

Sixth Sunday of Easter May 17, 2020

The Ascension of Our Lord May 21, 2020
Lectionary Year A – the Gospel of Matthew

Living the Lutheran Lectionary

A weekly study of the Scriptures for the coming Sunday since May 4, 2014.

An opportunity to make Sunday worship more meaningful and to make the rhythms of the readings part of the rhythms of your life.

Available on line at:

- ✦ www.bethlehemlutheranchurchparma.com/biblestudies
- ✦ Through [www.Facebook.com](https://www.facebook.com) at “Living the Lutheran Lectionary”, “Bethlehem Lutheran Church Parma”, or “Harold Weseloh”
- ✦ All links in this on-line copy are active and can be reached using Ctrl+Click

Gather and be blessed:

- ✦ **Thursdays at 10 AM(5pm Kenya/Uganda):** At Bethlehem Lutheran Church, 7500 State Road, Parma, OH 44134 and on line through <https://zoom.us/j/815200301>
- ✦ **Fridays at 7 PM in a house church setting:** For details, contact Harold Weseloh at puritaspastor@hotmail.com
- ✦ **Tuesdays at 1:00 PM (8pm Kenya time)** via Zoom to the Lutheran School of Theology - Nyamira , Kenya
- ✦ **On Facebook through Messenger** in a discussion group shared by people throughout the United States, Kenya and Uganda. Contact Harold Weseloh on Facebook Messenger.



<https://slideplayer.com/slide/8935555/>

Hymn of the Day

Lutheran Service Book (LSB) 556 The Lutheran Hymnal (TLH) 387

“Dear Christians, one and all, rejoice”

“Dear Christians, One and All, Rejoice” was probably the first hymn Luther wrote specifically for singing by a congregation in worship... The original title of “Dear Christians” was “A Christian hymn of Dr. Martin Luther, setting forth the unspeakable grace of God and the true faith.”...

The congregational character of this hymn is immediately evident in **stanza 1**...OK, but what about Ps. 66:16? Well, perhaps surprisingly, this hymn is all about what God has done for “my soul.” Read **stanzas 2–3**... How many uses of “I” and “me” and “my” can you count? Pool your knowledge of the life of Luther to discuss how well these stanzas fit his story... Whoever we are, whatever our station in life, we are this one sinner Luther describes!... Is this what makes a first-person account compelling — that it in fact applies to every individual?

What, then, has God done for my soul — for every soul? Read **stanza 4**... Imagine that! God had me in mind even before He created the world! See 2 Tim. 1:9. We can all say that! ... How precious am I to Him? What did He give for me?

Everything God has done for me is now laid out in **stanzas 5–9**. Read through the familiar story — but notice the very personal way it’s told... Where do you see each of these passages reflected in the stanzas: 2 Tim. 1:10; Gal. 4:4–5; Phil. 2:5–8; Ps. 46:1, 7, 11; John 15:13; 17:6, 10, 21; 2 Cor. 5:21; Rom. 3:24–28?... Read **stanzas 9–10**... Which of those functions of the Holy Spirit does the hymn recall? Remember John 16:13–14, 33. Of whom, again, does the Spirit speak?...How does the Spirit see to it that Christ’s story continues? For whom is His personal story now?...”

- <https://www.lcms.org/worship/hymn-of-the-day-studies> study by Carl C. Fickenscher II
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2ULPc1QpUCw> From the organ book Salvation unto Us: Twelve Easy Organ Preludes for Reformation Twelve new settings of hymns by Kevin Hildebrand from the Reformation era and for the observance of this festival.
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JQExktYVhYI> Messiah Lutheran Church and School, Eau Claire, WI Affiliated Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC)
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y6F3GxcQXWE> [LutheranWarbler](#) “Finally, I am getting around to my most requested hymn, and as a Reformation special, it is a LutheranWarbler duet with my mom!” Includes all ten verses.
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ggi5hfL7Wy4> “Written in commemoration for the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation ... A significant instrumental flourish opens the piece, setting the stage for an energetic theme that combines traditional style with a more modern rhythmic vocabulary. Episodic sections reflect the rise of this significant text which articulates the story of redemption.”

Commentaries have been chosen because the author has written in a way that compliments the reading. Not all of the commentaries are from Lutheran sources. They have been edited for length and in some cases for additional content that is not in keeping with a Lutheran understanding of Scripture. Links are provided for those who wish to read the entire commentary.

The Holy Bible, English Standard Version. ESV® Text Edition: 2016. Copyright © 2001
by [Crossway Bibles, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers.](#)

During the season of Easter the Old Testament reading is replaced with a reading from The Book of Acts. The Old Testament/Epistle titles are changed to 1st and 2nd reading.

1st Reading– “What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you.”

Psalm – “Come and see what God has done”

2nd Reading – “Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good?”

Gospel – “***I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.***”

Acts 17:16-31; Revised Common Lectionary (RCL), Acts 17:22-31 (Next week: Acts 1:1-11; RCL, Acts 1:6-14)

Arriving in Athens, Paul becomes distressed over the many idols adorning the city.

He decides not to wait for the arrival of his colleagues, Silas and Timothy (17:15) in order to share God’s good news with the Athenians. As has been his custom, Paul first visits the synagogues where he dialogues and debates with Jewish men and women (13:5, 14; 14:1) as well as those devout persons (hoi sebomenoi) in attendance (cf. 13:43; 16:14; 18:7). However, he does not limit himself to the synagogues; he also speaks to the people gathered in agora or marketplace (verse 17).

The Athenians and foreigners who frequented the market place were accustomed to hearing and engaging with new philosophical and religious ideas (verse 21). Epicurean and Stoic philosophers debated with Paul. Some concluded that Paul was a “Babbler” (spermologos, verse 18). That is, his message sounded piecemeal, like Paul had distributed crumbs of knowledge to them without the coherence and sophistication of the philosophers.

Others interpreted Paul’s words as promoting foreign divinities/religion because he spoke about the resurrection of Jesus. Neither party seemed to understand, but so that Paul should account for the perplexing intellectual and religious seeds he had scattered, he was escorted (epilambanomai) to the Areopagus (verse 19). It seems that Paul is being forced to officially explain himself before the city council...”

➤ https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=1932 [Mitzi J. Smith](#)

J. Davison Philips Professor of New Testament, Columbia Theological Seminary, Decatur, Ga.

Paul and Silas in Thessalonica Verses 1-9

Paul and Silas in Berea Verses 10-15

Paul in Athens Verses 16-21

¹⁶ Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols. ¹⁷ So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout

persons, and in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there. ¹⁸ Some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers also conversed with him. And some said, “What does this babbling wish to say?” Others said, “He seems to be a preacher of foreign divinities”—because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection. ¹⁹ And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, “May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting?” ²⁰ For you bring some strange things to our ears. We wish to know therefore what these things mean.” ²¹ Now all the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there would spend their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new.

Paul Addresses the Areopagus Verses 22-34

²² So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: “Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. ²³ For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription: ‘To the unknown god.’ What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. ²⁴ The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man,^[a] ²⁵ nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. ²⁶ And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, ²⁷ that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, ²⁸ for

“In him we live and move and have our being’;^[b]

as even some of your own poets have said,

“For we are indeed his offspring.’^[c]

²⁹ Being then God's offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man. ³⁰ The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, ³¹ because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.”

³² Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked. But others said, “We will hear you again about this.” ³³ So

Paul went out from their midst. ³⁴ But some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite* and a woman named Damaris and others with them.

- a. [Acts 17:24](#) Greek *made by hands*
- b. [Acts 17:28](#) Probably from Epimenides of Crete
- c. [Acts 17:28](#) From Aratus's poem "Phainomena"

* Dionysius is accredited as becoming the Bishop of Athens. Read more about him at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dionysius_the_Areopagite Damaris has an unclear background and more can be learned of her starting at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Damaris_\(biblical_figure\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Damaris_(biblical_figure))

"A Sermon Tailor-Made for the Athenian Elite

Paul's sermon to the Athenians illustrates both the inescapable reality of this enfleshing and the importance of paying attention to it. This sermon is like no other in Acts, because Athens is a cultural context like no other in Acts. In Acts 17 the gospel comes to one of the ancient Mediterranean world's centers of intellectual sophistication. There it endeavors to find a foothold. Watching it do so, we learn something about Christian preaching and Christian faith. The book of Acts has fun telling the story. Ancient historians described Athens as a very intellectually curious and very religious place. Acts does much of the same when it says, tongue in cheek, that the Athenians "would spend their time in nothing but telling or hearing something new" (17:21).

Extending the humorous undertones, it seems that Paul does not come to Athens to preach, but to wait for Silas and Timothy while things cool off in Thessalonica and Berea (17:1-15). But he cannot restrain himself, having become too aggravated by the locals' religious vitality that he understands as laudable but ultimately misguided.

Although he had just been forced out of two other major cities, in Athens a crowd of intellectuals (or wannabe intellectuals; the narrative leaves us wondering) enthusiastically ushers Paul before the Areopagite council, the city's governing authorities. He is not in legal jeopardy; the amused crowd wants its leaders to hear what he has to say.

Paul does not disappoint in this, the only major speech in Acts addressing a polytheistic audience (save, to a degree, Acts 26). Flashing his cultural bona fides, he quotes two Greek poets to the elite crowd. "In him we live and move and have our being" is probably from Epimenides (6th century BCE), and "We are his offspring" likely comes from Aratus (3rd century BCE). In these rhetorical moves, Paul secures a basic point of agreement with his audience: neither party thinks that deities dwell inside manufactured things (17:24-25). Everyone knows better than that. (Compare Stephen's comments in Acts 7:48, which formed the context for last week's reading from Acts 7:55-60)

Laying a foundation of common ground is an important part of this speech. (That's what this passage commends for Christian preaching.) After acknowledging the Athenians' religious fervor, Paul launches a critique of simplistic notions of idolatry in 17:24-29. Handmade gods have their limits. God appoints the natural order, precisely so that God may be found in human existence. We should infer that his audience nods and replies, "Amen." ..."

- http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=886
[Matt Skinner](#) Professor of New Testament, Luther Seminary, St. Paul, Minn.

+++++

“Paul ends his sermon by announcing that the time of ignorance is over and calling for eschatological repentance (17:30-31). Now Paul’s purpose is clear. He is not seeking to add a new god to the Athenian Pantheon; he is rather seeking the Athenians’ repentance! God will no longer “overlook” this ignorance (cf. 14:16; Romans 3:25); now is the time for repentance (17:30).

Just as God had made all the nations to inhabit the whole earth from one man (17:26), so God will judge the world through the one man whom God appointed (cf. Romans 5). That this man is Jesus is confirmed when Paul says that God raised him the dead (17:31). Paul has deferred the misunderstood subject of resurrection (17:18) until the end of his speech. The sermon ends with God as the main actor: God overlooks, commands, sets the day, judges the world and provides proof through the resurrection.

Paul’s Areopagus speech is sometimes unfairly criticized: 1) for lacking explicit citations to Scripture, which led 2) to the speech’s failure to win converts among the Athenians. But as we have seen, Paul’s argument is thoroughly grounded in the thought world of biblical Judaism (and Christianity) despite its lack of scriptural citations. And a peek at the very end of the story suggests that while some of Paul’s audience did mock him (17:32a), others promised to hear him again (17:32b), and still others “joined him and believed” (17:34). So goes the proclamation of the Gospel!”

- http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=2068 [Mikeal C. Parsons](#)
Professor and Kidd L. and Buna Hitchcock Macon Chair of Religion, Baylor University, Waco, Texas

Psalm 66:8-20; the same reading (Psalm 66:8-20; RCL, Psalm 68:1-10, 32-35)

“I recall from Sunday School days in a small Minnesota church that it was always one of my favorite songs. Somehow our group assembled for “opening exercises” always got cranked up singing the refrain: “I love to tell the sto-ry, ’twill be my theme in glory.” I was disappointed when the “green book” (Lutheran Book of Worship, 1978, 390) left out that word, “’twill” replacing it with “I’ll sing this theme in glory”. But now I’m happy to see that “’twill” is back in the 2006 red book, Evangelical Lutheran Worship, 661). Twice the singer of this Psalm invites the congregation to pay attention to a story he has to tell. First, the psalmist invites listeners to “come and see what God has done,” (verse 5) and then he tells what God has done for God’s people. Second, the psalmist invites the congregation to “come and hear...and I will tell what God has done for the psalmist (verse 16)...”

- https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=875
[James Limburg](#) Professor Emeritus of Old Testament, Luther Seminary, Saint Paul, Minn.

How Awesome Are Your Deeds To the choirmaster. A Song. A Psalm.

66 Shout for joy to God, all the earth;

² sing the glory of his name;

give to **him** glorious praise!

³ Say to God, “How awesome are your deeds!

So great is your power that your enemies come cringing to **you**.

⁴ All the earth worships **you**

and sings praises to **you**;

they sing praises to your name.” **Selah**

⁵ Come and see what God has done:

he is awesome in his deeds toward the children of man.

⁶ **He** turned the sea into dry land;

they passed through the river on foot.

There did **we** rejoice in **him**,

⁷ who rules by his might forever,

whose eyes keep watch on the nations—

let not the rebellious exalt **themselves**. **Selah**

⁸ Bless our God, O peoples;

let the sound of his praise be heard,

⁹ who has kept our soul among the living

and has not let our feet slip.

¹⁰ For **you**, O God, have tested **us**;

you have tried **us** as silver is tried.

¹¹ **You** brought **us** into the net;

you laid a crushing burden on our backs;

¹² **you** let men ride over our heads;

we went through fire and through water;

yet **you** have brought us out to a place of abundance.

¹³ **I** will come into your house with burnt offerings;

I will perform my vows to you,

¹⁴ that which my lips uttered

and my mouth promised when I was in trouble.

¹⁵ **I** will offer to you burnt offerings of fattened animals,

with the smoke of the sacrifice of rams;

I will make an offering of bulls and goats. **Selah**

¹⁶ Come and hear, all **you** who fear God,

and **I** will tell what **he** has done for my soul.

¹⁷ **I** cried to **him** with my mouth,

and high praise was on^[a] my tongue.^[b]

¹⁸ If **I** had cherished iniquity in my heart,

the Lord would not have listened.

¹⁹ But truly God has listened;

he has attended to the voice of my prayer.

²⁰ Blessed be God,
because **he** has not rejected my prayer
or removed his steadfast love from **me!**

- a. [Psalm 66:17](#) Hebrew *under*
- b. [Psalm 66:17](#) Or *and he was exalted with my tongue*

“On this Sixth Sunday of the Easter season, Easter is frankly fading from our minds. The trumpets are stored away, the lilies have long been consigned to the trash, and we’re moving on to Ascension Day and Pentecost. So it’s a good thing to preach on Psalm 66 today, because it reminds us that every Sunday, indeed, every day is a celebration of Easter. “Come and see what God has done (verse 5).” “Come and listen ... let me tell you what he has done for me (verse 16).” God has done “awesome deeds (verse 3).”

What awesome deeds has God done for us? “Praise our God, O peoples, let the sound of his praise be heard; he has preserved our lives and kept our feet from slipping (verse 9).” After a time of terrible testing, God has “brought us to a place of abundance (verse 12).” The early church recognized this as a Psalm about the passage from death to life. That’s why some very early Greek and Latin manuscripts have inserted the word “Resurrection” into the superscription.

Psalm 66 is a Psalm of resurrection—not just Christ’s once for all Resurrection, but also the previous world changing resurrections in the salvation history of God’s people and the smaller but personally important resurrections we experience day after day. The first half of the Psalm (verses 1-12) praises God for those nation making resurrections (the whole Exodus event from the Red Sea to the Jordan and perhaps the return from Exile), while the second half (verses 13-20) celebrates the life changing resurrection of one person whose prayers God answered...”

- https://cep.calvinseminary.edu/sermon-starters/easter-6a/?type=the_lectionary_psalms Stan Mast Adjunct Professor of Preaching, Calvin Theological Seminary, Grand Rapids, MI

1 Peter 3:13-22; the same reading (1 Peter 4:12-19; 5:6-11; RCL, 1 Peter 4:12-14; 5:6-11)

“Suffering is a central issue in the letter of 1 Peter, and it is a central focus of this week’s lectionary text.

Peter has been bringing both words of hope and caution to his readers in the first chapters of the letter. They should act in ways that are honorable and holy (1:15-17; 3:10-12) so that their neighbors and even family members (3:1) have no reason to criticize them (2:11-12). The tension inherent in their situation comes to the fore in our passage, where Peter asks the question that seems to be plaguing his audience: “Who will harm you if you are zealous for good?” (3:13; Common English Bible)...”

- https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=3239
[Jeannine K. Brown](#) Professor of New Testament, Bethel Seminary, St. Paul, MN

Wives and Husbands Verses 1-7

Suffering for Righteousness' Sake Verses 8-22

¹³ Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? ¹⁴ But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, ¹⁵ but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, ¹⁶ having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. ¹⁷ For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil.

¹⁸ For Christ also suffered^[b] once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, ¹⁹ in which^[c] he went and proclaimed^[d] to the spirits in prison, ²⁰ because^[e] they formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water. ²¹ Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, ²² who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him.

- a. [1 Peter 3:7](#) Some manuscripts *since you are joint heirs*
- b. [1 Peter 3:18](#) Some manuscripts *died*
- c. [1 Peter 3:19](#) Or *the Spirit, in whom*
- d. [1 Peter 3:19](#) Or *preached*
- e. [1 Peter 3:20](#) Or *when*

“The trumpets, the fanfare, and the antiphonal shouts of “He is risen! He is risen, indeed!” have receded into the background.

It is now the sixth Sunday of Easter; by now it may be somewhat difficult to sustain the excitement and positive outlook that only a few short weeks ago seemed so ready at hand. By now we have begun to settle in once again into the drudgery, the lack-luster, the “same-old, same-old” of the mundane daily tasks and worries that characterize life in the real world. If we recognize any of those sentiments or feelings, then perhaps we can understand in some way what must have been the experience of the recipients of the letter of Peter, living as they were toward the end of the first century. Our distance from the celebration of Easter, even though only a few weeks away, may offer a glimpse of what must have been the experience of this people.

Living now some seventy years after that first Easter event, they can perhaps be forgiven for having difficulty keeping alive the freshness of that first Easter announcement of our Lord's Resurrection and the accompanying promise of new life in him. But their distance from Easter and the accompanying delay of Christ's return are not the only problems they face. The letter makes clear that this community, as it seeks to remain faithful and to live lives that befit a good conscience, is constantly beset by the antagonism and outright persecution of those among whom they live. The double whammy of a fading sense of the resurrection and the very real experience of daily suffering are almost more than they can bear. To such a setting and people the writer addresses a word of encouragement through the restatement and assurances of the promissory implications of Easter..."

➤ https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=2089

[James Boyce](#) Emeritus Professor of New Testament and Greek, Luther Seminary, St. Paul, MN

"Suffering and harm are not the most popular topics when it comes to discussing the Christian life.

The sufferings of the early Christ-believers

In our society of instant gratification, it is not easy to seriously consider the idea that there is merit in facing difficulties for the sake of an idea or a belief. Depending on when one dates 1 Peter, the situation referred to in 1 Peter 3:13-22 could range from mild abuse and mockery at the hands of the families of these new Christ-believers, to open, official, harsh persecution by Roman officials under Domitian (81-91 CE). In reflecting upon the message of the epistle, it is not necessary to know for sure what kind of suffering the early Christ-believers were facing. Clearly, identifying one's self as a Christ-believer in the first century CE was not something as common and mainstream as it is in certain places of the world today. Christianity as one of the leading world-religions did not yet exist as such...

In this context, the addressees of 1 Peter had to prepare themselves for the consequences of their belief. The author of 1 Peter 3:13-22 uses several strategies to encourage his addressees to being willing to suffer for their faith.

The first strategy he employs is to get the Christ-believers to focus on the future; both theirs and their attackers.

The passage has a strong eschatological flavor. Even if the Christ-believers experience difficulties in the days ahead, they should be assured that not only will *they* gain future rewards (1 Peter 3:13-14) but *those who attack them* will be punished (1 Peter 3:16). The language of blessing and the fact that those who are attacking the Christ-believers will be put to shame gives this passage a strong eschatological flavor. Being blessed (*makarioi*) happens in the end times for those who have followed God's will. Knowing that their present suffering is not in vain is meant to give endurance to the Christ-believers.

The next strategy he employs is to remind them of the tools and resources available to them. They can defend their faith in respectful ways. Yet the author of 1 Peter goes further than that. He reminds his addressees that they have the necessary intellectual tools to take on those who might challenge them (1 Peter 3:14). Their faith might be mocked by others and derided as irrational, but the Christ-believers have tools and resources to give a reasonable and rational account of what they believe. Because of the assurance that the ultimate reward is not

dependent upon them, the Christ-believers can defend their beliefs with integrity but they need not be aggressive or mean (1 Peter 3:16). They can argue in respectable ways.

The third strategy he employs is to give them comfort in the knowledge that Christ himself suffered. The author of 1 Peter uses Christ as an example that suffering can be a part of the path of a faithful Christ-believer. The story of Christ presents two comforts to the Christ-believers. It helps them understand that being righteous and obedient to God's will does not provide a protection against pain and suffering.

In his perfect obedience, Christ suffered and died. It also helps them understand that suffering does not necessarily need to be seen as a sign of divine displeasure. Rather it can be and often is a part of a life that is lead righteously and respectably. While the Christ believers are not invited to seek suffering for the sake of suffering, they are encouraged to not shrink from their beliefs for fear of possible sufferings. Sufferings should be expected, and they are equipped to deal with them. Christ triumphed over them and they can hope to triumph over them as well..."

- https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=938
[Valerie Nicolet-Anderson](#) Maître de Conférence (Assistant Professor), Faculté Libre de Théologie Protestant, Paris, France

John 14: 15-21; the same reading (John 17:1-11; RCL, the same reading)

Have you ever seen the Holy Spirit? (No, that's not a trick question.) Seriously, then: have you seen the Spirit? No, of course not. The best we get in the Bible are descriptions of tongues of flame (Acts 2) or a freely blowing breeze (John 3). I think that's what makes preaching on -- or for that matter even talking about -- the Holy Spirit so difficult. We don't know what the Spirit looks like.

Except....

Except that in this week's reading we get two insanely helpful clues that, together, offer a pretty good picture of just what the Holy Spirit looks like..." (continued after the reading)

"The Holy Gospel according to the 14th Chapter of St. John"

I Am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life Verses 1-14

Jesus Promises the Holy Spirit Verses 15-31

15 "If you love me, you will keep my commandments. 16 And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper,^[a] to be with you forever, 17 even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be^[b] in you.

18 "I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. 19 Yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will

see me. Because I live, you also will live. ²⁰ In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. ²¹ Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him.”...

²² Judas (not Iscariot) said to him,...

- a. [John 14:16](#) Or Advocate, or Counselor; also [14:26](#); [15:26](#); [16:7](#)
- b. [John 14:17](#) Some manuscripts and is

This is the Gospel of the Lord” “Praise to You, O Christ”

“Clue #1: the Holy Spirit looks like an Advocate --the one who stands up for you when you need it; the one who speaks on your behalf; the one who lends you a helping hand, takes your side, and won't leave you while you're down.

Clue #2: the Holy Spirit looks like Jesus. The Spirit is "another advocate" because Jesus is the first. The Spirit, Jesus goes on to say, will abide with us just as Jesus the Word made flesh has abided with us. The Spirit is sent in Jesus' name and reminds us of what he taught (14:25). In a very real way, the Spirit mediates Jesus presence and helps to keep his promise that he will not leave us orphaned and will come to us.

In summary, then: *the Holy Spirit is an advocate that looks a whole lot like Jesus*. Which means that we've actually seen the Spirit lots of times. Anytime, in fact, someone stands up for another... Anytime someone acts like Jesus... Anytime someone bears the love of Christ to another... we've seen the Holy Spirit.

No wonder, then, that Jesus says, "you know him." Because, as it turns out, the Holy Spirit at one time or another has probably looked a lot like you, even a lot like me, and definitely a lot like each and all of us when we do these things..."

- <http://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=1573>
[David Lose](#) Senior Pastor, Mount Olivet Lutheran Church, Minneapolis, Minn.

+++++

“The Spirit plays an essential role in Christian faith and yet is something many find hard to deal with in preaching.

The art in our churches pictures episodes from Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. But the Spirit is more challenging to portray. The Spirit's dove may hover above Jesus on stained glass windows, but the Spirit often remains on the margins when it comes to proclamation. And this is a problem.

On the one hand, some people equate the work of the Spirit with a particular kind of experience, such as excitement in worship or speaking in tongues. Others are content with a kind of vague spirituality that seems to be mainly a sense that there is something "out there" that we cannot name. So what might the gospel say about the work of God's Spirit?

At the last supper Jesus has been telling the disciples about his coming departure, which raises the disturbing prospect of separation (John 13:33, 36; 14:2, 5). In years to come he knows

that the disciples will feel like "orphans." Easter will be a joyous reunion, but the resurrection appearances will not continue indefinitely. As the years pass, people will be called to believe in a Jesus they have never seen or heard. Jesus' words and actions will be conveyed to them through the tradition of the church in a world that may seem indifferent at best and hostile at worst to the message about a crucified Messiah.

In this passage Jesus anticipates the Easter moment when he says, "I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you" and "because I live, you also will live" (14:18-19). The Easter message is that life rather than death has the final word, and this is crucial for faith. In John's gospel, faith is a relationship with a living being. For there to be authentic faith in Jesus, people must be able to relate to the living Jesus--a Jesus who is not absent but present. Otherwise faith is reduced to the memory of a Jesus who died long ago...

John's gospel calls the Spirit the *paraklētos* or Advocate, a term for someone who is called to one's side as a source of help. In modern contexts someone may serve as an advocate in the court system, in the health care network, or in an educational institution, while other advocates may press the legislature to act on behalf of a certain cause. A quick reading of John may give the impression that the Spirit is the Advocate who brings our case up before God in the hope that God will do something merciful for us. But here the direction is the opposite. God has already given the gift of love unstintingly through the death and resurrection of Jesus, and such love is what creates genuine life. The Spirit is the Advocate who brings the truth of that love and life *to people* in this time after Easter, which makes faith possible.

Jesus calls the Spirit "another" Advocate, which assumes that Jesus also was an Advocate (14:16). Jesus and the Spirit have some similar functions. For example, Jesus and the Spirit both come from the Father and are sent into the world. Jesus communicates what he has received from his Father and the Spirit declares what he has received from Jesus (7:17; 16:13). If Jesus glorifies God, the Spirit glorifies Jesus (16:14; 17:1). Both of them teach, bear witness to the truth, and expose the sin of the world (3:20; 7:14; 14:26; 15:26; 16:8; 18:37). And in both cases, the reaction is the same: the world refuses to recognize and receive Jesus or the Spirit (1:11; 14:17)..."

- https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=934 **Craig R. Koester** Professor and Asher O. and Carrie Nasby Chair of New Testament, Luther Seminary, Saint Paul, Minn.



Agnus Day appears with the permission of <https://www.agnusday.org/>

How are you doing with **The Matthew Challenge**, a handwritten copy of the book of Matthew by the Last Sunday of the Church Year (Christ the King Sunday), November 22, 2020.

It is 28 chapters long (1071 verses or 18,345 words, subject to the translation). Break that down to a schedule that works for you; a specific time or day each week, 2 weeks per chapter, or about three verses a day. Use a spiral notebook or a journal. Decide if you want a "Red Letter" edition for the words of Christ. Invent your own illustrated manuscript style. (Or you could commit to reading it)

How you do it is your choice, actually doing it is also your choice.

December	Chapters 1, 2, 3	68 verses	completed ___?___
January	Chapters 4, 5, 6	107 verses	completed ___?___
February	Chapters 7, 8, 9	101 verses	completed ___?___
March	Chapters 10, 11	72 verses	completed ___?___
April	Chapters 12, 13	108 verses	completed ___?___
May	Chapters 14, 15	73 verses	completed _____
June	Chapters 16, 17, 18	89 verses	completed _____
July	Chapters 19, 20, 21	110 verses	completed _____
August	Chapters 22, 23	85 verses	completed _____
September	Chapters 24, 25	107 verses	completed _____
October	Chapter 26	74 verses	completed _____
November	Chapters 27, 28	86 verses	completed _____ 11/22/20

Review lesson from last week:

