

The Sixth Sunday of Easter – May 27, 2019
Pastor Michael D. Costello, Grace Cantor

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Thanks to James Holzhauer, the gameshow ‘Jeopardy!’ is enjoying an incredible boost in its ratings. Currently at a winning streak of 27 games and breaking the \$2 million mark this week, it is probable that Holzhauer may pass Ken Jennings, who won 2.5 million dollars in 2004.

Holzhauer, as you probably know, has a unique style of playing the game, which allows him to win a considerable amount of money before unearthing the Daily Double, an opportunity to bet as much or as little of his daily earnings as he wishes. Tending toward the higher end of things and winning out (at one point this week he went “all in”), his daily wins are regularly in the five figures. Not too bad for a day’s work!

I have always struggled with the game because of its answer-question format (and, yes, I said answer-question). As I’m sure you all know, contestants are given clues that sound like answers and the responses from the contestants must come in the form of a question. One example might be: “The person who preaches at Grace on holiday weekends whenever there are no other possible options.” The correct answer: “Who is the Cantor?”

All joking aside, ask me a question and I’ll give you an answer. But give me an answer and I’ll have a hard time coming up with a question, which is why today’s Gospel reading is difficult to comprehend out of context.

Because of how the lectionary is set forth for today—the verses selected to be read in worship—it feels a bit like each of us is being asked to be a contestant on ‘Jeopardy!’ The reading begins with Jesus’ response to a question, which we will unpack in just a moment. For now, however, only a few words into the reading, I’m wondering what it is was that was asked of Jesus in the first place. To what question is he responding?

Like last Sunday’s Gospel reading, today’s reading is a part of what is known as Jesus’ farewell discourse in John’s Gospel, which encompasses the four chapters of John 14 through 17. The farewell discourse follows the Last Supper and precedes the Passion narrative, so in terms of the overall Gospel narrative—even though we are in the Easter season—we find ourselves in the time before Jesus’ crucifixion. Next Sunday we will hear a later portion of this discourse from what is known as the High Priestly Prayer.

Jesus covers a lot of ground up to this point in chapter 14; but, just prior to this morning's reading he states that he will ask the Father to give another Advocate, the Spirit of truth, "whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him." A few verses later he continues, "They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them."

And here comes the question from Judas (not Iscariot)—and it feels a little like the answer to the Daily Double. "Lord, how is it that you will reveal yourself to us, and not to the world?"

This is the question to which Jesus is responding in today's Gospel reading. And it is worth noting two things: First, that Judas addresses Jesus as Lord and, second, that he is concerned about *how* God will be revealed in Jesus' absence; specifically, how it is that God will be revealed to Jesus' disciples.

1. First, the use of the word Lord (or *Kyrios* in Greek) at this point in John's Gospel says something about who the disciples understand Jesus to be. They believe him to be God. Jesus himself said in John 13, after washing the disciples' feet: "You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet." In this act, which we recalled on Maundy Thursday, it becomes clear that this Jesus is not the kind of Lord that the disciples were expecting. This Lord Jesus, this *Kyrios*, is the one who loves and serves his disciples, even to the point of laying down his life, which he will speak about in Chapter 15.
2. Second, the disciple's concern for *how* God would be revealed once Jesus departed grows out of this newfound revelation of Jesus as a different kind of Lord. After all, the *Kyrios* expected from every human standpoint was to be a mighty warrior, the kind of Lord who would rule through force, if not downright terror. If Jesus was going to leave the disciples and bring about a kingdom that is *not* of this world, then what exactly was he going to do? Or better, *who* was going to do it?

With all of this background—none of which is trivial, by the way—we finally get to Jesus' response. How will Jesus, the Lord of all, bring about his kingdom and reveal himself to the disciples once he is gone from their sight? He answers by saying: "Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them."

In short, Jesus reveals himself and the entire Godhead *through love*—life-giving, communal, sacrificial love. The very God who brought creation into being asks that we simply love enough that we keep the word, who in John’s gospel is none other than the very person of Jesus himself. And here, through that Word—who *in love* laid down his life for the world—we are promised that his Father will love us, and that the God who is One will come and make a home among us.

But keeping the word is no easy task and, in our sin, we fall short. We turn away from God’s love, thinking that something else or someone else will take its place. It is for *this* very contingency Jesus promises that the Advocate, the Helper, the Holy Spirit—who is the very love that exists between the Father and the Son—“will teach [us] everything, and remind [us] of all that [Jesus] has said.”

To help us, to teach us, and to remind us all that Jesus has taught is at the center of the Spirit’s work, especially as we gather together as the people of God (think Martin Luther’s words about the Spirit: “Calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies” in the Small Catechism).

Around Word and Sacrament, by the Spirit’s power, we hear the words of Jesus as words for each of us in this time and place: “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.”

And on this Memorial Day weekend, when we remember those who have died while serving in the Armed Forces, these words of Jesus about his other-worldly peace speak directly to the heart of human pain and suffering, just as they have in every time and place.

This peace of which Jesus speaks is revealed to the disciples and to us, even now, even in this earthly life. And yet we wait for the fullness of John’s revelation. “The angel showed me the river of the water of life,” John writes, “bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.”

Yes, we wait for that vision to unfold. But until that day when Christ returns to usher in a new heaven and a new earth, we love as God first loved us, keeping the Word of God in love by the power of the Holy Spirit. And here—in an earthly foretaste of the heavenly banquet—we gather to feast on the paschal Lamb, who has poured out his very life for us in love, that we may have eternal life in Communion with God.

This is no game show.

This is the victory won for us through the death and resurrection of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

Thanks be to God!