

Exaudi, A✠D 2010
John 15:26-16:4

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

1 The mood definitely changes at the end of the Easter season. Last week it was “whatever you ask the Father in my name, I will give it to you.” This week, it’s “the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God.” Last week the Introit was, “With a voice of singing, declare, proclaim this, utter it to the end of the earth. Alleluia. The LORD has redeemed His servant Jacob! Alleluia.” This week it’s “Hear, O Lord when I cry aloud. Alleluia. Your face, O Lord, do I seek; hide not your face from me. Alleluia.” What happened between last Sunday and this? Why the drastic change in tone? Thursday was the Ascension of our Lord. Christ’s ascension is both a comfort to His Church that she will ascend with Him when He returns and also a reminder that things are not as they should be or will be. Ascension is like a splash of cold water. When the Paschal candle is extinguished after the Gospel reading at Ascension, we are reminded that the day for which we are hoping and praying, the Day of our Lord’s return, has not yet happened.

2 So on the Sunday sandwiched between the Ascension of Jesus and the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, the Lord’s Church has appointed this Gospel reading. Jesus tells His disciples, “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. And you also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning. I have said these things to you to keep you from falling away. 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. And they will do these things because they have known neither the Father, nor me.” You will be put out of the synagogues. And the one who kills you will not be a godless pagan; he will be highly religious. And he will suppose your death to be what the church needs to survive.

3 The threat is not from the outside. Richard Dawkins will not convince you to abandon your faith and leave Christianity. But those inside the walls of church buildings might. Oprah will not, with her spiritualities of the day and invented false religion, cause you to fall away or keep you awake at night wondering about the validity of your faith. Satanists, Mormons, Christian Scientists, and Muslims will not persuade you that Jesus is not God or that God does not love you and desire to forgive your sins. The threat Jesus warns about is not from those outside the Church but from those supposedly inside the Church, who will persecute you to worship God and protect His Church.

4 In the time between Jesus Ascension and His return, the ongoing Exaudi of the age of the Church, the millennium, the Church is militant. She fights. Her enemies, however, are not those outside her midst. Her enemies are the devil and the world. And she fights, not for her sake, not to defend herself, but you. She fights against false doctrine and false belief, fights to preserve you from the devil, the world, and your sinful flesh. The devil great trick is not to come exposed for the liar and deceiver he is, but to come looking genuine and true. A wolf in sheep’s clothing is more welcome among sheep.

5 But who likes a militant Church? How celebrated is the idea that the Church keeps vigilant watch and valiantly fights against false teaching? Not very. No one trumpets closed communion as something they’re proud of. No one is satisfied that there are divisions and denominations within the Church. It is exceedingly unpopular to believe in God’s Word, even in the Church. Far more enticing is accommodation. The temptation is to tolerate different proclamations of God’s Word. Make a little

room for different interpretations. Fudge the details a little. Don't believe Genesis 1 and 2 are to be read according to their simple, literal sense? Want to accommodate those who teach that marriage is less a picture of Christ and His church than a picture of two people who sincerely love each other? Want to allow room in the pulpit for preachers who will talk less about sin and more about the great life God has planned for you now, or the ways God expects you to work for social justice?

6 And isn't there room in the Church for different perspectives on Baptism? Can't Christians agree to disagree whether the words of Scripture which plainly declare "baptism now saves you" are to be read literally or in some other way? Can there be room for disagreement over whether Jesus meant "is" when He said "This is my body" and "This is my blood"? Can't there be some wiggle room in the Gospel to allow for Rome's works righteousness or Evangelicalism's decision theology? Why must there be fighting in the Church?

7 The Church is militant—she fights—because the Gospel is important. What she confesses matters, not for her sake, but for yours. She fights because you must fight. Your sinful flesh is powerful. It does not by nature love the Word of God or even want to hear it at all, let alone hear it purely and unadulterated. You naturally want to compromise the Law by watering it down, to protect yourself, to spare yourself from its condemning accusation. You're content to let the Law condemn the sins of others, as long as it doesn't call to repent of your own. And with a watered-down Law, you only need a watered-down Gospel. If you're not completely sinful, you don't need a complete Savior. If you're not altogether dead in your sins, you don't need a source of new and complete life. You fight against your sinful flesh because it fights against the pure Gospel that God became man in the person of Jesus to suffer and die for your sinfulness, to buy you and the whole world back from the slavery of sin.

8 The world may hate you and war against you. Pious-seeming religious folks might cast you out of the churches, might kill you, or might merely persecute you for your confession of the pure Word of God. But you do not need the world's favor. You do not need the favor of those in the Church, even those in the true Church. You have the approval of the One who has sent to you His Holy Spirit. His approval He declared from the cross: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." You have His approval in Holy Baptism: You are a beloved child of God; all the inheritance of Jesus belongs to you. You have the Holy Spirit, whom the crucified, risen, and ascended Jesus has sent to you.

9 The Holy Spirit points you to Jesus. That's how He gives you comfort. When the world, even the religious, want to take your life, the Holy Spirit calls to your memory the One who gave His life for you. When the world threatens persecution, the Holy Spirit reminds you of your Lord's passion. "I have said these things to you that when the hour comes, you may remember I said them to you." The word of your Lord is a word of love stronger than hatred, of forgiveness greater than all of your sin, of life that triumphed over death. The Holy Spirit comforts you with the knowledge of what your Lord accomplished for you in Holy Baptism. There, He joined you into the very life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, so that neither death nor persecution can strip you of that life from Him. And the Holy Spirit comforts you by drawing you to receive the Body and Blood of your Lord who died to deliver you from your sinfulness. Here, His precious Body and Blood take away your sin, strengthen your faith, and fight against your dead, sinful flesh.

10 The desire for peace is good, and peace only comes through the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, who accompanies the pure proclamation of God's Word, who points you to Jesus. The Church will not always be militant. One day, she will be triumphant. On the Day when the ascended Christ returns to gather her to Himself, all the schisms and heresies that besiege her will be ended. All the divisions will be gone.

All the fighting will be finished. The victory, which is already won, will be fully hers. And fully yours. Until that day, she joins you into her company and fights on your behalf against your enemies of the devil, the world, and your sinful flesh. In her company, the victory is guaranteed.

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

Soli Deo Gloria

Pastor Jeff Hemmer