



[Pastor Keith GeRue](#)

Sermon for Easter 7

May 16, 2021

Living In-Between

John 17:11b-19; Acts 1:15-26

¹¹ *[Jesus said:] “Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one. ¹² While I was with them, I kept them in your name, which you have given me. I have guarded them, and not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction, that the Scripture might be fulfilled. ¹³ But now I am coming to you, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves. ¹⁴ I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. ¹⁵ I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. ¹⁶ They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. ¹⁷ Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. ¹⁸ As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. ¹⁹ And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth.”*

¹² *Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day’s journey away. ¹³ And when they had entered, they went up to the upper room, where they were staying, Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot and Judas the son of James. ¹⁴ All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.*

¹⁵ *In those days Peter stood up among the brothers (the company of persons was in all about 120) and said, ¹⁶ “Brothers, the Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke beforehand by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus. ¹⁷ For he was numbered among us and was allotted his share in this ministry.” ¹⁸ (Now this man acquired a field with the reward of his wickedness, and falling headlong he burst open in the middle and all his bowels gushed out. ¹⁹ And it became known to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the field was called in their own language Akeldama, that is, Field of Blood.) ²⁰ “For it is written in the Book of Psalms, “‘May his camp become desolate, and let there be no one to dwell in it’; and “‘Let another take his office.’” ²¹ So one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, ²² beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us—one of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection.” ²³ And they put forward two, Joseph called Barsabbas, who was also called Justus, and Matthias. ²⁴ And they prayed and said, “You, Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which*



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one of these two you have chosen²⁵ to take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place.”²⁶ And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias, and he was numbered with the eleven apostles.

Alleluia! Christ is ascended! [*He is ascended indeed! Alleluia!*]

The first reading that we heard tonight, from the book of Acts, is an interesting one, because the Church is at a unique time in its history – it is *after* the Ascension of Jesus, yet *before* the day of Pentecost. It is an “in between” time, these ten days, when the apostles and believers might very well have been wondering, “What shall we do?” Jesus has ascended, but we’ve not yet received the promised Spirit . . . “What shall we do?”

That question, and these verses, are important for us because our situation is somewhat similar. We too are living in an “in between” time – the time between Jesus’ first coming and the time of His second coming. And like the apostles and believers that we heard about, many today are wondering, ***“What shall we do? What shall the Church be about? How do we face and address the questions facing us in our day and age today?”*** And those are good and important questions.

So, returning to the reading from Acts, how did the church then decide what to do? They went to the Word of God, the Holy Scriptures. Peter stands up and quotes from the Psalms. For them, there was only one place to go; one source of truth; one font of direction and guidance, and that was the Word, the Holy Scriptures. And based on God’s Word, they acted – they appointed an apostle to take the place of Judas . . . a process, by the way, which probably did not take only five minutes, but more likely a few days, as they deliberated and prayed.

But in turning to the Christian Church in the world today, unfortunately, this example of going to the Word of God for truth, for direction, and guidance is – as strange as it sounds! – not what we see. No, instead, Christians and Churches *in increasing number* are turning not to the Word, but to themselves, to determine ***“What shall we do?”*** It is not to the Word, but to our hearts, our emotions, our wisdom, our opinions – these are the things that guide and direct many today. And so instead of hearing people ask, ***“What does the Word say?”*** . . . and instead of hearing ***“Thus saith the Lord!”*** . . . it is far more common to hear asked, “What do you think? What would you do?”

1. Many Christians today say Christ has saved them, without repenting and renouncing the very thing Christ saved them from: sin. The Bible tells us that in Christ, we are already dead to sin. We were buried with Him in baptism, and we were raised with Him in His resurrection. Paul says a dead man is already freed from sin. If we are dead to sin, how could we live in it any longer? (see Romans 6)
2. I have seen and heard of teachings that say if you want to reach the world, you've got to adapt to the world. One such teaching says Daniel adopted Babylon's culture and way of life.



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However, this is misleading because Daniel never ever compromised his faith. In fact, he was thrown into the lion's den for praying three times a day. (see Daniel 6) Even Daniel's friends were thrown into the fiery furnace because they didn't bow down to the king's statue like everybody did. (see Daniel 3)

God commands us in the Bible to strive for holiness. To be holy means to be "set apart" unto God. We are to rid ourselves of any fleshly and worldly ways of thinking, desiring, behaving, and living. We are to put on the Lord Jesus Christ.

3. I am saddened at the current turn of events in churches. I've read and heard stories of people who went out of the church because many Christians live a life contrary to the word of God:
 - a) Instead of loving fellow believers, they treat them wrong.
 - b) Instead of treating fellow believers impartially, they judge them based on how they look.
 - c) Instead of being a servant to others, they demand to be served.
 - d) Instead of encouraging others, they put them down.
 - e) Instead of urging others to love the Lord Jesus Christ, they demand to be honored and heard, even more than the word of God.

Such kinds of actions reveal a heart that hasn't submitted to the Lord. These things tell disillusioned believers that the church is full of hypocrisy: a people who love God with their lips but not with their lives.

Now, should we be surprised by this turn of events. Reverence for the Word of God has been in decline for some time now, with many no longer believing that the Scriptures are The Word of God, and many now believing that the Scriptures contain errors and that we must sort out what in the Bible to keep and what to lay aside as irrelevant and out-of-date. And that being the case, what has then rushed in to fill the vacuum, what has replaced the Word of God as the source of truth, is what many would call "*sanctified reason.*" The thinking goes, "we have the Spirit speaking to us, inside of us, to our hearts" . . . because we live after Pentecost and the Spirit is living in us, the thoughts of our hearts and minds and emotions must therefore be guided by Him, and therefore be "sanctified,"

We are, as St. Paul so aptly describes in Romans 7, simultaneously saints and sinners. And so, we simply cannot depend on what comes out of our hearts and minds, because as the Scriptures say in Matthew 15, "***For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander.***" And as you look in your heart you know that's true, and so do I.

The alternative, then – the alternative to looking within ourselves for the answers, is to go outside of ourselves. To follow the example of the believers in the book of Acts, and go to the Word. And this is exactly where we are directed to go by Jesus in the Holy Gospel that we heard today. Those verses from John 17 are part of Jesus' prayer on the night when He was betrayed, and notice what they say about *the Word*. While Jesus was in the world, the disciples, the church, were kept in the Word of God by the Word of God made flesh Himself! He kept them, He guarded them, and they



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knew Christ would not mislead them, but lead them in the way of eternal life. . . . But then next in His prayer, after speaking of His time with His disciples, Jesus then acknowledges that this time is coming to an end. And so, He prays, ***“Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.”***

And so, we have a source of truth – *outside of us* – which will not mislead us. An infallible source of truth which will sanctify us. A source of truth which does not come and go, which does not change, which does not depend on our thoughts and emotions or the prevailing opinions of the world. The objective, trans-cultural, timeless, and eternal Word of God to now guard and keep us in the truth. The Word through which Christ continues to work through the Spirit He gives through that Word.

Now take note of that last statement: the ongoing work of Christ, by the Spirit, through the Word. That’s terribly important – to know how Christ continues to work among us. For those who try to live by some inner “spiritual voice,” or by their “spirit-sanctified reason” have a problem when they find that their thoughts and reason do not agree with the Word of Christ. They must then, actually, pit what they consider “from the Spirit” against Christ and His Word – or God against God! But that cannot be. *The Spirit is not a substitute for the Word.* No, Christ is working by His Spirit *through* His Word, and the Spirit leads us *into* the Word. They are inseparable. And they cannot contradict one another, for they come from the same source, Christ. And so, if there is a contradiction between the thoughts and opinions of our hearts and minds – however “sanctified” we think they may be! – and the Word of God, the truth is not what comes from us. As Jesus prayed, ***“Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.”***

So, by Word and Spirit, Christ still today leads us into the truth, and the Spirit by the Word leads us to Christ. For as we heard in the readings on Thursday night (Lk. 24:44), all the Scriptures speak of Christ and point to Him. And so, the Word of God preached and read leads us to the truth of Christ. The Word of God joined with water leads us to Christ and washes us clean with His forgiveness. The Word of God joined with bread and wine leads us to Christ and feeds us with His body and blood. The Word of God leads us to Christ and His life for us – Christ enfleshed for us; Christ at work for us; Christ crucified for us; Christ resurrected and ascended for us; Christ’s ongoing work *through the Spirit* for us. . . .

The most wonderful thing about all of that is that *none of it* depends on you – what you may think of yourself, how knowledgeable you are, or whether you *feel* forgiven or holy. It all depends solely on Christ and His work for you. And therefore, it is sure, and steady, and reliable. And relying on the Word, and focusing on the Word, and depending on the Word, you will not go wrong. For the Holy Spirit, working through the Word, the Holy Scriptures, will lead you not to yourself, but to your confidence and hope, your life, and your Savior – to Christ, the Word made flesh. And joined to Christ by the Spirit, Christ takes us to the Father. He takes us with Himself through this life, for He



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too lived this life. He takes us through death, for He went through death. He raises us to life, for He too was raised to life. And He takes us to Heaven, for He ascended into Heaven.

Having accomplished everything, and having returned to His Father, Christ has given you His Word – to sanctify you in the truth, to guard and keep you in the truth, to give you His Spirit of truth – that you may know the truth, and believing be saved. That is His will for you, and what He has come and accomplished for you.

As we live in this “in between” time, know that we have a sure guide and source of truth. In this “in between” time, when we may wonder “What to do,” we know more importantly what Christ has done *for us*, and what He is still doing *for us*. And so joined to Christ, and sanctified by Him, and remaining in the truth of His Word, we will know the truth, and like the disciples, we will know “what we are to do.”

- A. We **repent**, and receive the forgiveness of Christ.
- B. We **forgive**, and proclaim the love of Christ.
- C. We **love**, and speak the truth of Christ, the Word.

And when this “in between” time ends, and Christ comes again in glory, we will be glorified, with the glory of Christ. For those who live in Him and His forgiveness and truth now, will also live in Him forever.

Alleluia! Christ is ascended! [*He is ascended indeed! Alleluia!*]