



Redeemer Lutheran Church of Leisure World

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Reflections on WORSHIP and DISCIPLESHIP by Margo Geesing

“Promises, Promises, Promises, and Fulfillment”

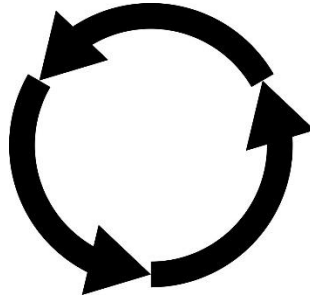
It seems odd that during the Easter Season, when we are in celebration mode, we would return in the Gospel lessons to the night of Jesus’s arrest and the night before his crucifixion. In the three Gospel lessons leading up to the final Sunday of May when we celebrate Pentecost [the birthday of the Church], we reflect on the promises that Jesus gave his followers just before his death.

The first Sunday of May Jesus speaks with his disciples before his arrest. He tells them he is going to the Father to prepare a place for them. As usual, there is confusion and doubt. Jesus re-iterates that he is in the Father and the Father is in him. He also reminds them of the requirement of discipleship: to continue the work he has begun to glorify the Father. He ends with the promise that if we ask anything in His name, He will do it.

The second Sunday of May is Mother’s Day. In the Gospel we are reminded that God’s love is unconditional. With that said, for many, love for God tends to be conditional. If God does whatever, then I will love him and believe in him. Jesus calls his followers to a greater love. To love unconditionally. How do we show that we love him: we keep his commandments. Simply put, Jesus’s commandment is: to love God, love ourselves, and love our neighbor. The Gospels are full of the “how to” live that commandment. We fulfill the Ten Commandments and we live the Beatitudes. Through our faith in Jesus, we are called to feed the hungry, we give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, give shelter to the travelers, we visit the sick and imprisoned, and we bury the dead. We are given the example of prayer and alms giving. We find in Jesus many examples of forgiving, healing, and being merciful. But Jesus also promises that he will never leave us unsupported in these actions. He promises to send the Advocate. There is a huge circular gift of love that is presented in this Gospel:

Jesus Loves the Father and Humanity

We Love Jesus, the Father, and Our Neighbor



the Father Loves Jesus and Creation

And we are graced to be in this circle. We show our gratitude by continuing the circle.

Thursday, May 18 is the Ascension of Our Lord. For this day, I'd like to look at the first lesson from Acts. It begins with an explanation of what has occurred. Jesus gives them a final commission: go be witnesses to the ends of the earth. Let us reflect on the word choice of "witness". We go beyond the idea of someone who just saw and are not affected by what happened: a bystander. Rather a witness is someone who saw, experienced, and is now stating the truth. This is what we are called to do: to continue that witnessing. As Jesus ascends to heaven, the disciples cannot help but stare upward in awe of what they are seeing. Suddenly two men, appear and push them out of their lethargy. They are kindly telling them, "There's nothing more to see here; get to work." The issue is similar to people who say, I love Jesus and I go to church and leave it at that point. Our primary witnessing **does not** come in gathering together. Why do you come? Habit or duty? To receive Communion? To sing the hymns? To hear Scriptures? To listen to the sermon? To see friends? Do you come to worship because it satisfies your needs? Sorry to break it to you, you're like the disciples who are staring up at the sky. We need community to strengthen us for the journey, but we are **sent** at the end of our celebration. We come together to praise and worship God. We come to satisfy Jesus's desire to be with us on the journey. So, go and WITNESS to what Jesus has done in your life. Go and share Jesus.

On the third Sunday of May we have Jesus praying for his disciples the night before his crucifixion. This is not a prayer of "never let anything bad happen to them" but rather a prayer of remembrance. Father, remember these people who love me and love you. Jesus KNOWS that following him will be a life of suffering, hardship, disasters, pain, and tragedy. Most of his early followers ended up in jail or suffering painful deaths. Jesus doesn't ask that they are spared these things. He asks for the gift of strength to preserve during these trials for his followers. Jesus knows that their belief in him makes them one with him and through him, one with the Father. This unity will always triumph.

The final Sunday in May is Pentecost Sunday. The birthday of the Church. The day the Holy Spirit came to the disciples. There are various views of how the Spirit was given to them. In the Gospel of John, the Spirit is given before the Ascension. Jesus appears to them in a locked room where they were hiding in fear that they would be next on the hit list. The first thing Jesus says is, "Peace be with you." Jesus then commissions them, breathes on them to

give them the Holy Spirit and tells them to GO. In the alternate Gospel for Pentecost Sunday, also from John, Jesus only gives a foreshadowing of the Spirit. Here Jesus refers to the Spirit as a river of living water that will flow from the hearts of believers. In Acts there is wind and fire. The disciples are accused of being drunk. In 1 Corinthians the gifts of the Spirit are named. We don't really hear a lot about the Spirit except on Pentecost. That's really a reflection on the Holy Spirit. Although the Spirit can be violent wind and fire, usually the Spirit is peace and breath. The Spirit manifests to do good. The Spirit is guidance. The Spirit is strength. The Spirit is inspiration. The Spirit is what let the disciples come out from behind the locked door, let their fears go, and allowed them to witness to who Jesus is. The Spirit is what renews the face of the earth. The Spirit is what moves **US** out of our fears and encourages us to witness to our own faith.