

Sermon – John 14:15-21; 1 Peter 3:13-22  
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Grace Lutheran Church  
6 Easter – Year A  
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“Love That Abides, Not Abandons, or the Dude Abides”

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

***He is risen indeed! Alleluia!***

1. Waypost Camp, a Lutheran Bible Camp on Mission Lake in the middle of Wisconsin, is a place that holds my heart. It is, more than any other physical place, my spiritual home. I first went to Waypost as a five-year old for a week of family camp. I attended high school leadership camps and spent college summers at Waypost. I've spent time there as pastor-in-residence. I *love* Waypost. But the first time I went there by myself I cried. I was eight years old. My parents had dropped me off on a Sunday afternoon and wouldn't be back until Tuesday morning. So they were gone, you know, basically forever. I loved camp – the songs, the games, the campfires, the new friends, the cool counselors, even the food. I loved camp, but I cried my eyes out at night, trying to sleep on a cot as some poor college kid tried to reassure me that my parents really would come back to get me. Which, of course, they did. I haven't been homesick since. But for about 40 hours I had an unshakeable feeling that I had been forgotten, forsaken. I couldn't see my parents; why should I believe that I would see them again, that they would come back for me?
2. On the night before his death, Jesus speaks to his friends about the fact that he will soon be going away. His words have a double meaning which they don't understand. For one thing, they still don't want to believe that he will die the next day. They certainly don't yet grasp that he will be raised. So they can't catch the second meaning, that even after he rises, he will leave them

once more to return to his Father in heaven. The disciples worry about what life will be like without Jesus; they fear what will happen to them. They feel that they will soon be forgotten, forsaken. Will anyone come back for them?

3. Jesus, however, speaks words of comfort and hope. He elaborates on his earlier themes: Do not let your hearts be troubled. If you have seen me, you have seen the Father. Now he adds: I will not leave you orphaned; God will send you another Advocate, the Paraclete who is (depending on how one translates from the Greek) our Counselor, Comforter, and Helper. Who is this Spirit? What will it do? It would be easy to get lost here in mushy notions of contemporary spirituality, or some vague sense of something transcendent out there somewhere, or goodness knows what. But Jesus has something, someone, very specific in mind. This Spirit is the Spirit of truth, and it is concretely connected to Jesus' own life and ministry. This Advocate is "another Advocate" meaning it is directly related to the first Advocate, Jesus himself. Sometimes it's suggested that Lutherans don't talk about the Holy Spirit enough, and sometimes the critique is valid. Still, the Spirit was not poured out to point to itself; the Spirit comes to connect us to Jesus. Craig Koester of Luther Seminary writes, "The Easter message is that life rather than death has the final word, and this is crucial for faith. In John's gospel, faith is a relationship with a living being. For there to be authentic faith in Jesus, people must be able to relate to the living Jesus – a Jesus who is not absent but present." It is this Holy Spirit, this Spirit of truth, who connects us to the One who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. As you might remember from your catechism studies, Martin Luther writes, "I believe that by my own understanding or strength I cannot believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to him, but instead the Holy Spirit has called me through the gospel." The Spirit does what we cannot. It believes that Jesus Christ who died now lives. And not only does the Spirit do this, the Spirit does this for and within us.

4. In our epistle today, Peter invokes the memory of Noah as he writes about baptism, recalling how God washed the slate clean of a creation marred by human sin, saving eight people from the flood and promising never to do it again. Of course, humanity got back to sinning as soon as Noah and his boys stepped off the ark. But then, in the fullness of time, God decides to act with finality against the forces of sin and death. Instead of unleashing floodwaters, God in Christ goes under the waters of sin and death and emerges into newness of life. Christ pulls us through the flood with him, setting our feet upon the far shore where death is but a fleeting memory. In your baptism, you have been saved by grace. Peter writes that in baptism an appeal is made to God for a good conscience. Not a clean conscience, which you're not likely to find any time soon, you sinners. A *good* conscience. An inner voice not your own, gifted to you to guide you into truth. A conscience within you that is good precisely because it is God's own Spirit, sealed within you when you were baptized. You live in Christ because the Holy Spirit lives and moves in you, enabling you to see the Christ who would otherwise be hidden from you sight. Empowering you to know that you are not alone, this Christ will come to you. Just as he promised.
  
5. Yesterday, in this room, little Kathryn Ann was brought to the font by her mother, father, and brother. Family and friends joined in via Zoom from around the country. With five of us present, we were safely under the limit of ten people and well over the quorum of two or three gathered. Jesus showed up. We couldn't see him, of course, but with the Spirit in us we were able to see the Spirit come to claim Kathryn as a child of God, marked forever with Christ's cross. As it is now true for Kathryn Ann, so is it still true for you. Jesus is your ark, carrying you through the flood, passage purchased by his own blood.
  
6. It is easy in these days to feel forgotten, forsaken. We yearn to open up, as they say. We ache for another as we are apart. We look to the day when we

can return here for worship, and I pray it won't be long. But in the meantime, know this: Jesus will not leave you orphaned. The Spirit has come to you, lives in you, enables you to believe the otherwise unbelievable, that not only is Jesus not dead, he is the Lord of heaven and earth. I once heard a friend of mine who has several children, one of whom is adopted, respond to a question in the most delightful way. She was asked, "Does your son ever feel less loved, less special, because he was adopted?" My friend answered: "I sure hope not. I always tell him, your siblings were the ones we got and we love them very much, but don't forget you're the only child we picked out for ourselves." So it is for us, each one of us. God has chosen you. Jesus died for you and lives for you. The Spirit has been poured out upon and within you. And Christ will come again to take you to himself. In the meantime, keep his commandments. Live in his love. Keep looking for Jesus. With the good conscience of the Spirit within you, your eyes of faith can't miss him. Amen.

And now may the peace that passes all human understanding keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus, this day and forever. Amen.

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