

Rev. Janet R. Doyle  
Elmer Presbyterian Church  
7<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter  
May 29, 2022  
Scripture: John 14: 15-31; Acts 1: 3-11

## **Sermon: A Special Gift**

A man named Norm Williams went to the library and requested two books by author Deborah Tannen, who is a communication researcher. One of her most popular books is entitled, ***That's Not What I Meant***, and another is entitled, ***You Just Don't Understand***. "What's the first book?" the librarian asked. "That's Not What I Meant," Norm said. "Well, what did you mean?" the librarian asked. "That's the title of the book," he replied. "Okay, and the other book?" asked the librarian. "You Just Don't Understand," he replied. "Excuse me?" said the confused librarian. It took a while, but Williams finally got his books.

This Sunday we are looking at our scripture lesson in John 14 where Jesus tells his disciples he is giving them a special gift after he leaves them, the gift of the Holy Spirit or known also as the Advocate or the Comforter, but talking about the Advocate can also be as confusing as Norm Williams getting his books at the library.

The Holy Spirit is mysterious and hard to understand, and at times, we feel the Holy Spirit's presence guiding us and comforting us beyond explanation. We have to be listening carefully for the promptings of the Advocate in our lives. The Holy Spirit is a special gift to us if we choose to accept it.

Next Sunday, June 5 we will be celebrating the birthday of the church universal when the disciples were given the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, which is 50 days after Jesus' resurrection.

Today we are celebrating Jesus' Ascension to the Father. May 26<sup>th</sup> marked 40 days from our celebration of Jesus' Resurrection and the day the disciples said good-bye to Jesus as he ascended into the clouds. This marked the beginning of the disciples' wait for the special gift given to the world that changed people's lives over the last centuries.

All of these celebrations are important because it marks the beginning of the ministry of the disciples after Jesus commissions them to carry on, but he reassures them that they will not be alone doing it.

In our previous sermons and readings of this, chapters 13 and 14 in the Gospel of John, we see that Jesus is having a question-and-answer session with his disciples. The disciples have many questions for Jesus because they don't understand everything Jesus is telling them about the future and what they are to do. They have been with Jesus for three years now. They left their jobs, boats, investments, family and their life plans to be with Jesus and learn from him. Before Jesus' death, he starts to prepare the disciples that he is going to die, and where he is going, they will come someday. Peter asks Jesus on the night of his arrest (John 13:36), "Lord, where are you going? Why can't I come now, Lord? I am ready to die for you." Jesus tells Peter, "You can't go with me now, but you will follow me later."

Jesus tells the disciples in John 14, "I am going to prepare a place for you and you know the way to where I am going." But Thomas speaks up and says, "No, we don't know, Lord. We have no idea where you are going, so how can we know the way?" Thomas wants a map, a GPS signal, to point the way and the direction as to where he is going.

Then Philip is next with his question we looked at last week. Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied." Jesus was still surprised at his disciples not knowing that when you have seen Jesus you have seen the Father. The Father and Jesus are one.

Jesus wants them to understand that obedience to God and his love isn't complicated. If you love Jesus and obey his commandments you will never be alone, because after Jesus' ascension to his Father, the Advocate will be in their presence, and at Pentecost, the Holy Spirit will touch them with power to do the work of the Father.

Jesus reminds his disciples that their hearts don't need to be troubled or afraid. Have you ever left your child or grandchild or seen a parent leaving their child at school or the nursery and the child is crying because they don't want their mother or father to leave them? They are afraid to be without them and alone. The disciples were like those children; fearful and afraid to be alone. Just like a child needs

reassurance that it will be all right and they will return, so do the disciples need reassurance for the journey that is about to begin. Jesus also reassures the disciples that he will come back again for them. These are the promises that Jesus is also reassuring us with.

As a result of the love we have for Jesus, the Father is able to come and dwell within us. If we don't love Jesus or keep his commandments, the Holy Spirit is not going to be our special gift. The Holy Spirit equips and empowers us for service. God's Spirit will empower us to proclaim the gospel message, to tell others about the life changing power of God. It is the Holy Spirit who will work in the hearts of people to convince them of who is the Truth and not the lies of the world.

Jesus is asking the Father to send the Holy Spirit to dwell in us to remind us of what he has taught, to bring God's words back to our minds. We can communicate with God directly and have a relationship with God because of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. The empowering of the Holy Spirit will bring us peace in the midst of the storms of life. Jesus tells us it is a peace that the world can't give us.

One of the greatest desires we have, especially in today's world, is an inner peace. It is a peace born out of a living, personal relationship with Jesus himself and the gift he has given us of the Holy Spirit. The peace we can have because of our faith and belief in the promises Jesus has for us.

Because God's Holy Spirit dwells within us, when we pray, God is present in our praying. For us, prayer is communicating within the mystery and gift of God's Holy Spirit.

As the Apostle Paul puts it, "The Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God." (Roman 8: 26-27)

So, the Holy Spirit is given to all who love Jesus Christ, to empower us for his work, to teach us all things, and to give us a real and lasting peace in the knowledge that Jesus has overcome the world.

How do you receive that special gift of the Holy Spirit? By being one who loves Jesus Christ and lives an obedient life serving and following his commandments.

The Great Commission sends us out. Acts 1:8 says, “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

Let us thank God for the Ascension of Jesus so that we would receive his Holy Spirit.

Let us pray that God’s Holy Spirit would be present in each of our lives in a real way; that we would recognize his presence and draw great comfort and peace from it as we enjoy being part of God’s own family for the Holy Spirit is a special gift like no other we will ever receive.