

Scripture Readings and Sermon

May 16, 2021 by Rev. Mark Brechin

Commentary on John 17:6-19 (Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#))

As Jesus faces his death, he is concerned about the future of his disciples. Now that the disciples have "believed that you sent me", Jesus knows that the world will reject them as the authorities have already said that anyone who accepts Jesus will be put out of the synagogues. This prayer is a prayer of protection made possible by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. It is the power of the Holy Spirit that will allow the disciples not only to be in the world protected but will empower them to go into all the world with the truth in their hearts. Jesus is the word and Jesus is the truth. "Your word is truth" and that truth is the indwelling of Jesus. This is sanctification. Not separation from the world but a dedication of our heart and soul to God. As the will of God manifests in our lives, the truth of Jesus is revealed through us and into the world. That truth will be rejected but the Father will keep us from corruption.

John 17:17 Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.
What is the truth? How do determine the truth?
What authority do rely on? Radio, news, online? Which one?
Where does God fit in?
If prayer and your source of authority conflict, who do you choose?
Do you shape the word to fit you or does the word shape you?

Commentary on Luke 24:44-48, Acts 1:4b-5, 9-11 (Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#))

While most scholars agree that Luke and Acts are two volumes of the same book, the early church wanted the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) to be read together so John was inserted between Luke and Acts. When woven together, Acts 1:3-8, Luke 24:44-50, Acts 1:9-11, and Luke 24:52-53 can be read together as the story of the ascension (note Luke 24:51 and Acts 1:9 describe the same event). That said, there are distinction to be noted between Luke and Acts. While Luke focuses on the life of Jesus Christ, the Book of Acts focuses on the life of the Holy Spirit who formed and sustained the church. In Luke, the emphasis is on how Jesus is the Messiah of the Old Testament. In Luke's Gospel, Jesus "opened their minds to understand the scriptures" three times as a way emphasize that the entire faith tradition is fulfilled in Jesus. Acts will then emphasis the power of the Holy Spirit which enables the disciples to "open the minds" of those to whom they proclaim the Good News. Without the Spirit, it is impossible to witness. The gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost only comes after the Ascension of the Resurrected Jesus which is recorded in today's reading. By emphasizing that Jesus was with them for "forty days", Acts not only places the gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost but also provides a chronological distance from the Resurrection event. This distance provides a distinct break between the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts as stand alone books.

Luke 24:47 "that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name"
What do we repent from? Sin or our will?
If sin is choosing gratification over following God, do we need to repent?
Can we call others to repent if we humbled by our own repentance?
What does forgiveness look like to you?
Do we too often accept forgiveness from God while judging others?

Commentary on Ephesians 1:15-23 (Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#))

This reading from Ephesians is paired with the ascension readings because of vs. 20, "seated

him at his right hand in the heavenly places". For Paul, however, the verse has less to do with the ascension and more to do with the authority of Jesus as the Christ. The section begins by describing how "his glorious inheritance among the saints" is obtained in Christ by all who set their hope on Christ. How do we get "into" Christ? Through hearing "the word of truth/the gospel of your salvation" and believing. Once we are "in Christ", we are sealed with the Holy Spirit. This is made evident by the fruits of faith and love shown "toward all the saints". Paul then prays that God's sanctifying grace will deepen that faith and love "with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you". This grace was begun when Christ was raised and continues in all who follow. This grace eventually leads all the saints to Christ who fills all in all.

Ephesians 1:18 "with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope"

What are the eyes of your heart?

Could it be seeing others through the loving eyes of God?

How does compassion change the way you view people and situations?

Can love and hopelessness co-exist?

Does compassion lead to hope? How does having the Holy Spirit affect this?

Sermon "Consecrated Heart" ([*Sermon Video*](#))

It is hard to imagine how a death will effect someone especially when they are close. It is even harder when you are the one affected. Grief comes at random times and to varying degrees with no apparent rhyme or reason. Grief can do strange things like make you doubt everything you believe and accept what you would normally never consider. Anticipating his own death, Jesus knew that the disciples would soon experience this grief. Jesus also knew that their new understanding and faith in him would be sorely tested. Giving us an example to live by, Jesus did the one thing he could when dealing with the future - he prayed.

He began his prayer by acknowledging his Father's glory and will. Accepting his role in his Father's plan, Jesus turns his attention to the future of those he had grown to love. This love he had developed for them, like a shepherd for his flock, was because his Father had chosen them and given Jesus them to care for. In the spirit of that caring, Jesus now asks his Father to care for their hearts. Jesus asks that their hearts be set apart, consecrated, sanctified from the divisions of the world and the lies of the evil one especially during their grief. Just as Jesus had given his heart to the Father's will even to the cross, so Jesus was asking that the disciples' hearts be clothed and consecrated in that same love for the Father's will.

Jesus is not asking that the disciples remove themselves from the world or even become "holier than thou" but rather that their hearts remain one in Christ just as Jesus was one in the Father. Holiness and sanctification is not separation from the world but rather engagement in and with the world with a heart totally filled with God. The temptations and lies of the world can not enter a heart that is filled with the love of God. As Paul says, with the eyes of our hearts enlightened we can reject the lies of the world and embrace the hope of Jesus. We have this living hope because of the ascension.

At the incarnation (Christmas), the love of God entered our human existence. The infinite Presence became present with us in Jesus. During his short life with us, Jesus revealed the full beauty and wonder written about God in the Old Testament. There was no third party or interpreter but God with us in Jesus. But while God was with us, we were not with God. The Father remained distant on the throne until Jesus ascended. When Jesus ascended, he took the essence of what it means to be human into the mystery of the Trinity. The way which was made at the incarnation now became a two way road of grace and prayer. Love flows into us because we have a living connection with the Trinity. The ascension means that not only are the eyes of our hearts enlightened and our hearts are consecrated to God but that through our living Savior we can always approach the throne of grace with our deepest needs and concerns. This is the good news of the ascension.