

The Collect.

O ALMIGHTY God, who alone can order the unruly wills and affections of sinful men; Grant unto thy people, that they may love the thing which you command, and desire that which thou dost promise; that so, among the various and manifold changes of the world, our hearts may surely there be fixed, where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The Epistle. James 1:17-21

EVERY good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures. Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath: for the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God. Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls.

The Gospel. John 16:5-15

JESUS said unto his disciples, Now I go my way to him that sent me; and none of you asketh me, Whither goest thou? But because I have said these things unto you, sorrow hath filled your heart. Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you. And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they believe not on me; of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more; of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged. I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you. All things that the Father hath are mine: therefore said I, that he shall take of mine, and shall shew it unto you.

Our Eyes Are Open

Jesus says that he will show himself to the Apostles after he is gone. But Judas understandably asks: "how is it that you will show yourself to us, and not to the world?"¹ This question was provoked because Jesus had said to the Apostles: "He that has my commandments, and keeps them, he it is that loves me: and he that loves me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him." The strange thing is that Jesus doesn't give Judas an answer – at least not directly. Listen carefully to what he does say: "If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him." Jesus says that the Father will be sending us the Holy Ghost (παρακλητος) and "he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.

The Gospel reading for this Sunday comes from John, chapter 16, which is part of a larger "table talk" section in John, which extends from the beginning of the 13th chapter of John and concludes at the end of Christ's high-priestly prayer of the 17th chapter.

I have mentioned before that I believe that there is considerable evidence that John has greatly expanded this section to help the Church understand her relationship with the risen Lord, since most of the discussions that Jesus has with the disciples here can only be understood, and in fact *were* only understood, long after the ascension. If I am right that John has expanded this table talk section, this means that John considers this very important stuff. And since there is not much information in the other Gospels about what was said prior to the ascension and about how we must live after the ascension of Christ, I think that the Church should be preaching on this section often.

We have also mentioned before that Jesus in this section of John starts referring to us as "friends" – which really lifts our status with God to a very high level. In John's epistles, we will go even higher than this. In his first epistle – not in this table talk section, John will refer to us as "begotten" γενναω of God. And this idea fits in perfectly with another very important new idea that appears in this section. And that is that we are no longer part of this world. Thus, Jesus says, the world will hate us, just as they have hated Christ. Because the world and those that are of the world are from below; we are from above – because we have been born - γενναω - from above.

My spiritual formation class has been praying through the psalms, and the question has come up – why so much talk about our enemies? This is why. The best way to understand much of its talk about spirituality, and much of its talk about our place in the world - is that we are in wartime.

Remember that Jesus had made this same distinction – of two opposing forces - when arguing with the Jews: "And [Jesus] said unto them, Ye are from beneath; I am from above: ye are of this world; I am not of this world."² And this is one of the reasons that Jesus calls us friends. Because we have decided to begin our departure from the world with him, and we have begun to assume our place in the fraternity of the gods. In the OT, God called them gods to whom the word of the Lord came.³ How much more does he in the New Testament call us the sons and daughters of God - to those who have been begotten to a new life by the word of his truth that he has spoken to us - as even St. James has said?

Another key, new idea that John includes in the second part of his table talk section is that Christ has *overcome* the world. And since Christ is our commander in chief, so will we. And he here means something much more than “overcome.” The word νικᾶω means “to actively conquer.” And even more importantly, the word used for “world” is κόσμος, which is a much larger word than our “world.” John used this word in last week’s proper. It’s a much larger word than even “universe.” For we will conquer *all* of the forces of *all* worlds – not just the silly unpleasantnesses of our puny psychological and emotional and romantic and political life on this planet. We will conquer sin. We will conquer disease. We will conquer sorrow and tears. We will conquer the devil himself. And we will conquer the final enemy. We will conquer death. We will overcome the catastrophe that will engulf the entire universe - whether it is dies by fire or ice - we don’t know. This is the ending of our theodicy. Christ – and all who follow him will achieve *total* victory – over death itself.

One of the last features that sets off the second part of the table talk from the first part is that Christ begins to speak *plainly* in the second part - as if belatedly to create that two-tiered audience structure of Matthew that we’ve mentioned before, even though later on, John has Christ saying to the High-priest: “I spoke openly to the world; I always taught in the synagogue, and in the temple, where the Jews always resort; and in secret I have said nothing.”

And this is because Jesus doesn’t have any secrets. There are no secrets in our Gospel. If the Gospel is hid, Paul says, it is hid from those who are not looking for it. There’s no inner cadre initiated with secret truths that are withheld from the rank and file, like many other secret societies. Truth is not a secret that can be possessed or not possessed. *The knowledge of the truth is something that can be believed or it can be disbelieved.*

And this is what separates the two Gospel audiences – the two opposing forces in the warfare of God. There are those whose eyes are open and believe, and there are those whose hearts have waxed gross and their ears have been stopped and their eyes have been shut. They have turned from the truth of God and their minds and hearts have become darkened.

This is the distinction of the two Gospel audiences. And this sets up an enormous conflict – not just the world, trying to throw off the authority of God – but between the world and us who bow before that authority. And this, after all, is the answer to Judas’ question. This is how Jesus will reveal himself to us and not to the world.

There is no magic required in his answer. There is no deep philosophical explanation required about how we can have the assurance of Jesus’ presence with us - of which the world is entirely ignorant. It isn’t even the result of a super-spiritual, mystical experience – although we will have them. Jesus Christ will illuminate us and not the world *because our eyes are open*. And the world’s eyes are not open. They are blind. They do not want to see. They are preoccupied with looking after their earthly lusts and lives, not immortality. It’s just that simple.

If we want to know which side we are on, John says, we must ask ourselves: Is the Holy Ghost leading us into all truth, revealing Christ to us? Do we see now? If we can answer yes, then he is. And

further: do we have the peace of God living in our hearts – or are we all torn apart by lust and turmoil and doubt and distress and worry and fear? Be honest with yourself, John says. These are the primary markers of Christ's presence in your soul. If we are still blind to the truth, then we cannot have the peace of Christ. We can only have the wretched chaos of a forever unsettled world.

If we have made the world our true and final love then we can never have the peace of Christ. The love of the world will always end in futility and heart-break.

The world, represented by Babylon in the Bible, will always betray us, because she is not capable of love. She is only capable of bondage. She does not glorify Christ; she glorifies herself. It is she that says of herself: "I sit a queen, and am no widow, and shall see no sorrow."

She callously plays with the souls of men. She promises them so much but gives them so little. She tempts us with so many precious things, so many beautiful things, so many delightful things. The things that men's souls long and lust for. But in the end there is nothing but weeping and gnashing of teeth. Nothing but betrayal and pain and sorrow and death.

But if we are looking into the very Word of God, with our eyes open, his Word will transform us. His Word will conceive itself in us. His light will illuminate us. We believe that Christ was conceived by the Holy Ghost. So are we. John says we are. And this is how Jesus is going to build a church – *in absentia* – in a hostile world - out of men's hearts – no matter how much we may have sinned. Suddenly, when we now look into the depths of our own souls, we see something conceived there that we could not possibly have produced. It is something that longs for eternal life. It longs for virtue. And it longs for the love of God.

And here we come to the central purpose of John's table talk. *From now on we are going to consciously live and move and have our being through that power and presence of the Holy Spirit.* That's what this section is about. In a sense, Christ is *never* going to leave us. He will be *spiritually* present. And the Father, himself, will be spiritually present too. Because the Holy Spirit of God will be given to us to dwell with us and in us - empowering us for every seemingly impossible good work and to fulfill every new and seemingly impossible commandment that has ever come from the lips of Christ.

Especially the *newest* commandment. The one in which we are commanded to love each other. Not with easy, abstract sentimental affection, but with a love so great that we are willing to lay down our lives for the "friends of Christ," as he laid down his life for us. It will be a love so great that the leaders of the Church will be willing to lay down *their* lives for the sheep just as Christ laid down his life for the sheep. Instead of running away - leaving the flock to the wolves because they don't pay us enough money or fulfill our social and psychological needs... It will be a love so great that we give our bodies and our blood for the life of each other and for the world. Can we do that?

Christ reveals himself to us and not to the world by the Holy Spirit that dwells in us. He will lead us and empower us and inspire us. And He will teach us wonderful things. Things that we were once not ready to see or to understand. Just as the first generation of Apostles were not ready to understand the rest of the story of the Gospel until *after* Christ had gone.

Surely, this is what this period of the Church's calendar is for - this liturgical discipline - between Easter and Ascension - and then on to Pentecost itself - to open our eyes and to focus them to see these things. Until we all clearly see and understand the answer to Judas' question. Jesus will reveal himself to us and not to the world through the Holy Spirit, whom the world cannot receive. Why? Because our eyes are open - and the world's eyes are not. - *Amen*

¹ Joh 14:22

² Joh 8:23

³ Joh 10:35 If he called them gods, unto whom the word of God came, and the scripture cannot be broken