

Fifth Sunday of Easter, May 3, 2015, Year B

St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: John 14:15-21

“The Most Wonderful Gift”

I am so very grateful to be with you today. I am sorry that I could not be with you the last two Sundays. Thank you to Wesley, Sandra and everyone who led the Morning Prayer services. I truly missed y'all, and I thank you for your prayers, cards, flowers, visits and calls – this St. Andrew's family is truly remarkable – but I don't need to tell you that. You have been family longer than I have been a part of this family – and I thank you from the bottom of my heart!

During our Wednesday night Christian Education we have been studying the Gospel of John. It has been a wonderful time of learning more about Jesus – His divinity and His earthly ministry. Today's Gospel is from the Apostle John and we are in a most interesting chapter, chapter 14. At the very beginning of this chapter, which takes place in the Upper Room, on the night before Jesus dies, He tells the Apostles that His Father's house has many rooms, and He is going 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 NIV) This statement is leading to one of our cornerstone beliefs – a place where the “rubber meets the road” and probably one of the major reasons why many churches left their previous congregations. Thomas asks Jesus *"Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?"* (John 14:5 NIV) It is here that Jesus makes this most important statement, which we all know *"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 NIV) Jesus is the perfect reflection of God the Father. We were made to be reflections of God – as we were made to be in His image and likeness – but our image is tarnished because of what took place in the Garden of Eden. Jesus' reflection of God is perfect – absolutely perfect. Jesus said *"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."* Isn't it interesting that the first two words are “I am” – the very words that the burning bush spoke to Moses when he said “who shall I say sent me?” God said *"I am who I am."* In Greek it is *ἐγώ ειμι* (ego eimi) the very same words “I am.” There is no debate here. He is THE WAY – not one of many ways. If anyone says that He is one of many ways – then they do not believe that Jesus is truthful. Famous Anglican author C. S. Lewis, who wrote the Chronicles of Narnia, and at one time was a stout atheist, and then the Lord touched his life. He had this to say about Jesus: “He is either a liar, a lunatic or Lord.” I believe Jesus' words to be absolute truth – and therefore He is Lord.

There is much more that happens that night before Jesus is arrested. Jesus is meeting any doubt that the Apostles might have straight on when He tells them *"Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves."* For three years these 12 men have been following Jesus around like puppy dogs, witnessing miracle after miracle; healings, walking on the water, calming the storm, so many things that took place. Jesus 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 NIV) When Jesus says “in my name” He doesn’t mean just tagging on “in Jesus’ name” to anything we might think of - however selfish, silly, or even hurtful. The term “name” is supposed to reveal the character. Praying “in Jesus’ name” means that as we get to know who Jesus is – we get drawn into His life, love and sense of purpose. We will then begin to see what needs to be done, what we should be aiming at, and what resources are needed to do it. I am preaching to the choir now – because without a hesitation you walked into the wilderness – away from a church – and writing your own history. You saw what needed to be done and you did it, bringing pews into the church at midnight, and much more. Doug Watkins told me about that just last night. I had heard the stories, but hearing from an eyewitness means so much more – hearing from someone who out his back to the plow. Gathering week after week, and when your priest is sick and in the hospital – what do you do? You don’t close the doors – you have a Senior Warden who says I will do what is necessary and have Morning Prayer for two weeks. We see what needs to be done, what we should be aiming at, and what resources are needed to do it, or as Wesley would say – “get ‘er done!”

When we then ask it will be “in Jesus’ name” and to His glory, and through that to the glory of God the Father – and when that happens – we should never doubt that Jesus said “anything.” He said it and He means it!

Today’s Holy Gospel begins right after this in verses 15-21 when Jesus tells them further of His relationship with the them and the Father and gives them a new and incredible promise. Jesus says *"If you love me, you will obey what I command." "And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor 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.""*

I want to ask you a question: have you ever seen the wind? You see the effects of the winds – but can you see the wind? You can watch the forecast that will tell you the winds will be 60 MPH; you can see the trees go back and forth; you can see braches fall off – but do you see the wind? The same with the Holy Spirit and ironically the Hebrew word for wind is the same for spirit- *ruach*. *Ruach* means wind – the “*ruach ha Kadesh*” means the Holy Spirit –the Holy Wind. When Jesus breathed upon the Apostles in John 20 – you didn’t see His breath – because He wasn’t in New York during a cold winter, or in an ice box. You don’t see those things but you know they are there. We know the Holy Spirit because the Holy Spirit is in us, we see the works of the Holy Spirit.

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Remember that these words were spoken on the night that Jesus was betrayed, arrested, and denied three times, and so He gives the Apostles promises and warnings of what is to come, both bad and incredibly marvelous. Jesus has told the Apostles many times that He is going to die and be raised up – but now He is telling them that in spite of His death – they will never be alone. He will not leave them as orphans. Jesus assures them His Spirit will be with them. *“When the Counselor 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 NIV) When the Holy Spirit lit upon the Apostles on the Day of Pentecost – all of their doubts and fears disappeared. They washed away – and each of them went into the world to preach about Jesus. We read about Philip who testified to the eunuch – and then he vanished. All from the Holy Spirit! These 11 who were left after the betrayal of Jesus, chose a new one called Matthias – to restore the 12 – and 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 – and know the truth.

Jesus knew what was coming in His own life – His arrest trial, execution, and resurrection. But before He left His disciples to carry out God’s plan to reconcile His people to Himself, He wanted them to understand that they would never find themselves in the position of abandonment. This would be His last chance to make clear to them before He left them that they would be cared for. 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 comforter, Counselor and helper to take with them through their trials. His blessings are founded on His promises. Jesus has pledged to come back to His people and to answer when we call on Him. The Counselor, the Helper 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 Temple Veil was torn in two it was a sign that believers would now have direct access to God Himself, in the person of the promised Holy Spirit.

We, as believers and followers of Jesus have the Holy Spirit’s presence in our hearts – and 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 cruel 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. We do not need to feel worried or afraid when we know that we have Almighty God walking with us on life’s journey. Before Jesus went to the cross and ultimately to the Father He gave us these words that I leave with you in closing: (John 16:5-15 NIV) *“Now I am going to him who sent me, yet none of you asks me, ‘Where are you going?’” “Because I have said these things, you are filled with grief.” “But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.” “When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment:” “in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me;” “in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer;” “and in regard to judgment, because the prince of this*

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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 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 bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you." "All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you." Isn't it wonderful to know that we belong to Jesus? We are His and He is ours!