

## Exaudi, A✠D 2009

**John 15:26 - 16:4** "But 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. <sup>27</sup> And you also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning. "I have said all these things to you to keep you from falling away. <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> And they will do these things because they have not known the Father, nor me. <sup>4</sup> But I have said these things to you, that when their hour comes you may remember that I told them to you. "I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you.

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

1 "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." These words of warning from Jesus to His disciples must have come as a shock. You will be killed, not by the angry atheists or the politically powerful. You will be killed by the religious elite, who will suppose that by killing you, they are offering service and worship to God. That's how offensive the Gospel is: not even those who suppose to be religious can handle it.

2 "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." The word for witness is martyr, the word we use for a person who has died for a cause. So would all the apostles be witnesses to the One whose ministry they witnessed, by giving their lives. According to tradition, ten of the eleven apostles died by martyrdom, with only St. John living to die a natural death in old age—albeit exiled to the island of Patmos. Andrew was crucified on an x-shaped cross. Bartholomew was either beheaded or skinned alive and crucified upside down. James the Greater was beheaded with a sword. James the Lesser was thrown from the pinnacle of the temple and then stoned and beaten with clubs. Jude was killed by being beaten with clubs or shot with arrows. Matthew was burned alive, stoned, or beheaded with an axe. Peter was crucified in Rome, upside down as he considered himself unworthy to die in the same manner as his Lord. Simon was sawn in two, and Thomas was speared to death. Philip was scourged, imprisoned, and

crucified. Mark was dragged to pieces. Even Matthias, chosen to fill Judas' place, was beheaded.

3 The Gospel is equally unpopular today as it was when Jesus warned His disciples that those who killed them would do so in supposed service to God. Not belief in a god, that's exceedingly popular, nor even Christianity, as that's marginally popular, but the Gospel—the message that you were so ensnared in your sins and worthy of hell that God suffered and died in your place—is unbearably offensive. It's to that Gospel that the apostles were made witnesses.

4 Far preferable to the Gospel is the neatly ordered religion that's easy to manage. In this religion, only those with nice, normal sins are included, while those with more obvious (thus easier to avoid) sins are marginalized. That's why the Pharisees and scribes could gather to stone the adulteress but departed when only the sinless were afforded the opportunity to cast stones. With the Gospel, there are no normal sins; each is an abomination. In this neatly ordered religion, you are expected to clean up your act and make yourself outwardly presentable before approaching Jesus, but with the Gospel, Jesus comes to you—to anyone—as you are, to take away your sins. It was the Lord Himself who went to dine in the homes of tax collectors and sinners. In this neatly ordered religion, approval of others is sought more than approval from the Lord; with the Gospel friendship with the world is enmity toward God. The Gospel of Christ left the religious elite stung, offended, ready to kill the Chief Proponent of the Gospel. So also it will render the rest of its witnesses public enemies, outcasts from the popular religious thinkers of the day.

5 The temptation for those to whom the Gospel has come is two-fold. On one hand, the temptation is to fear persecution. Favor in the world's eyes keeps you far safer—at least temporally—than favor in God's eyes. The temptation is to avoid what St. Peter calls the fiery trial that is about to come upon you. But friendship with the world is enmity with God. Repent of the desire to choose the easy, comfortable, Gospel-denying way. The other temptation is to be

the persecutors of those who bear the pure Gospel. The notion that you are not generally a good person doesn't sit well in the ears of the popularly religious. The message that you can do nothing to earn God's favor is unwelcome to your American Dream sensibilities. The Gospel is truly offensive to your sinful flesh because you so desperately need to hear it. But only by the one who despairs altogether of his ability to do anything righteous is the Gospel truly heard. Repent of the knee-jerk reaction against the proclamation of the pure Law leading to the delivery of the pure Gospel.

6 No witness, no martyrdom, is anything other than a testimony to the death of the One who spoke this warning to His disciples. Even in the face of death, know this: Jesus has sent the Holy Spirit, the Comforter. "In what way, then, does the Holy Spirit comfort? The Lord says, He will witness of me. In other words, beloved, the devil will intimidate and frighten you, the world will imprison and kill you. That you must expect; it simply won't be different; but in contrast, the Holy Spirit will be a witness of me, awaken you, and inspire you to think of me. He won't give you a thousand or more dollars like the world, but he will witness of me and enable you to say, When everything is gone—wife and child, house and property, goods and honor, yes, even body and life—still, Jesus Christ, who for my sake became man, died and rose again, has ascended into heaven to the right hand of the Father, as I daily confess in the Creed. If that is true, of what should I be afraid? Truly God's Son, my dear Lord, who suffered death for me will not be my enemy. He means well with me. If one loves someone, one does not fear him. If God's Son loves me, I have no reason to fear him or believe him capable of anything evil" (Luther, *HP*, 2:147).

7 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 send you out to bear witness—to be a martyr—of Him who lived, died, and rose for you.

8 That's witnessing. Not saying, Look how much God has blessed me, or even, God gets me through tough times, but rather, Look to Him who died to forgive me my sins. Your life as a forgiven, beloved child of God is a witness to Christ Crucified for you. And likewise your death, whether at the hands of those who think to offer service to their false gods or on a bed surrounded by loved ones, your blessed death with the Lord's gift of faith is a witness to Him who rose victorious from the grave and has promised that you will follow.

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

*Soli Deo Gloria*  
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