



## Sermon

19 May 2024

### The Holy Spirit's Task and Ours

John 15:26-27; 16:4b-15

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There was a fascinating plaque attached to a building that I once saw which read, On the 28<sup>th</sup> of June on this spot absolutely nothing happened.

The opposite is true when we turn to the New Testament. Imagine how it would have been to watch Jesus doing the things described there. There must have been an almost constant sense of amazement in the disciples as they experienced again and again the miracles that Jesus performed.

We must of course realise that the intensity of the actions may not have been so great. The Gospel writers are trying to condense three years into a few pages. Even so it must have seemed like a whirlwind ride.

So, it comes as a bit of a bombshell to hear Jesus say in our reading today that he must leave them. Nor is the response of the disciples at all a surprise. They are grief stricken. And in response to their grief Jesus tells them it is to their advantage that He goes away. Sounds too much like the parent who is handing out some severe discipline. "This is going to hurt me as much as it does you." Yeah right!!!

What we need to grasp hold of is that the Resurrection was not expected by ANYONE but Jesus himself. Yes, there would be Resurrection on the last day. Everyone knew that. No one was expecting one NOW.

That is the emotional context of this passage. Absolute devastation. The disciples react the way any ordinary person would.

So, Jesus seeks to comfort them by telling them what will happen after He has left them. The great comforter, the Holy Spirit will come. He will take Our Lord's place. More importantly He will be able to be in each one of them wherever they are. He will lead them into all the truth about Jesus and the things He has been trying to get across. Near or far, the disciples are promised the very presence of God Himself. Even so Jesus concludes His talk with them by saying, "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now."

No, they can't. It will take the Resurrection itself to begin to open their hearts to receive what Jesus is saying.

Rather than a plaque saying, "Absolutely nothing happened." We need a plaque saying, "On this spot 2000 years ago God acted to inaugurate stage four of His plan to redeem His world." For that is the message of the NT. That is what we believe. That is why we always have hope. God has acted. He still is, even now. With exception of walking on the water, I have seen or heard from a reliable source the miracles recorded in the NT.

So, let's now see what we can learn of this Person that Jesus is talking about. What does this passage teach us. He will prove the world wrong in three ways and for three reasons.

1. The world is wrong about sin.
2. The world is wrong about righteousness
3. The world is wrong about judgement.

The world is wrong about sin because people do not believe in Me.

The world is wrong about righteousness because I am going to the Father, where you will no longer see Me.

The world is wrong about judgement because the prince of this world now stands condemned.

Let's look at each of these.

Why is failure to believe in Jesus so important? What is sinful about that? One of the greatest insults that can be given to a person is to take them for granted. Try ignoring your wife, friends, workmates, or workers. Never thank them and never give them the merest hint that they matter to you. Just expect them to be around when you need them. And if anything

goes wrong, blame them. That is the way people treat God. God has given us everything we have, including life itself. The NT says that Jesus is upholding the universe with His mighty power (Hebrews 1:3-6). Everything remains in existence because God is holding it there. No wonder St Paul places, "Neither were they thankful." at the beginning of his list of the sins of humanity. God has come in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. To treat Him as if He didn't exist, to take all He has done for granted is the greatest of sins. The Holy Spirit comes to convict the world of that.

How come our Lord's return to the Father tells us we are wrong about righteousness? The word righteous is used often throughout scripture. William Barclay describes it as having a right relationship with God, people, and creation. It means having everything in its right place and in its right order. Jesus was not universally accepted by everyone. Many still think of His teaching too hard for human beings. Who can live up to the rigours of the Sermon on the Mount? John puts it this way, "He came to that which was His own and His own did not receive Him." (John 1:11) He was called a friend of sinners, despised because He allowed a woman of dubious reputation wash His feet with her own tears and wipe them with her hair. Finally, the authorities of His day executed Him as a heretic and a dangerous imposter. Such was the world's verdict. The Resurrection proved them all wrong. The Ascension placed Him at the right hand of the Father. The Holy Spirit comes to show the world is wrong about Jesus. He is Lord of lords and King of kings, by the declaration of the Father Himself. Heaven and earth are now under the rightful rule of their one true King.

The world is wrong about judgement. The centre of all wrong is spiritual and can only be dealt with finally in spiritual ways. "Put on the whole armour of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle," says St Paul, "is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms." (Ephesians 6:11-12) The Holy Spirit comes to show us this truth and live accordingly. The main thing here is to see that the enemy now stands condemned. He has done the worst He can. Every weapon he has was launched against Jesus on the Cross. There is nothing else he has in his armoury. But he still fights on using whatever or whoever comes his way. We can join the battle against all forms of evil. But we must be clear that only by the power of the Holy Spirit will we be victorious.

Such is the work of the Holy Spirit as described by Jesus. The great Catholic philosopher and teacher says that the shortest sermon he has ever heard came from one of the great saints. It is four words long. "I'm God: You're not." That is a great summary of the first task of the Holy Spirit. With apologies to whoever the saint was could we add to that and say the second one can be summarised, "I'm right: Dad said." And the third could be, "I'm judge: You're not."

For that is the importance of the statement our Lord makes at the beginning of His description of the work of the Holy Spirit. He comes to prove to the world wrong.... **It is not our job to do that.** Our job is to live speak and act, as a church and individually in cooperation with the Holy Spirit. We are not alone in our fight against the evil powers of this world or the evil spirit that is behind them all. Jesus must leave this world in order that the Holy Spirit may come. That is what we celebrate on this day each year. The heavy lifting has been done by our Lord on the Cross. His work on the Cross is finished. The defeat of the enemy is certain. We now join the battle against evil wherever we see it looking all the time for the presence and guidance of the Holy Spirit. At the same time, we are seeking his guidance and truth for when we, individually and as a Church are part of the problem.

Let me say it again. The Holy Spirit is the one who proves the world wrong, NOT US. We need Him in our lives to both keep on the right path ourselves and be junior partners in the battle against evil.

Can I invite you to open yourself now to His work? Will you welcome Him again into our midst to enable our worship. Will you now reach out to Him and asked to be filled anew that you may become part of the answer and not part of the problem.

**God forbid that there will ever be a plaque on this Church saying, Today, in this Church, nothing happened.**