**6th Sunday of Easter – Year C – May 5, 2013 – Faith Lutheran Church, Radcliff, KY**

**Based on Luke 14:23-29 written by Pastor Paul Horn**

**THOSE WHO LOVE JESUS REJOICE IN HIS GOING**

**Because now the Holy Spirit teaches and reminds us of Jesus’ message.**

*Jesus replied, "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching.* *My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.****24*** *He who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me.****25*** *"All this I have spoken while still with you.* ***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.****27*** *Peace 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.* ***28*** *"You heard me say, 'I am going away and I am coming back to you.'* *If you loved me, you would be glad that I am going to the Father,* *for the Father is greater than I.****29*** *I have told you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe.*

In Florida this past week, 54-year old Brenda Heist turned herself in to authorities as a missing person. Eleven years ago in Pennsylvania this woman abandoned her family, she just walked out, disappeared. They thought she was dead, so they declared her dead. The husband remarried. The children, an 8 year-old daughter and 12 year-old son, moved on. The children, now adults, are obviously angry, upset, and confused. All those Christmases, birthdays, when she wasn’t around, they wondered what had happened to her, for eleven years!

Our hearts certainly go out to this family. You understand how they might feel if you had someone leave your family.

In our lesson this morning Jesus was in the upper room with his disciples. It was Maundy Thursday, the night of the Passover meal. Jesus gave the gift of the Lord’s Supper and a new command, “Love one another as I have loved you.” That night Jesus would be arrested, dragged to an illegal trial, sentenced to death, and crucified that next morning. Before all of this happened he taught his disciples that all of these horrific events were necessary, he had to suffer and die, to save the world from sin and death.

But he comforted the disciples. He promised that they would see him again. He would rise again in three days, but then forty days after his resurrection he would ascend into heaven. His physical presence would no longer be with them. But his going was a good thing. He was going to heaven to prepare a place for them, so that when he returned again, he would bring them to be with him forever.

In the meantime, they were to go into the world and preach the good news of Jesus. But Jesus warned them that the world would hate them, arrest them, throw them into prison, to be flogged, beaten, and put to death, to stand before kings and princes and forced to testify.

Jesus comforted his disciples by promising to send someone else to be with them. He promised the Counselor, the Holy Spirit. This special blessing would empower them to go boldly into all the world and preach the good news, he would give them a better understanding of the Scriptures, the ability to heal and drive out demons, to raise the dead. The Holy Spirit would strengthen the disciples in these times of persecution.

That’s why Jesus could say to them, **“Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”** But wouldn’t it be better if Jesus stayed with them? He could protect them. His visible presence was reassuring and comforting. Why did he have to go?

Have you ever had someone leave you? Last week my last surviving grandparent died: my grandmother, Alice Horn, she was 90 years-old. She was in the final stages of Alzheimer’s. Even though we recognized that her departure from this life is a blessing for her, she is with her Savior, she is no longer suffering the effects of sin, one of my aunts said, “It doesn’t matter how sick or old someone is, or if you are expecting death, I wasn’t ready to let mom go.” And I think that if you’ve had someone depart this world through death, you’ve had similar thoughts. You’ve asked the question, “Why did they have to go? Wouldn’t it be better if they stayed?” Better for whom? For them? No, better for you. As we progress through the grieving process those thoughts trouble us, sometimes for many years.

People leave us in other ways, and those departures trouble us: a deployment, PCSing to another post, maybe you’ve experienced a pastor leaving your congregation to go serve another parish, maybe you’ve gone through a divorce, a child moving away from home, and a part of you seems to leave with them. Even the thought of a possible separation brings fear in your heart, because you’re unsure of how you will handle the stress and change of it all.

Perhaps what bothers us the most is when people we love leave the Christian faith. A child who in their high school or college years abandons their confirmation vows, whose shadow rarely, if at all, falls upon the threshold of the church. A family member whose life is crumbling around them, and they ignore your repeated invitations to find comfort and strength in the Words of Christ. A friend who needs to hear the good news of Jesus but has no interest in talking about “religion.” You fear for their soul, it troubles you to no end, thinking about their eternal destination.

Why are these people abandoning Jesus? Why are they leaving me? Where is Jesus? Why isn’t he here, doing something about this?

Perhaps you don’t have these questions, these fears. But you know people who do, and as a Christian it is your responsibility to share Jesus’ promises with them. But if we don’t know those promises for ourselves, how can we help them and comfort them?

We have all these questions, all these fears and troubled hearts. Is there no answer? Yes, there are answers to these questions! Jesus addresses our grief, our pain, our loneliness, our fears and anxieties, Jesus promised, “**The Holy Spirit will remind you of these things.”** *These things*… everything Jesus taught us about forgiveness and his grace, about love and his resurrection, about his promise to make all things work for our good. But the Holy Spirit doesn’t whisper in our ear. He talks to us through the Bible, through Sacraments of Baptism and Lord’s Supper. When we don’t take advantage of the time we have to spend in Word and Sacrament, we tend to forget what Jesus promised us. I forget because I have trained myself to value my time with other things as more important than spending some time every day with Jesus’ promises. From time to time we love the world more than precious Word of life. When I forget, then I easily become afraid and troubled, and forget to trust in Jesus.

I was talking with a friend last month. Their marriage is hitting a rough patch, not bordering on divorce or anything, just lots of tension. The kids are acting out. They found they were losing their patience with everyone and everything. I asked, “What are you reading for your daily devotional time?” Silence on the other end of the phone… and then they sheepishly admitted, “I’m not… could you give me some direction?” Yes, in humble repentance, we turn to God and confess, “We have sinned. We have abandoned your Word. We have forgotten.” But God has not forgotten us. He has not left us all alone. He sends his Son Jesus through his Word to remind us, **“The Holy Spirit will teach you and remind you of everything I have said to you.”**

The Holy Spirit teaches you through Word and Sacrament. The Holy Spirit teaches us through Holy Baptism. Titus 3:5-7 “**He saved us,** **not because of righteous things we had done,** **but because of his mercy.** **He saved us through the washing** **of rebirth and renewal** **by the Holy Spirit, 6 whom he poured out on us** **generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, 7 so that, having been justified by his grace,** **we might become heirs** **having the hope** **of eternal life**.”

The Holy Spirit points us to baptism and says, “Here is your Savior Jesus, in baptism. Here he made a promise to you. Here he brought you the gift of faith. Faith believes. By faith you believe that Jesus is your Savior, that he saved you from your sins of doubt, from your sins of laziness with his Word. He saved your body and soul from death through the power of his resurrection from the grave. Here you find Jesus, in the waters of baptism. Here he called you his child. Here he brought you into his family.

Even though at times in your life family will abandon you, they will disappoint and disown. God will not leave you alone. God will always remind you that you are part of his heavenly family. You are always his baptized child.

Do you see why it is so important that we return to our baptisms every day and review what Jesus did for us in baptism? There the Holy Spirit instructs me, “This is who you are in Christ. This is what you have in Christ.”

Does not the Holy Spirit also teach us and remind through the Lord’s Supper that Jesus is present with us? That night in the upper room Jesus shared disturbing news with his disciples, his arrest, sufferings and crucifixion, but he also gave them the Lord’s Supper to comfort them. He does the same for us today.

In Holy Communion his true body and his true blood, which he possesses now in heaven, in a miraculous way he makes present with this bread and wine. Through this meal Christ offers and gives you the forgiveness of your sins. Where the forgiveness of sins are, there you are strengthened and empowered, to face a world that opposes you, a world that disappoints, that brings much heartache. Jesus knew this. That’s why he gave the Lord’s Supper to you.

Jesus’ promise to send the Holy Spirit to teach us and remind us is fulfilled through the Bible, God’s holy Word. Through the Scriptures the HS touches our hearts and points us to Christ, this is especially true when someone leaves us through death. Hear the words of the Apostle Paul, “**Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant** **about those who fall asleep,** **or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope.** **We believe that Jesus died and rose again** **and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him.”** (1Thessalonians 4:13-14)

When sin completes its work and death takes some one away, we selfishly think, “It would have been better if they lived.” But isn’t heaven where we all want to go someday? When a loved one dies in the Lord, we rejoice they have reached the goal of their faith. They are receiving eternal life through power of Christ’s resurrection. We know we will be there someday, too. We will grieve, we will shed tears, and perhaps we will never be “over it.” We have a confidence they are in heaven with their Savior, the same Lord Jesus who lives with us today. We will allow the Holy Spirit to teach us these things because we will study his Word, those promises, every day. These promises are the ones we will share with those who are afraid and alone and abandoned…

…like the family in Pennsylvania. 54 year-old Brenda Heist is not the only one to walk away from her family. According to the National Missing & Unidentified Persons System, their database contains 85,000 missing people in the United States. People will leave us in life, sometimes temporarily, sometimes permanently, and eventually we will leave people behind when we die. Jesus does not leave us alone. He sends his Holy Spirit through Word and Sacrament to teach us and remind us of his promise, never to leave us, never to forsake, but to return and bring us home to live with him forever, for Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Amen!