this on the gift of the water of life, the tree (cross) whose fruit and leaves is for the healing of the nations. This is not a future reality, but a present one. The reader is already a citizen of that place in faith, we wait only for the day when the entire world shall see and these eyes of mine shall see what my faith already knows.

John ends the book with a number of assertions and statements which are worthy of the preacher's attention. Indeed, almost any of these could be a sermon in itself. I would not try to preach all of them, but to pick one and run with it if you are so inclined. Jesus is the Alpha and the Omega. The righteous are right with God because their robes are washed in the blood of the lamb. Notice, this is not because they got it right, but because their lives are bathed in Jesus blood. Their whole being is in need of this cleansing. Outside are all the dogs, the immoral, the liars, etc., but their exclusion is not because their sins are worse but because for reasons of their own choosing they are washed in that blood.

Jesus comes "soon" but as C. S. Lewis has Aslan tell Lucy in the "Voyage of the Dawntrader" all times are soon for God. But John would have us join the whole people of God in the prayer which also is found at the end of I Corinthians. Maranatha! Come, Lord Jesus! Our prayerful expectation is that the soon is really soon. The church which has lost sight of this eschatological element has really lost sight of its faith. The NT portrays Jesus as something of an eschatological prophet, Paul devoted whole books to the subject, and historically the great movers and shakers of Christianity have all be united in the belief that Jesus was coming "soon." Included in that list are Luther, Augustine, Bernard and Abelard.

John 17:20-26

²⁰“I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word,
²¹ that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. ²² The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, ²³ I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me. ²⁴ Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. ²⁵ O righteous Father, even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these know that you have sent me. ²⁶ I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.”

In the past we considered this for a confirmation Sunday:

This is a marvelous confirmation text, if you are confirming students. Notice the promise that having been "taught" the name of God, the person is now united in the Son and the Father and with one another. Notice the present tense of that, not the past, not the future, but the right now. To the catechumen you would want to say, "Jesus says this for you today!" Too often we baptize and confirm and never see them again. But this text really points to a purposeful presence of Christ and a presence of Jesus in the life of the Christian from this day forward. We may not see them, but Jesus never loses sight of them.

One could also do something with the “name” The name of Jesus is not only “Jesus” but it is the whole story of what he has done, what he has said, it is the holy week, the cross, the miracles, the birth, the resurrection, all of it. Name here is more like “reputation.”

The challenge here might be to figure out why it is important to be at one with Christ. What is the problem/Law/the issue which Jesus addresses by the prayer for unity with him and his Father and the rest of his people. What is the problem with being alone? What is the alternative?

- 1. Is not hell really defined as the absence of God? To be without God, to be away from him, is hellish.*
- 2. But Jesus promises more than just presence of Christ here, he promises unity. He promises intimacy, he promises more than simply the beatific vision, but he promises the very presence of Christ in us.*
- 3. Isn't confirmation really a commissioning ceremony? We are invited into the confession of the Trinity, and we have in that become the embodiment of Christ in this community. Thus the Christian who walks out the door of this place, with this Jesus promise fulfilled, we never go alone, but he comes to this world through us. Our whole life becomes transformed. Jesus walks into every situation with me, defining my life, purposing my life, blessing my words and deeds, so that they might even the words and deeds by which he establishes relationship with another broken sinner or two or a thousand in this world.*
- 4. Could we tie this to the Acts text? Peter needs a witness. The confirmand is really saying that he/she is a witness to Christ. No longer a child of a witness, but I myself have seen the love of God and I can bear witness to this.*

Jesus speaks of being taught the name of Jesus and God, the Trinity, which is understood through the economy of salvation.

These words of Jesus are couched in a prayer which is often called “Jesus High Priestly Prayer” in which he prays for the believers. Just in terms of Jesus praying this text has potential, we could preach a whole sermon on prayer here. The fact that Jesus is praying for us is powerful. It is also really beautiful that he prays for something I would never think to pray for. Notice how his prayer is not that my sickness be healed or my aunt's trouble goes away, he prays for unity with God and with one another so that the name and glory of God might be known. That purposeful prayer might also be highlighted if we are going to talk about prayer. This prayer prays toward a purpose, that the kingdom may come and people may see it.

In terms of a simple placement, this prayer is really what he prays in heaven upon his Ascension. When he hears this prayer, the Father pours out the Spirit and we get Pentecost and all the blessings which flow from it.

In these words we get the heart of that prayer, a prayer for unity with God, not only for the disciples but for all who will believe through their witness. That would be us. Jesus is praying for us today.

In truth, John's Revelation passage is simply this prayer of unity, in which we are in God and God is in us, answered and fulfilled. The two passages work together very nicely that way.

The preacher here will want to think about what it means to be at one with God. This is not the place to delve into long and protracted logical arguments, but to simply describe it, to feel it, to experience it.

Jesus has given his glory. That is a rich and content-laden word in John. In Hebrew it was "kabod" which actually meant "heavy" or "substantial." You can imagine that the wealthy and important people in an ancient community had the better diet and were thus "heavy" but we still use the term to describe things that are of serious import in our lives. An announcement that is "heavy" is one that bears hearing, even if the news is bad. Of course the preacher may also want to play with the fact that heavy and heaven sound so much alike.

For John, the glory of Jesus is not then the light which we might associate with Glory, not the majesty and the brilliance which we would usually think. As Jesus uses the word he is speaking of his crucifixion, when his body is heavy, a dead weight. There is Jesus the most "real" in the brutal outcome of this whole incarnational exercise in salvation. When he hangs on a cross between heaven and earth Jesus is "glorified" (see John 1, 3, 12, 16, et. al.)

To be glorified with Jesus thus is not something the world might seek, indeed it might flee, for this is filled with the whole theology of the Cross. (Return to the first reading for more on that.) We are not saved by our success, but in what looks like the utter failure of the painful death and suffering of our master. To be one with Jesus might just be a very frightening thing. As Paul and Peter will say, we rejoice in our sufferings. The implication is that in suffering we are close to Christ.

The preacher will also want to focus on the activity of Christ. He is making the Father known. John said in John 1:18, Jesus is the "exegesis" of the Father. If we would know God, since the incarnation, we must know this Jesus of Nazareth. This is how God has revealed himself, humbly, gently, through suffering and death, through the scandalous particularity of a Jewish carpenter of Nazareth in the first century. Look not for him in signs of power and wonder, nor in prophets and profits, but in and only in Jesus. He makes God known. It is not all of God, but that which we mist know, his great love for this world.

We were also drawn toward the unity which Jesus prays into being here. Jesus prays for it, it is essential to our witness (connected to the first reading). In our unity with Jesus and one another, we are a witness to the people of our planet. Tertullian tells us that the Romans saw the early Christians and noticed that they loved one another.

Jesus proclaims/prays a unity which has its basis in Him and in the Father. It is not found in the common thoughts/feelings of the people. It is found in the gift which God has given and expressed in Christ and the Spirit.

Law and Gospel

Law – Without the Spirit we are helpless, blind, dying, and without hope.

- A. Like Peter in the first lesson we act impetuously – does he jump the gun here?
- B. We need the river of life, we are cut off from it – John’s picture of heaven cannot but lead us to look at our own life and see its shortcomings, the places in which we find a dryness which can only be fulfilled by that stream.
- C. We need the tree of life, our healing is not complete – John’s picture of heaven creates in us a longing for that place.
- D. We are divided and alone. Who has not felt the pain of losing members to another Christian denomination? Why are we sad when that happens?
- E. How often isn’t the Christian proclamation diluted, obscured, or hindered by our divisions and hostility within the body of Christ?
- F. How much more effective and efficient would we really be if we were all one? Or do you see that the whole message is more effectively preached when many are preaching in a cacophony of voices which range from high church liturgics to the revivals and the street preachers?

Gospel – Jesus sees our need and promised us help.

- A. Peter’s decision, though it may have been impetuous was also blessed. Have you ever done something foolish and found out that God was able to work with even that foolhardy deed?
- B. Our dying becomes an occasion for the good news to be proclaimed. We are connected to the life of faith when the waters of baptism splashed across our head, but our bodies are still occasions for death reign until the resurrection is brought to its completion on the last day. (see also II Corinthians 4:7)
- C. We are divided, and it grieves us, but only because we have had placed within us the longing for the unity that God has created in Christ. That unity does find expression when Christians of every stripe can find commonality (I remember the joy I used to feel when I saw another car with a fish on the bumper in Salt Lake City). But that unity will find its fullest expression on the last day, when all are raised to the Church triumphant, neither Lutheran, Catholic, Methodist or non-denominational, but simply Christian, simply the people of God.

- D. Until then, beneath the cross Christians continue to gather. The love which God expressed in Christ is still being proclaimed throughout the world. 100,000 and more will become Christian today. 3,000,000 every month.
- E. Our failings do not mean the Spirit is crippled or ineffective. Indeed, despite our failings, even those of the divisions that we have caused, become in the mysterious working of the Spirit an occasion for the Spirit to work.
- F. That the outpouring the Spirit is a better presence of Christ than that which the disciples enjoyed prior to the ascension.

Sermon Themes

1. Amen! Come Lord Jesus (That the Holy Spirit would create in the hearer a heart which longs for Jesus and which delights in his sacramental presence.)

The very earliest worship words we know about in the Christian movement are these. Paul says that the Corinthians pray this prayer (I Cor. 16:22). Larry Hurtado makes a great deal of these words and they deserve our attention. Paul is writing to a Greek speaking community, but he simply transliterates this into Aramaic: Maranatha. This only really makes sense if the Corinthian congregation is praying this in Aramaic in order to be praying with the Palestinian, Aramaic speaking Christians. Following this line of argument, this is the oldest liturgical artifact we have from the Church. God's people have been praying this prayer since the very beginning.

Of course, God has answered this prayer. Jesus is here – he has come in his blessed and gentle Holy Spirit. Jesus is not far away from us, but he is right here, intimately and wholly ours. And yet, of course, we also long for that day when we will see him who is the Water of Life, the one whose perforated hands have paid the price for your sins and mine, when we will bask in his glory, palm fronds in hands, completely at rest. The coming of Christ means peace and freedom from all that torments us today. So we still pray this prayer, but pray it in complete confidence. The Spirit is the down payment, the pledge and promise. This prayer is answered with a resounding and divine “Yes!”

The Spirit who has been poured out says “Come!” The Bride, that is the church of Christ, says, “Come!” And John enjoins all of us who hear to join in every generation and all of creation's prayer, “Come, Lord Jesus!”

The preacher will want to connect the prayer to the need or this will become trivial. Jesus, remember, will dry every tear from our faces (Revelation 7:17). There will be no more weeping at the graves of our loved ones. They will be empty and those loved ones shall live. There will be more sorrow or pain, suffering or persecution. It is Satan who wants to

tell you that such things are normal, even necessary. “Without suffering, you cannot have joy,” he whispers and it makes so much sense. But God’s Word thunders another message and he defines another reality for us.

The sensitive preacher will have a sense of the sorrows which afflict his parish and its people. He will connect the answer to this prayer as the solution, the real solution, to those problems, the balm for those hurts, the life for that death.

2. Consoled (Gospel/Revelation That the hearer would appreciate the great gift of Spirit which has been poured out and whose promised and fulfilled outpouring we will celebrate next week.)

This sermon relies on the promise of Jesus that he will pour out this Spirit on all flesh, thus improving on his presence in the world. You might want to read the Ascension story at the beginning of the service for this one. Highlight the sense of absence. The law development here is really the misbelief that Jesus is somehow absent from our lives, from our church, and from our world. He is distant, away from us, sitting on some far off throne, listening to angels and only thinking about us if we scream very loudly.

We believe another truth entirely. The Spirit whom Jesus promised has been delivered upon and that means Jesus is here to care for, love, and give us life itself. This is only good news if the preacher reminds his congregation of what it might be like without that Spirit and the presence of Christ he brings. Life really would be about little more than the amassing of things, winning of wars, and perhaps having children who did not disappoint us too much. What hope would we have for meaning when we are inexorably destroying the planet and we are drifting farther and farther away from any sort of peace and harmony.

But with this Spirit, everything can be seen differently. The word I share, the forgiveness I give, and the loving relationships I nurture in Christ become eternal things. They have genuine significance as they result relationships with God in which he grants real life. The world whose pollution I grieve has hope in Christ and that moves me to be a part of his love for it. No, I will not single handedly clean up the environment or help all the folks whose lives have been flooded this past week in various parts of the country or burned out before the fire in California, but my picking up a little trash beside the street now has become part of His great love for this world which will culminate in a new heaven and a new earth.

3. United (Gospel That the hearer would believe that God has heard Jesus prayer and granted it in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. We are united with God and Christ, perfectly and beautifully.)

Jesus prays today for you and me, for our unity with him, with each other, with God. It is not hard to see why he needs to pray for this. The divisions inside the people of God are altogether too easy to see. A walk down just about any American street will find the names of churches which don't get along all that well. Can any of us honestly admit that there is not a little schadenfreude when we see that the pastor of the large non-denom has resigned amid some scandal?

Even deeper is our problem with God and with Jesus. For our sin is but the symptom of our true rebellion. Deep down we think that life in hell on our own terms would be better than heaven's obedient glory and peace. We operate with a delusion that somehow our autonomy and real joy is being threatened by the role of discipleship and following which defines the Christian.

Jesus describes it today, however, as unity. Don't get me wrong, united with a crucified and risen savior might be a painful experience, but Paul rejoiced in suffering and the entire band of disciples who drew lots to include Matthias in today's reading would face martyrdom and only John would die a natural death. Even Matthias would bear the witness of a martyr if the traditions which surround his name are credible. (If you want a really interesting fiction story in which he plays a part, consider picking up Philip Jose Farmer's *Jesus on Mars*.) They did not see it as a lessening of themselves, indeed, the humble fishermen of Galilee would find their real meaning in life in this unity for which Jesus prayed and God delivered.

Can we see it any other way? Christ prays for our union with God and one another, a unity which is built on his sacrificial death and resurrection. Jesus' resurrection from the dead has real consequences and one of them is that we are included in a community, a family, not of our own choosing but God's doing. Jesus is not trying to convince his disciples to play nice with one another, he is praying for a unity to be established by God, and on the day when Jesus pours out that spirit on all Flesh, including you and me, he accomplishes that unity.

Jesus regularly uses familial metaphors to describe our relationships. We may not always agree with our families but we are still their siblings, children, parents, etc. That unity is not found in agreement or common feelings or will, but in a reality which transcends those things.

4. Witness (Acts 1 That the Holy Spirit would empower the hearer to bear testimony to Christ through word and deed.)

Peter called for a witness to Christ – that same call goes out today. The world is not saturated with the testimony of Christ, indeed, if it is saturated, it is saturated with the bleak message of the law, the bad news that the world is coming apart at the seams and the usual levers of power and help are simply ineffectual. How confident we were

decades ago that we could solve problems, but we have discovered that a war on poverty has probably made it worse, the weather gets wackier, and society itself seems to be dissolving a little more with every shooting, every bombing, every terrorist. Some have simply given up hope and descended into a sort of nihilism. Others cast about for other idols in whom they can place their trust. Have you ever read the pitches for essential oil or cannabis treatments? They are truly religious. These treatments can apparently solve almost all your problems.

Peter calls us to witness to the true solution to life's problems. Through the eyes of the Gospel writers we have experienced his birth at Christmas, his passion and death and resurrection at Easter, his miracles in these readings, but not only here in this place but also out there. We have seen Jesus! He is not absent but he is here. Jesus says it today. He is in us. We are in him. He was not talking simply in some figure of speech, but he really meant it. It is what we confess and God accomplishes every time we have extended our hand at this altar and received this sacrament. Jesus in us! Look to the left and right today, see Christ.

But this vision is not just for us to gape at. The world needs us to bear witness.

Peter needs 12 – explain why. (see notes above) But we also may well need twelve. I think it often is the case that one witness will not work a conversion, perhaps it takes 12 today as well. I might be number five or six, and only rarely do I get to be that number 12, but five and six are just as important, just as necessary.

This sermon will urge the hearer to bear witness to the Jesus they have seen in life. They don't need to have the Bible memorized. They need to have their eyes open to see the same Jesus in their own lives who is talking and acting in the text of the Gospels. That is your job to open their eyes to see it, to draw the connections our enemy is so desperate to obscure. Evangelism is not memorizing and regurgitating the Bible. It is speaking about our own lives and what Jesus has done.

The Bible's role in this is normative, a shaping and guiding role. My experience of Jesus should not contradict what I find in the words of these pages, but it doesn't have to look exactly the same. It won't. Jesus rarely did miracles the same way twice. He seems to have had the individual fixed in his sight when he acted. He has not changed.

The preacher should be ready with his witness – the day Jesus answer his prayer, the day Jesus helped him, the time when Jesus comforted him. It does not need to be some dramatic event. In fact, the mundane and simple action may be better. It might open the hearer's eyes to the daily presence of Christ.