

All this I have spoken while still with you. ²⁶But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. ²⁷Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

It is a joy to get together with family, as my family and I recently realized while on our vacation in Wisconsin. While we were in Wisconsin, we stopped at Neenah, and visited with my brother and his family. My younger brother serves as the chairman of the WELS congregation that he and his family belong to. It also happens to be the same congregation where I served as a vicar in my third year of seminary training. While I was there, this past week, he showed me some of the farewell retirement videos for two of the school teachers that I knew while serving as a vicar there. It brought to mind other farewells. The farewells at Martin Luther Church in Neenah are a regular occurrence. In fact they plan for at least one farewell every year, because the vicars are only there for one year. When we think about those kinds of events for a congregation, and as families come together to say their goodbyes to those called workers. That kind of farewell will often times include not just goodbyes but maybe even a gift for the individual leaving. A keepsake that they will have, so that they will always remember their time spent there with fond memories.

What we have today is something rather ironic and actually different. Rather than the departing individual receiving a gift, we have Jesus telling us that when he leaves he will be providing the gift. He says he will definitely leave his disciples (for our Savior speaks only the truth when it comes to the past, present and the future). Yet in this situation, he will not be the one receiving a gift, rather in a strange kind of way (even as the center of attention for this special farewell), he is the one who gives a gift. And it will not just be one small token-gift; it will even be more than just one gift. It will include many gifts as our text makes clear for us. He gives the gift of the Holy Spirit, and he gives the gift of peace. He gives it not as the world gives it. That gift that we focus on today leaves us to understand that: **Jesus gives us the perfect farewell gift.**

1. The gift of the Holy Spirit is unearned

2. The gift of the Holy Spirit is unmatched

Think about what was celebrated on May 29, as far as Ascension Day. Ponder for a moment the Ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ! He went up into heaven with a significant purpose in mind, in order to leave rich blessings for us. When Jesus ascended into heaven . . .

- He assured us that he is the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords.
- We know that he went to the right hand of God the Father almighty. And there at the Father's right hand he would continue to serve us faithfully, as he had during his ministry. He would continue to serve as our Prophet, as our Priest and as our King. As our Prophet he proclaims his message of salvation to us through the Word. That's what a prophet does. As our Priest he intercedes for us, he pleads on our behalf. We pray to him in his name and he blesses us. And as our King he is in control of every little minuet detail in our life. He is in control, to keep us dependent and trusting in him.
- His ascension also tells us a greater message. It tells us that as far as gaining and paying for our salvation, he didn't have any more reason to stay here. Because his work was done, your redemption was bought and paid for. He lived the holy life, he died the perfect death, and he rose again victorious so that his resurrection is indeed our resurrection. And because of that all being done and finished he could go back to heaven to comfort us and to remove from our minds any doubt what so ever as to whether he finished what he came to do. It is truly finished and accomplished.
- We are also reminded by his ascension (for he tells us so in the opening verses of John chapter 14), that he has gone to prepare places for us. What a comfort it is to know that he has ascended into heaven so that the mansions he has prepared for us will be ready for us when he calls us from this life, whether that be this week, this month, this summer, or later this year. We don't know when our Lord calls us home to himself.
- We are further reminded of the additional comfort that is included in his Ascension. He is going to come back. For the angels said, "This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11). That is a comfort, because if Judgment Day comes while we are still alive on

- this planet, he will come to gather us to himself. And if we have died, he will raise us and gather us to himself. He is coming back. This planet earth is not and will not be heaven, this side of Judgment Day. We know only too well that this life is far from heaven. So he will come back and all the elect will be gathered into his perfect kingdom.
- Now we have a final blessing connected to his Ascension. That is made clear for us in our text. This final blessing is attached to all those other blessings. This is the blessing of the Holy Spirit. For our Savior has not abandoned us. Perhaps, for most of us, there is no greater fear than to be abandoned. Some years ago there was a movie called Home Alone. It was about a young child who is left behind while the parents and all the siblings take off on a plane to Europe. You could see the fear in the face of that child. The fear becomes even more evident as his time alone increases. He longs to be with Mom and Dad. You also saw the fear of the parent's who were separated from that child. But the analogy we want to focus on is how a child feels when they have lost track of Mom and Dad. They've gotten separated from Mom and Dad. But when they see Mom and Dad again, they are at peace, they are at ease, and they are comforted. This is true, not only because of the familiarity, but because of the safety and security that is there with Mom and Dad. They know best how to show a real love and affection, by providing physical care and protection as well. Our God reminds us and assures us that he will not abandon us and he does not abandon us. He sent us not only Christ to live and die for us but the Holy Spirit to live in our hearts. And to make us alive in Christ for time and eternity. This true love became a real love for each of us at Baptism, at the time in which we became children of God.

This is a tremendous comfort as Jesus speaks these words to the disciples and speaks them to us. He reminds us that this is a profound gift. He reminds us that this is an unearned gift that God doesn't owe to us. In fact, because of our sin and rebellious nature, we deserve to be abandoned by God. We didn't do anything to warrant any such loving attention from God. It is by His grace, not only that Christ left the glories of heaven and came to this earth, but also that he sends the Holy Spirit to keep us from every being alone and to always have peace. Hear again the words of our text, ²⁶"But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. ²⁷Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you."

Bear in mind the many sins that we have already committed. These make us unworthy of these gifts of forgiveness, peace and security. So often we forget about these gifts. We forget about what Christ went through on our behalf. Now, so that we will never forget his sacrificial life and death, he sends the Holy Spirit. He sends the Holy Spirit that empowers his Word to bring about the miracle of life. This is a new life, a spiritual life, a life of faith. This truth was pronounced and made apparent in the Old Testament reading. For it was by the breath of the prophet, the word of the prophet, which the Holy Spirit breathed into him, that brought dead bones back to life. Ezekiel recounts for us in Ezekiel chapter 37 (verses 9-10),

Then he (the LORD) said to me, "Prophesy to the breath; prophesy, son of man, and say to it, 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breath into these slain, that they may live.'" So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet – a vast army.

And now God the Holy Spirit does the same thing with our dead bones by nature and makes us alive in Christ already at Baptism. What a rich blessing God gives to us. We come to especially value and appreciate this gift when we are reminded of the sins that first alienated us from God and didn't make us worthy of these great gifts in the first place.

We have often forgotten these truths. No doubt, that is the reason that we would want to gather in worship on a regular basis in God's house even during the summer time when we feel like its vacation time. The Holy Spirit doesn't take a vacation. And as we recognize how important the Holy Spirit is in keeping us in the faith, may we use the Holy Spirit who comes to us in word and sacrament to embolden us in the faith and to empower us to share the faith. Have we thought about that? Have we pondered that? Not as well as we should. The opportunities are there for us to use the Holy Spirit to nurture our faith. This is true now, whether that be with the upcoming

Vacation Bible School for our children in the first week of August or in the Adult Bible Classes on Monday nights. The Holy Spirit is working through that Word to keep us alive in Christ.

At those times in which we have not remembered, we make ourselves worthy of being abandoned by our Lord. But in his grace he came for us, he came to be with us, and still comes into our hearts today. He comes to us and reminds us of everything. Jesus told his disciples that this would especially happen for them after the day of Pentecost. "But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit . . . will remind you of everything I have said to you" (John 14:26). This kind of "remembering" for the disciples was a profound miracle. We can't remember everything that was said. In fact it is said that one of the poorest ways to learn anything is by your Pastor standing in front of you and talking to you. It is said that people only retain ten percent of what they have heard. That which involves more visual, and especially hands-on, is the best way to learn. But even none of those ways involves 100 percent retention or 100 percent remembering. But God the Holy Spirit would perform a miracle that would allow these disciples to remember everything, 100 percent, not only for their benefit but for yours because they are God's holy writers. Since many of them became the writers of Scripture, you and I need never forget, but always remember the details. Value those special gems in scripture that Jesus is the only Way the Truth and the Life.

- There are those Bible passages that assure you that because he lived you too will live.
- They show you that God, who promised to send a Savior, fulfilled that promise.
- They tell you that Jesus who made that promise also fulfilled it.
- Just as the Old Testament prophecy tells us that Pentecost would happen, so also Jesus prophesied it and it all happened.
- It's all a plan. It's God's plan, and he reveals it to us so that we know that nothing is happening by happenstance or by chance but because of God's design. All things happen in line with his will for our good, in order to draw us closer to Christ and to keep us focused on him.
- We further know that there is not another Savior we should some day expect. Jesus is the all sufficient Savior. He is to be the focus of our faith, of our attention, of our living, and of our serving.

In God's Word then we leave here today knowing that we have a tremendous gift. Not just the gift of the Holy Spirit that is unearned. But the gift of peace that is also unmatched. Isn't that what Jesus said. "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives"? How often doesn't it happen that you may get "such a deal"? You get something in the mail; it's yours for the asking. But you have to pay the shipping and handling. Sometimes such vague promises are sent along with a credit card bill. It may say you are going to get something for nothing, until you find out the shipping and handling costs are more than what the product is even worth. There are always strings attached. But not with God's gift. Not with his gift of peace. That peace is even greater than world peace. Peace has been sought with so many armistices and so many alliances. So many treaties have never maintained or sustained peace, harmony or unity. This is because everyone is always looking out for his own interests. God gives us a peace by interceding for us. In his demand for a full payment for sin, he sent Christ to shoulder that payment on our behalf. This is what Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians chapter 5, "God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them" (2 Corinthians 5:19).

Let us ponder how that reconciliation is ours because God has given us a gift that is unearned, a gift that is unmatched, a peace that wells up unto eternal life. He gives us a security of knowing that we are not abandoned. God is with us and gives us eternity. Jesus, prior to his Ascension said, "I will be with you always even to the end of the age." And we will be with him always, even to the end of the age as a result of the promise of heaven. Share that gift, knowing that God has given you that gift with no strings attached. In this way you will grow in knowing and appreciating and valuing the perfect farewell gift. Someday we will say "farewell". When we say "Farewell" from this earth and from this life, we will enjoy the fruits of that gift of the Holy Spirit as an unearned gift and an unmatched gift indeed. Amen