

Even though tides never cease; they continually rise and fall, so for now, as our Eastertide ebbs into the flow of ordinal time, we proclaim for the last time in our Eastertide:

P Christ is risen!

C He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the risen Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Since our Eastertide is winding down, and given that most retailers are open now 7 days a week and most folks anymore shop online, I thought I would get a jump on things and remind you all that there is only 207 shopping days until Christmas! Plenty of time to procrastinate. My real reason for mentioning Christmas is that as I was working on this Gospel lesson for today, I was thinking about something St. Paul wrote that may have inspired Charles Wesley when he composed “Pleased as man with us to dwell, Jesus our Emmanuel.” Wesley put these words together in the popular Christmas carol we know as “Hark! The Herald Angels Sing.” However, Saint Paul says it this way to the church in Colossae:

¹⁹For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, (Colossians 1:19).

What I’m pointing out is this, the fullness of God as we know it, is Jesus Christ.

In our Gospel today Jesus informs those gathered with him and those of us who are gathered with him today...he proclaims this fullness of God when he says:

²²The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, ²³I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. (John 17:22)

This term “glory” in this Gospel of John is NOT defined as we normally understand this term to be. It is NOT high renown or honor won by notable achievements, it not defined in this Gospel as magnificence or great beauty or a thing that is beautiful or distinctive; a special cause for pride, respect, or delight. John uses the term *δόξα* (*doxa*) “glory” to mean the manifestation of God, or the revealed presence of God, or even God Himself. Jesus is praying that his fullness may be our fullness...His “glory” may be our glory. Just as the fullness of God is pleased to dwell within Jesus Christ, he is praying for that same fullness to dwell in each of us.

Looking then at the entirety of this lesson before us, we hear the final words spoken at the gathering that we heard about on Maundy Thursday evening. Once again, this week we hear of that night when, Jesus gets up from the supper table, the last supper he will eat with his followers, and washes their feet. As he finishes washing their feet, he returns to the table and begins speaking to the gathering in what we come to know as the Farewell Discourse. Jesus then closes that discourse with a prayer, a prayer we have come to know as his High Priestly Prayer. And what we have before us today is the close of that prayer.

For in Jesus, the fullness of God dwells! Considering this *glory* along with these words of St. Paul’s understanding of Jesus Christ, listen again to what Jesus prays:

I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of *those who will believe in me* through their word,²¹ that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. (John 17:20-21)

In this prayer that Jesus, the fullness of God, is praying here today in this lesson, we hear that he is praying NOT just for those in *that* gathering, but he is praying for us who sit here today, who confesses a belief in Jesus Christ through the word those gathered with Jesus shared with others beyond that gathering. Their word is the same word that Jesus shared with them in that gathering on that night and is the same word that is shared with us today...the word that becomes incarnate through our faith and our sharing of it. But as this word is and has been shared through the generations, keep in mind that it is through the work of the Holy Spirit that the word becomes more than just a spoken word, it becomes Christ in us through our faith in it.

Now if any of you are like me, you too may be thinking...how is it that God would dwell in a sinner like me? Of course, none of this is possible without the work of the Holy Spirit. The work of the Holy Spirit is confessed and defined in the Third Article of the Apostles' Creed. This is the article that Luther titled, "Being Made Holy." This is what happens in this article when we confess that:

"I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen."

So, what does this mean when we confess this? How does such sanctifying take place? Luther explains it this way:

Just as the Son (Jesus Christ) obtains dominion by purchasing us through his birth, death, and resurrection, etc., so the Holy Spirit effects our being made holy through the following: the community of saints or Christian church, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. That is, he first leads us into his holy community, placing us in the church's lap, where he preaches to us and brings us to Christ.

Neither you nor I could ever know anything about Christ, or believe in him and receive him as Lord, unless these were offered to us and bestowed on our hearts through the preaching of the gospel by the Holy Spirit.¹

To put this article simply as Luther does in the Small Catechism:

I believe that by my own understanding or strength I cannot believe in Jesus Christ my LORD or come to him, but instead the Holy Spirit has called me through the gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, made me holy and kept me in the true faith, just as he calls, gathers, enlightens, and makes holy the whole Christian church on earth and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one common, true faith.²

No, we are NOT made holy by what we think we have earned through our self-righteousness in order to dwell with God. We are made holy by the pure grace given us through the work of the Holy Spirit...and through our faith in Jesus Christ, whose death and resurrection assures us of that grace.

¹ Robert Kolb, Timothy J. Wengert, and Charles P. Arand, *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000. "The Large Catechism" The Creed, The Third Article. Pages 435-436, par, 36-38.

² Ibid; page 355, par 6

What Jesus is praying for is that there would be an understanding of the mutuality or the relationship he shares with God. And he prays that this understanding of mutuality and relationship is extended to NOT just the disciples in his presence, but to us who have come to believe through “their word.” This was the mission of Jesus Christ that becomes apparent through the work of the Holy Spirit. A mission that makes manifest God’s love and grace that has come to us and is shared with us through Jesus Christ.³ And just as Jesus is the dwelling of God, this mutuality or this relationship of God and Jesus includes the disciples and us and that mission continues in the world today through each of us sitting here right now. We the readers or listeners of this passage are directly included into this prayer that Jesus asks of the Father, on behalf of these, meaning the ones gathered with him, but also on behalf of *those who will believe in me*...that is each of us.

An expression of this mutuality or this relationship of God and Jesus is this community of believers. As John proclaims this is this Gospel lesson that is before us today, we can hear this same sentiment in his first Epistle:

⁷ Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God, and he who loves is born of God and knows God. ⁸ He who does not love does not know God; for God is love. ⁹ In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. ¹⁰ In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. ¹¹ Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. ¹² No [one] has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and [God’s] love is perfected in us. ¹³ By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his own Spirit. (1 John 4:7-13)

As we reflect on this Gospel that is presented to us today, *PLEASE*, keep the words of this prayer of Jesus in your heart as you reflect on this passage. Please remember that Jesus is praying for *THOSE WHO WILL believe in me*. Yes, Jesus is praying for mutuality, praying for a relationship, he is praying for unity between God, Himself, those physically gathered with him and those who today gather here in His name, but keep in mind that this expression of unity ought not be taken as an expression of human solidarity or the start of an exclusive institutional structure...such as a “church” building. This prayer and its intention is NOT a private experience for the believing community...or as Jesus prays:

that they (*meaning us or those who come to believe*) may *all* be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.

²³ I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved *them* even as you have loved me.
(John 17:21, 23)

Our call, our mission, or rather our entire sense of who we are as baptized Christians in this Holy Apostolic Church, is not to challenge the world with some program of exclusive communal reform, but with the Gospel message about the relationship or the unity we all share with God the Father and the Son Jesus Christ as well as each other in here and out there. This is what Jesus prays when he says:

³ *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, Editors: Raymond E. Brown, S.S., Joseph A. Fitzmyer, S.J. (emeritus), Roland E. Murphy, O. Carm. (emeritus). Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1990. 61 The Gospel According to John, page 979, 205 (iii) *That they may be one (17:20-26)*.

"I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word...

Through the Holy Spirit, this Word that we share becomes the incarnate Word of God that in the beginning *was with* God and was God. This Word, when shared is the “glory” of God...the very revealed presence of God. This Word, when shared is the unity we all share with God and with Jesus Christ and with each other. This Word, when shared is the heart of our relationship with God, with Jesus Christ, and with others, this Word, when shared is God’s love, it is God’s grace in Jesus Christ, if there is no word shared beyond this gathering there is no future, there will be none who will come to believe, there will be none who know. St. John writes earlier in this very chapter:

³ And this is eternal life, that *THEY* may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. (John 17:3)

This word, when shared is and has been shared through the generations not just spoken in the interpretations of various languages, this word is shared in the love, the grace, and the respect that God gives each of us through Jesus Christ. Through the work of the Holy Spirit the word becomes more than just a spoken word, it becomes Christ in us and Christ in others in here and out there.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.