

A Sermon for the Sunday after the Ascension  
John 15:26–16:4  
by Peter Bockoven

The Text

**26** But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me. **27** And you also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning. I have said all these things to you to keep you from falling away. **2** They will put you out of the synagogues. Indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God. **3** And they will do these things because they have not known the Father, nor me. **4** But I have said these things to you, that when their hour comes you may remember that I told them to you. I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you.

The Prayer

O Lord, open our lips, and our mouth shall show forth your praise.

The Sermon

“Christ, the Ascended King, Sends Help to His Waiting Church.”

- I. Brothers and sisters: it's difficult to read the verses of our Gospel, without reflecting on the fact that our country has been struck by another tragedy. A young man, 18 years old, in the state of Texas, murdered 19 schoolchildren, 2 teachers, and his own grandmother, on Tuesday last week. A truly heartbreaking story, beyond words. May God have mercy on all those families affected, and on our whole country.
- II. My friends, we are members of God's family. He is our Father. We are his children. We've been bought by the blood of his Son, Jesus Christ. We are God's family: and yet we face constant struggles, sorrows, and dangers. In face of these, we might wonder: if we are his children, if he loves us, then why is it so hard to see him in the world? For thousands of years, people have looked at the universe: all the wonders of the natural world: animal life, plant life, the expanse of space and its endless wonders, and they've often discerned this obvious truth: there is a God who made this all. But for that same amount of time, people have seen the horrors of violence, suffering, and death that also fill the world. In face of these things, God is very difficult to see. He seems hidden. We are God's family: standing between two great periods of human history. Between the Ascension of our Lord Jesus into heaven, and his return from heaven. We are God's family, and we are waiting. We are waiting for that last, glorious day. We are waiting for the fulfillment of all of Christ's promises. We are waiting for him to usher in a new age. An age of unending joy and gladness. An age in which there will be no more sickness, no more war, no more death.
- III. We are waiting just like the Apostles were. Just before his death, as our Gospel describes, Jesus promised the gift of the Holy Spirit to his disciples. This gift would be critical for the disciples, as they faced their many troubles during their apostolic ministry. And so today, on

this Sunday between last Thursday's celebration of Jesus' ascension into heaven, and next Sunday's celebration of the gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, we remember the apostles: Waiting for the fulfillment of Jesus' promises to them. Waiting for the gift of the Holy Spirit. Waiting to become empowered to begin their apostolic ministry in the world.

- IV. The Gospel tells us that the apostles' work in the world would be anything but easy. Jesus plainly describes the trouble they would have. Many would trouble them, and try to thwart their work. "The hour is coming," he said, "when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God." The apostles would be representing their victorious king throughout the earth. Preaching the Gospel. Healing the sick. Spreading the kingdom far and wide. Distributing Christ's victory to all nations and countries. And yet, by human standards, their work would not look victorious or successful. They would be: Thrown out of fellowship with their Jewish brothers and sisters. Dragged before kings and governors to defend themselves in court. Locked into prison. Whipped and beaten like common criminals. Killed and executed like the worst of criminals.
- V. But the record of Jesus' ascension, and today's Gospel show us that they wouldn't be left alone in their work. When Jesus' ascended before their eyes, he wasn't saying "goodbye" to his disciples. To them, or to us. "I am with you always," he said. And not only would he always be with them. But he would send them a special "Helper," the Holy Spirit. The one who would give them the supernatural strength and determination they needed to face their troubles. On their own, the apostles were cowardly, hiding away in rooms out of fear. But with the Holy Spirit, the apostles would become brave and bear witness about Christ. On their own, the apostles would face a world full of doubts and doubters. But with the Holy Spirit, Christ would assure them and give them confidence, that he, and all that he did, is the truth. On their own, the apostles could only forget the promises of eternal life, given to them by Christ. But with the Holy Spirit, Christ would remind them of all that he said, all that he taught, and all that he did. The Holy Spirit would preserve them and uphold them in all their trouble, and keep them connected to their victorious and ascended Lord and Savior.
- VI. Brothers and sisters, it's by this same Holy Spirit that Jesus still rules and helps his Christian Church today. he still rules and helps you. He helps his church as it is waiting. The church is waiting in the world: that means the church is often suffering persecution by those who oppose the truth. And when we hear of some members of the church suffering from persecution, we are all suffering from persecution with them. We all feel the pain. We all feel the hurt. Because we are members of one body. The church is waiting in the world: that means also, that the church, along with everyone else in the world sometimes suffers from the disastrous effects of sin. And when we hear of some in the world suffering from hunger, sickness, war, and death, we all suffer with them. We feel the pain. We feel the hurt. Because we are in the world together.
- VII. But Jesus does not leave you defenseless in the world. He doesn't leave you without a Helper, or without a Guide. In our Gospel, after Jesus had foretold the Holy Spirit and the disciples' upcoming trouble, he said: "I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you." The disciples didn't need the promise of the Holy Spirit when Jesus was with them bodily; they had Jesus right next to them, instructing, encouraging,

strengthening them. But they did need the promise of the Holy Spirit, for the time when Jesus would no longer be with them bodily. The Spirit would provide all the instruction, encouragement, and strength that Jesus formerly gave them by his bodily presence. So here Jesus teaches his disciples, that having the Holy Spirit, is functionally the same as having Jesus right next to them bodily. So if you have the Holy Spirit, it's the same as if Jesus were standing right next to you. And you do have the Holy Spirit. He's been given to you directly in his Word and sacraments. These are the avenues through which the Spirit does his important work in our hearts, and gives us the help we need. the Spirit and dwells in your heart by faith. Jesus continues to stand right next to you. And the Holy Spirit's work, as Jesus says later in the Gospel, is to convict. That is, to expose what's real. What's real about us. What's real about the world. What's real about God. Through the Law, he shows us that: Our sin is real. Our broken nature is real. The darkness of our natural soul and mind is real. And as a result of our broken nature, he shows us that: The brokenness of the world is real. And because of our broken nature, and because of the brokenness of the world, he shows us that: our natural separation from God, our loving Father, is real. But there's something more real than these things that he shows us through the Gospel of Jesus. More real, because they give life in place of death. Through the Gospel of Jesus, the Spirit shows us that: God is real. God's love is real. His mercy in Jesus Christ is real. Because the Spirit shows us the point and meaning of the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus: Christ took: All of our sin. All of the world's sin. All of our brokenness. All of the world's brokenness And all that we deserved, onto himself. And taking all that we deserved onto himself, Christ took: the fullness of God's justice and wrath. And taking the fullness of God's justice and wrath, Christ took: away the separation between God and humanity. And by all that Jesus did, the Spirit shows us that: God the Father loves the world he created. Eternal life in Jesus Christ is open to everyone who believes. The sufferings of this age are temporary; but the happiness of the age to come is eternal.

VIII. In all this, we see why it's the case that, by looking at the world, by looking at the universe, it's impossible to see the one, true God. The seasons of growth and decay in nature; the movement of the sun, the moon, and all the stars of heaven; only show us that God exists. But we need to know more than that simply exists. We need to know that he loves us, that he's saved us, and that he'll rescue us. And since we can't know that by ourselves, no matter how much we look at this present universe, no matter how far we look into it with our telescopes, When we look only at this present universe, with all of its wonders, and with all of its horrors, We can only forget the one true God. We can only forget his love. We can only forget that he has saved us.

IX. Therefore, Jesus sends us his Holy Spirit. With his Spirit given to us, Jesus walks right by our side, he is present at all times with us. Taking care of us. Forgiving us our sins. Preserving us from evil. Bringing us into eternal life. The Spirit may not show us all that we want to know; but he shows us all that we need to know. He shows us God's love for us in Christ. Since God loves you in Christ, then he will take care of you during this earthly life. Since God loves you in Christ, you can be confident that all your sins are forgiven. Since God loves you in Christ, no terror, no evil, no sorrow, will overwhelm you.

- X. Brothers and sisters, imagine a man injured in a car accident, and rushed to the hospital. He's barely conscious, unable to fully understand what's going on around him. But the staff put him on a bed. The nurse gives him pain medication, until he can be treated and recover.
- XI. Brothers and sisters, as the nurse deals with that man, so Christ deals with you. Our nature is corrupted. And as a result, we're unable to fully understand all that happens both in our own life, and in the world around us. But Christ, like a compassionate nurse, gives you the pain medication you need, until he brings you to full recovery, so that you can fully understand again. He gives you his Holy Spirit. He fixes your wandering eyes onto Christ. Christ, who is the truth. The ruler of all things. The one who holds world history, and your own life, in his hands. You're wounded, but you're in the hospital. You're in the church. Amen.