

Fifth Sunday of Easter, April 29, 2018, Year B

St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: John 14:15-21

"The Spirit of Truth"

If you feel like the Gospel has been jumping around the last couple of weeks, well that happens in the time after Easter. Today's reading takes us right back to the Upper Room on the night that Jesus will be betrayed and then arrested. It seems that we just celebrated the resurrection but there is more that we need to celebrate, and it is in His words today that we will do that. Jesus tells His Apostles that He is going to leave them in order to prepare a place for them. He says *"And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going."* (John 14:3-4) This all happens before today's reading. Thomas asks Jesus *"Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?"* (John 14:5) Jesus answered him with probably some of the powerful words in all of Scripture, revealing the truth: saying, *"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him."* (John 14:6-7) In some places of Christianity those are fighting words – because some people try to change the words or “to better understand them” according to today's culture. It is so important that we remember that Jesus said *"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."* There is no debate here. **Jesus is THE WAY** – not one of many ways! It comes down to this: if anyone says that Jesus is just one of many ways – then they do not believe that He is truthful. I for one - do not believe Jesus to be a liar!

The Lord Jesus encourages the Apostles and all believers - when He said *"I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it."* (John 14:11-14) When we ask for something it will be “in Jesus' name” and it will be to His glory, and through that - to the glory of God the Father. Remember Jesus' words in the Gospels of Luke and Matthew: *"Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened."* (Matthew 7:7-8)

I truly learned what those words from Scripture meant when I was in seminary. My first semester in seminary, the fall semester of 2002, we uprooted our family from Jacksonville, FL, I left AT&T Universal Card and suddenly became a student after 30 years of not being in college. I had been teaching, and an instructor with AT&T, but going back to school was a whole different story. What was MLA? When I went to college you wrote your papers on a typewriter with onion skin, erasable paper. Word processors are now a beautiful thing. The hardest part was when I had to learn ancient Greek!

I did OK in Spanish in High School with 3 years of it, and I did OK using it when we went to South America twice – but Greek is a whole ‘nother issue. This is ancient Greek, which isn't

being used anymore. I learned what it was to get on my knees and seek the Lord's guidance, because I am not a linguist. All of a sudden having to learn and understand Greek, because the New Testament was written in Greek. As a pastor I can go back and look at the original text and understand what was going on before and after the text, the meaning of the verbs; past, present, or ongoing? It is very powerful stuff, but I learned that I needed to get on my knees, that there was no way that I was going to do this by myself. God is so good! Marilyn will tell you of the nights that I was on my knees in our living room, in Ambridge PA, with tears in my eyes. God is so good – and I am not bragging, but I finished all of my Greek classes with A's. Those A's do not belong to me, they belong to the Lord! God had a plan for me and He was not going to let me fail out. He wanted me to understand when I am preaching – what I am looking at.

Jesus continues in John 14 verses 15-21 telling them further of His relationship with the them and with the Father giving them a new and incredible promise. He says "*If you love me, you will obey what I command. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor (or advocate) to be with you forever-- the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him.*" Jesus is talking about the Holy Spirit living within us.

Just think of the wind. You see its effects – but you can't really see the wind! Has anyone here today ever seen the wind? You can see the trees swaying back and forth; you can feel it on your face or as it pushes your car on the road from side to side, but do you see the wind? I have told you many times before - that the Hebrew word for wind is the same for spirit- "*ruach.*" *Ruach* means wind – and the "*ruach ha Kadesh*" means the Holy Spirit –the Holy Wind. When Jesus breathed upon the Apostles in John 20 – they didn't see His breath – but they certainly felt its effects. We know the Holy Spirit because the Holy Spirit is in us, and we see the effects - the works of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus gives His Apostles both promises and warnings of what is to come, bad and incredibly marvelous. He is telling them that in spite of His upcoming death – they will never be alone. He will not leave them as orphans, assuring them His Spirit will be with them. Later that same evening Jesus tells them, "*When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me. And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning.*" (John 15:26-27) When you testify you are a witness. What does a witness do? A witness tells of what they know and what they have seen. If you are standing on Ward Street and there is a fender bender – and you go over and given your name – you are going to be a witness – and you will tell the truth about what you saw. On the Day of Pentecost, these apostles had all of their doubts and fears

disappeared. They were washed away – and they became witnesses so that each of them boldly went out into the world to preach about Jesus.

In our reading today from Acts chapter 8 we learned about the Apostle Philip who testified to the eunuch – and then he vanished. All through the power of the Holy Spirit! The 11 Apostles who were left after Judas betrayed Jesus, chose a new Apostle named Matthias – to restore the 12 – and they went out into the world – facing death. They would not have been brave enough to face death if they did not have the Holy Spirit of God – and know the truth. They would soon be joined by the 13th Apostle - Saul of Tarsus who the Holy Spirit transformed from a persecutor to become one of the most influential men in Christian history. God can use anyone! As you may feel unworthy – God doesn't see that. God sees a child of His that He can use for His ministry. Be open to it!

Back to that night in the Upper Room - Jesus knew what was ahead of Him; His arrest, trial, execution, death and resurrection. But before He left His Apostles He wanted them to understand that no matter how lonely they may have felt - they would never find themselves in the position of abandonment. He promised that His Holy Spirit would live within them as the epitome of God's presence. Jesus offered them the wonderful gift of His Advocate, Comforter, Counselor and helper to take with them through their trials. Jesus promised to come back to His people and to answer us when we call on Him. The Advocate, the Comforter, the Counselor, the Helper that Jesus promised has long since come and taken up residence in our hearts, continually teaching us what God wants and bringing peace to our souls. When Jesus took His last breath -the Temple Veil was torn in two – not from bottom to top as a human would do but from top to bottom as only God can do. This was a sign that believers would now have direct access to God Himself, in the person of God's Holy Spirit, whom Jesus promised to all believers.

We, as followers of Jesus are blessed to have the Holy Spirit's presence in our hearts – and we know that we will one day share in Jesus' Glorious presence for all eternity.

- Without Jesus in our lives – everyday problems and challenges would appear to be huge unreachable mountains.
- Without Jesus in our lives we would be at the mercy of this harsh world.

When we give our lives to Jesus we receive the kind of hope that gives us strength as we are empowered to put our daily struggles into perspective – and into His loving hands. It might be like a student getting on his knees to learn Greek, and just saying I cannot do this without you Lord! We do not need to feel worried or afraid when we know that we have Almighty God walking with us throughout life's journey.

In closing I want to leave you with words that Jesus shared later that evening. Please open your Pew Bibles to John 16:5-15, at the top of page 1678. Jesus told them, *"But, now I am going to him who sent me. None of you asks me, 'Where are you going?' Rather, you are filled with grief because I have said these things. But very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him*

Fifth Sunday of Easter, April 29, 2018, Year B

to you. When he comes, he will prove the world to be in the wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: about sin, because people do not believe in me; about righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; and about judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned. I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you. All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will receive from me what he will make known to you." (John 16:5-15)

The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are not three different Gods – but One God in three distinct persons – but all working for the same thing – the will of the Father. Jesus tells us in John 14:20 – *“you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you.”* Being a believer in Jesus Christ means that with the Holy Spirit living within us – we also work toward achieving the Father’s will – that no one would be lost. God’s love is for everyone. Remember, Jesus is a gentleman and He will never force His love on you, or Himself on anyone. As in Revelation 3:20, He stands and waits for people to open the door of their heart and to invite Him in. If they do, they will never be the same! *“The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them.”* (John 14:21)