

Exaudi

24 May, Anno Domini 2020

St. John 15:26-16:4

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In the Name of the Father, and of the +Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

There is simply nothing more comforting than the truth. It sometimes hurts but at least you know you are dealing in reality. If you ask someone what they think of your clothes and they tell you “You look great!” but you don’t believe they’re telling you the truth, the compliment is useless. In fact, it makes things worse because they would encourage you to go out in public wearing something that actually doesn’t look good on you. Truth is the only comfort because a lie isn’t real. The truth allows us to operate in reality rather than in fantasy.

That is why, in the midst of warning the disciples about the troubles and the suffering that lay ahead of them, Jesus promises His disciples that He would send the Holy Spirit who is the Helper or Comforter. How does the Spirit help? He bears witness to the truth. He bears witness to Jesus - the very embodiment of Truth. That is what the disciples needed more than anything as they watched their teacher suffer and die. That is what they would need when they were cast out of the synagogues and were martyred for proclaiming the resurrection of Jesus Christ and salvation in His Name. They needed the truth because that truth would be the source of their greatest suffering. They would be attacked as heretics and blasphemers and perverters of God’s word. They would be charged with leading people astray with lies. And how tempting would it be to abandon what you believe if the most distinguished and revered theologians all called you a liar?

Make no mistake, the Gospel that the disciples went out preaching was radical, not new, but radical. That a man is God. That that God died for sinners. That that man then rose from the dead and ascended into heaven. That that God-man will return on the Last Day to judge the living and the dead. That you are not saved on account of your good works but on account of the Blood of the God-man. That even the best and seemingly most holy works are useless in matters of your salvation. That those who trust in their own righteousness are condemned. That circumcision is nothing. That neither the Law of Moses nor the law of man can save you. Such truth defied reason and logic. The disciples were in the minority. They didn’t have the status or the degrees or the years of training at the feet of renowned rabbis like Hillel or Gamaliel to make such wild claims. Who are they to proclaim such things? They needed to know and constantly be reassured that

this radical Gospel of a gracious and forgiving God who condemned sin in Himself rather than in us is THE truth. This truth condemns all other attempts at salvation. It is not simply a truth, one among many. It is the only truth the one and only salvation for all people.

It is very tempting in the midst of the fiery trial to begin to question whether the hope that you have in Christ is the truth - whether God really is who He says He is or will do what He says He will do. Doubt can very quickly overwhelm you when your sin is staring you in the face, when your reputation is being destroyed, when your prayers seem to go unheard and the suffering doesn't stop, when you speak the Word of God and everyone turns against you and makes you out to be the most loveless, hate-filled, bigoted person they know. We begin to wonder - "Maybe I have it wrong. Maybe everyone else is right. Shouldn't the truth be easier? Who am I to claim to have the truth?" Satan begins to whisper "Are you sure? Did God really say that He just forgives your sins? Are you sure that that is true? Maybe not EVERYTHING in the Bible is important or God's Word. Maybe you really can't trust the Bible at all. Maybe you've got the Christian faith all wrong. Maybe there's more than one way to heaven. Maybe your suffering is your own fault. Maybe you're the one who's wrong and everyone else is right."

This is why our Savior very specifically referred to the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of truth. This truth matters forever. It's the only one that does. The truth of your clothes, your investments, the severity of diseases - these truths last only as long as this world does. In death, even in the face of death, we suddenly see how irrelevant and powerless they and we really are. They cannot help you before the judgment seat of God. Even now, they cannot in anyway help your conscience before God. They cannot give you the security concerning eternal life. They cannot promise that you will not have to answer in full for every wicked thought, every unkind word, every selfish decision, every lust-filled glance. No matter how hard we work to try to provide ourselves with some kind of certainty of our eternal salvation, we will not ever be able to provide it by means of our own making because this simple truth remains "Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins." (Ecclesiastes 7:14) It doesn't matter how hard we try to convince ourselves otherwise, all will be revealed on the Last Day and the fig leaves of our own making will fall away and we will be left exposed and helpless in God's presence. What others think of us isn't going to matter in the slightest.

Lies may be more comfortable in the moment, which is why we tell them. But every lie comes with a cost. And no lie has a higher price tag than lying to

yourself and others about who God is and what He has done. Note God's anger toward Israel who profaned His Name among the nations. By their preaching and living, they spoke of God in ways that were not true. They conducted themselves as though God were not their merciful Deliverer and Redeemer. They lived as though God would not provide for them as He had promised. They withheld their worship, their trust, their offerings. They invented their own works and worship to try to appease God. They adopted the pagan practices of their neighbors and for that their neighbors liked them more, to be sure. But what does that matter when you have broken faith with God? And more, you have kept others from knowing and believing in the only true God and so kept them from salvation while also throwing yours away. Lies may be comfortable but they are not comforting and they come at a terrible, eternal price. "You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain." (Exodus 20:7)

There is only one truth that provides sinners with comfort and peace in this life and eternally - Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who spilled out His innocent Blood on the cross to cover the entirety of your sin and to reconcile you to God. The forgiveness of His sacrifice is the only thing that can calm the terrified conscience and resist the attacks of Satan, the world and your own flesh. And this is true because it is the only means of salvation that is completely out of your hands and does not involve your works. The sacrifice of Christ, the word of absolution, the salvation of Holy Baptism, the forgiveness of Holy Communion - these are all God's works for you. Everything has been accomplished by Christ from start to finish. All that remains for you is to receive in faith this great treasure. Christ's complete work on your behalf sets you free and this truth destroys all the lies that would have you take confidence in even the smallest thing you could do. This work of Christ is so complete that even your faith in it is a gift from the Holy Spirit whom Christ sends as a gift to proclaim to you what He has done for you.

And that truth is exactly what the Holy Spirit bears witness to. He confirms in your heart what you have heard with your ears from the prophets and apostles: that the Triune God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit - has delivered you from sin and death purely out of His grace and mercy. He has brought you to the font and washed you clean and adopted you as His own dear child. He will bestow upon you all the blessings of His gracious kingdom from your daily bread, to a clean conscience, to the peace of eternal life. He will never lie to you or lead you astray because He doesn't want anything from you. He wants you. He wants you to know that everything that comes out of His mouth is the truth. And that truth is driven by His love for you. It doesn't matter what affliction befalls you, it doesn't

matter how dark your sin seems, it doesn't matter how hopeless this world seems - in Christ you are alive, you are forgiven. What God promised you at the font never changes. What Christ promises in the Holy Supper never changes. They are the Word of the Lord spoken to you which endures forever.

Let these promises of Christ, witnessed to you by the Holy Spirit through the Holy Scriptures comfort you and be your peace. Believe nothing other of God than what He Himself has told you. Don't believe reason or your guilty conscience or the world. Don't believe the sorrow of your heart. Don't believe the diseases that threaten your body. Believe Jesus. He is your Deliverer. He is your Rock and your Refuge. He is your Redeemer. He is your Father. And all that He has promised and declared to you, He will do. That is the truth.

In the Name of +Jesus.