

The Feast of Pentecost

John 14:23-31

Arise, let us go from here! These are the last words of our Gospel reading today. And it is somewhat surprising, is it not, somewhat strange, on this the great feast, the Feast of Pentecost, to hear those words as the conclusion to our reading of the Word of God: *Arise, let us go from here!* Those are words of foreboding rather than of festivities. For we know very well, do we not, where it was that they would be going; that they would go to the Garden of Gethsemane, where our Lord Jesus would give Himself over into the hands of His enemies to be taken away to judgement and suffering and death. As we also hear it today that He said it: *I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming.* The evil one was about to have his hour. And this is where it ends, our hearing of the Word of God today, on the great feast: *Arise, let us go from here!*; even though it did take Him and His disciples yet another three chapters of the Gospel according to Saint John to get out from where they were gathered and actually go where they were going.

Today, on the day of the great Feast, we are set right back to that bitter last night, the night in which our Lord Jesus was betrayed. It does seem somewhat backward, does it not?

Well, I suppose there would be those who would say that that is only typical for us Lutherans; the greater the celebration, the darker the atmosphere. We cannot have all this joyfulness; when we grudgingly have to allow for some joyfulness, we must at least make sure that it is tempered.

We Lutherans did not come up with this, though; not only is what we hear today actually out of Holy Scripture, nor is it only what our Lord Jesus spoke in that bitter last night on which He was betrayed, it is also actually what He spoke as He was speaking about the coming of the Holy Spirit, which is what we celebrate today, at Pentecost.

And perhaps what we hear today is really not so bad for a celebration; in fact, perhaps it is not only *not so bad*, but actually the greatest of all. As we also hear it today that our Lord Jesus said it: *You have heard me say to you: 'I am going away and coming back to you.'* And: *If you loved me, you would rejoice that I said: 'I am going to the Father*

And now we are confused again, are we not? How can it be to love Jesus to rejoice in what He said in that bitter last night about going to the Father?

How can it be to *love Jesus* to think of Him going before the judgement of God to suffer and die under His judgement against the sin of the world? To *love Jesus*, does that not mean to have a *personal relationship* with Him and feel really good when we think about how much we love Him? Certainly it seems to be what it means to those who talk the most about how much they *love Jesus*.

If anyone loves me, says our Lord Jesus, as we also hear it today, *he will keep my Word*. This is what it means to love Him, *really love Him*; for this is how He wills to be loved: that we *keep His Word*, as in keeping custody of it, or keeping it in our possession; for that is what it means, the Greek word our Lord Jesus uses in what we hear today; not so much to *keep* something the way one can keep a law, or a Commandment, by actually acting according to it, but rather to *hold on to* something.

And the Word of which He spoke to His Apostles in that bitter last night, and of which He speaks to us on this festive day, is His Word of salvation. As we might remember, that when the Jews asked Him: *What must we do to be doing the works of God?*, He had answered them: *This is the work of God: that you believe in Him whom He has sent*. It is by *faith* He wills to be loved; by faith in His Word of His love and what His love has done for us. As He has had His holy Apostle John write it elsewhere: *This is the love: not that we loved God, but rather that He loved us and sent His Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins*. Or as we hear it today that He said it: *In order that the world may know that I love the Father, and that as the Father gave me command, so I do: arise, let us go from here*. This is the love of God, the love of the Son for the Father, and the love of the Father for us sinners: that the Son of God, who is Himself God from eternity, would go and be given over into the hands of His enemies, and into the hands of the evil one himself, although there was nothing in Him that belonged to the evil one, and go before the Father to suffer for sin, although there was no sin in Him, all for us sinners, in our stead and on our behalf, to bear for us His own judgement against all sin and pay the price and penalty Himself, for our salvation. And this is how He wills to be loved: that His sufferings are not lost on us, that we take His Word of salvation to heart and seek and find our salvation in His Word of His love and what His love has done for us.

This is how our Lord Jesus wills to be loved: that we keep His Word of salvation in our possession, more so than that we keep it as one keeps a law, by actually acting in accordance with it.

Now, this does not mean that we are not also to *obey* the Commandments of God in the way we actually live, no: His Commandments are His Commandments. And we owe it to Him to obey Him in all things. But it is not of that our Lord Jesus speaks in what we hear today; except, perhaps, in the sense that His First and foremost Commandment is that He alone be our God, and that we honour Him as such.

And this is important, that the way He wills to be both honoured and loved is first and foremost that we seek our salvation in His Word of His love and what His love has done for us; not so much because we get off easily that way, in that we do not have to actually love God by honouring and obeying His Commandments, rather, the point is this: that everything comes down to the goodness of God rather than our own; because He alone is God, and His goodness is greater than all, and His love for us! To turn away from His Word of salvation to preoccupy ourselves instead with our own goodness and godliness, that is not to love Him, not at all, rather, it is to fail His love, and His will, and to go afoul of His goodness. As we also hear it today that our Lord Jesus says it: *He who does not love me does not keep my words; and the Word which you hear is not mine, but the Father's who sent me.*

It is in the salvation the Son has won for sinners with His sufferings and death that God's eternal will is not only *known*, but actually *fulfilled*! And His eternal will for each of us sinners is brought to completion when He hear His Word and take it to heart.

If anyone loves me, he will keep my Word, says our Lord Jesus, as we hear it today; and my Father will love him, and not only that: we will come to him and make our home with him.

In the Word of His love and what His love has done for us, the love of God comes to us; and as we hear it and take it to heart, it makes us to be beloved children of God. And with it, God Himself comes to us, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

This is what Pentecost is. This is what it means that the Holy Spirit has come to His Church and is upon us: God Himself lives with us, and within us, with all that He is and all that is His, so that His Word of salvation also actually *works* salvation, and that which He speaks is actually given to us, for real.

These things I have spoken to you while being present with you, as our Lord Jesus says it, as we hear it today. But the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, He will teach you all things, and bring in remembrance for you all that I have said to you.

The Spirit of God, who is God Himself, and is, in fact, the very life and the innermost self of God, He teaches and brings in remembrance all that our Lord Jesus has spoken; and not only so that we know *about* it, that this is the way things are. *Peace I leave with you, as our Lord Jesus says it, my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you.*

In Holy Scripture, *remembrance* is so much more than merely to be reminded, and perhaps remember. In Holy Scripture, when things are brought in *remembrance* with God, that which is *remembered* is real to Him, which means that it is really real. When God *remembers* His own, He actually saves them; when sin is brought *in remembrance*, His judgement is actually effectuated and executed upon it. And when we celebrate His festive meal of salvation, as our Lord Jesus has commanded His Church to do, often, *in His remembrance*, it means so much more than that we are reminded of Him, and perhaps even *remember*, if we happen to be in the right frame of mind. Rather, it means that as He stands before the Father as our heavenly High Priest, pleading what He has done for our salvation, His salvation is real in Heaven, and what He brings *in remembrance* is actually *given* to us, for real, with His body and blood.

When the Spirit of God brings *in remembrance* what our Lord Jesus has spoken, it means not only that we are reminded, and remember; it means that that which our Lord Jesus has spoken is *realised* upon us, and lives in us as real. His Word of life makes His own life to come alive in us, so that we die away from the death of disobedience and defiance and doubt and begin to believe in Him, and actually *belong* to Him. It means nothing less than that the reality of His salvation is with us and lives in us, as God Himself lives with us and within us, with His Word. We are at peace with God, because He has made peace with us in the sufferings and death of the Son, and paid Himself the price and penalty for our sin, for all evil and ungodliness and impurity in our lives, and for the ungodliness and enmity against God that is in our hearts and minds. We are at peace with God. Our sin is dealt with and done away with, and we are right with God. We shall not perish and die forever in His wrath, rather, we shall live and be with Him for ever in the fullness of His goodness and His glory. And all is well, really, and we have nothing to fear. *Let not your heart be troubled, says our Lord Jesus, neither let it be afraid.*

We have seen the true light; we have received the heavenly Spirit; we have found the true faith. Let us worship the undivided Trinity, for *He* has saved us. *Amen.*