

Sermon 5-10-26
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Trinity Lutheran Church
W. Hempstead, NY
Based on the Gospel for the 6th Sunday of Easter John 14:15-23

In Us

Your cell phone listens to you all the time. I know this from things that are fed to me on my YouTube channel. Here's the latest. Last Sunday, we spoke of Yahweh's purpose to inhabit our bodies, along with our own spirits. Remember? Well, a short video clip of a teaching or a sermon by a man named Leonard Ravenhill showed up on my YouTube feed this week. It definitely looked like it was black and white video from the 1960's or 70's. Ravenhill was born in 1907 and died in 1994. He was from the Methodist Wesleyan Holiness tradition and was known for holding revival meetings in his native Great Britain during the 1940's. He moved to the U.S. in 1950. Here, he became good friends with A.W. Tozer. He influenced David Wilkerson of Teen Challenge, also Charles Stanley and Christian musician, Keith Green.

Here's what Mr. Ravenhill had to say in this sermon clip: "Christianity is the only religion in the world where a man's God comes and lives inside of him. A Chinese scholar was given a copy of the New Testament. He'd read the Quran, the Vedas and all the sacred books. The man [who gave him the New Testament] said to him, 'Did you read the New Testament through?' He said, 'I did.' 'What's the most amazing thing [you found]?' He thought the man would say 'the most amazing thing I read was that Jesus Christ was born of a virgin; that He died and physically rose again from the dead.' Instead of that he said, 'the most awesome thing is in Ephesians chapter two. . . . It says in time past we walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, and then at the end of that same chapter it says you're the habitation of God.' [The scholar said,] 'Sir, does your God live inside of you? If so, that's the most awesome thing I've read. I've read the Quran. I've read the Vedas. I've read all those other sacred books. But I never read where a man's God comes and makes the man the habitation of God.'"

To say the least I was flabbergasted. The last two times I've preached we've looked at New Testament texts that teach that our bodies are temples of the living God. Scripture definitely teaches that we're indwelt by our God. In particular, last week, I quoted the very passage of Scripture mentioned in the clip, Ephesians 2:19-22, "19. . . [We are] members of the household of God, 20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, 21 in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. 22 In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit." Why did that clip show up on my YouTube feed? The phone had to be listening to last week's sermon when I preached it. It's too bad the thing can't be converted and saved!

Anyway, the phone is going to have to listen again, because our Gospel text today is loaded with the assertion that Yahweh indwells believers. Apparently, Yahweh designed us for such indwelling.

But before we go on, I want to mention one thing about the video clip. Ravenhill didn't name the Chinese scholar. He didn't name the Christian who gave the New Testament. So, this might be one of those made up stories that circulate among preachers in order to make a point. Is Christianity the only religion where "a man's God comes and lives inside of him?" I've never heard of another religion that teaches such a doctrine. But certainly my knowledge of what other religions teach is not exhaustive. Therefore, I won't repeat Ravenhill's claim. It may be true that Christianity is the only religion that teaches that "a man's God comes and makes the man the habitation of God." It may not. Nevertheless, one thing is for sure. Scripture definitely teaches that Yahweh, Creator of everything, including us, comes and dwells within the body of every baptized, believing Christian on this earth. And Scripture teaches this doctrine in multiple places.

So here comes Jesus teaching number one from this morning's Gospel lesson. John 14:15-17, "15 [Jesus said,] 'If you love me, you will keep my commandments. 16 And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, 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 in you.'" Jesus spoke these words on Holy Thursday during supper. This was before His crucifixion.

Love is commitment. The disciples were about to go through the most profound confusion and despair imaginable from Friday evening to Sunday evening. All of their love and commitment melted away until it was restored on Easter evening when Jesus showed them undeniable, awesome proof that He was bodily resurrected from the dead. Another week was needed to secure Thomas' commitment. But, Jesus eventually had the full love and commitment of His apostles. And, keeping the Lord's commandments becomes a pleasure once anyone is filled with that kind of devotion. Indeed, Jesus spoke of that kind of love and devotion when He said of Himself in John 14:31, "... 'I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father.'"

However, in this life every believer remains in a struggle with sin, death and the power of the devil. Our love and obedience is easily distracted. It can fade. Therefore, Jesus prayed to the Father to send us a powerful divine helper in the fight — Lord Holy Spirit. And the one thing Lord Holy Spirit brings is the Truth about this world, ourselves and our Creator. Without our Creator's Truth, we're immersed in lies. For, Jesus unequivocally told us in John 8:44 that the devil is a liar and the father of lies — lies that come at us from the world, as well as the lies we tell ourselves within.

Because of all the lies, especially the lies about Yahweh and Messiah Jesus, the people of the world cannot receive Yahweh's Truth. Thus, they cannot see or know Yahweh. This situation can only change when the testimony of those who had seen and known Jesus is preached to the people of the world. For, when the Gospel is preached, then Lord Holy Spirit has something to work with in order to change the hearts of those who have heard the Word.

Now, Jesus told the disciples that they already knew Lord Holy Spirit because He was dwelling with them. Jesus was speaking about Himself dwelling with them. However, Lord Holy Spirit had been dwelling with them also.

To explain, we've got to get into the weeds concerning the two natures of Jesus. He is at the same time both Yahweh, the Son, and Jesus, the son of Mary — one and indivisible person. He is fully God and fully human. This means that as a human being He had room for God the Spirit in His human body just as we have. And when Jesus was baptized into the

baptism of repentance preached by John the Baptist, Lord Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus like a dove and indwelt Him. So, by being in the company of Jesus, the apostles also had Lord Holy Spirit dwelling with them in Jesus.

But then, Jesus said that something would change. Lord Holy Spirit would indwell the apostles and the other believers. As we've seen, that happened first on Easter evening when Jesus breathed on them and said "receive the Holy Spirit" and thereby opened their minds to understand all the Scriptures about the suffering and victorious Messiah. Subsequently, on Pentecost 33A.D., the Spirit came to dwell in all who were saved that day.

Teaching number two. John 14:18-20, "18 [Jesus said], '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.'"

In these verses, Jesus predicted His resurrection appearances to His select group of witnesses. He informed them that death could have no ultimate hold on Him. And because He would be victorious over death, Jesus promised that the apostles and disciples would also have eternal righteous life in Him.

But there was still more. Jesus said He is IN the Father. Being a person of the Trinity that's understandable. However, Jesus then added that the apostles and disciples were IN Him. So if Jesus is in the Father and we are in Jesus, are we also in the Father through Jesus? Obviously yes. This is an unthinkable privilege for sinners that can be so only by the gracious gift of God; only by the atoning blood of the crucified God/man, Messiah Jesus.

And then, as if that wasn't enough, Jesus said one last thing. The apostles and all subsequent disciples, including us, would know that Jesus is IN us. As we saw last week, these bodies of ours were designed to be Yahweh's holy temples, His dwelling place within us. Apparently this is true not only of these mortal bodies but also will be true of our resurrected immortal bodies. No wonder the sinful nature pushes back against Yahweh. It wants to be its own god and doesn't want company. But that doesn't change the design. These bodies were designed by Yahweh with room for Yahweh. And it's very dangerous for us if Yahweh doesn't occupy His temple. For, rebellious spiritual squatters can occupy the space instead, and lead us straight into "the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels" that Jesus spoke about in Matthew 25:41.

This is why Holy Baptism is so important for infants and the young. Peter said in Acts 2:38, "... 'Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.'" In Holy Baptism Lord Holy Spirit takes up residence in our inner temple of Yahweh, no matter what our age.

Teaching number three. John 14: 21-23, "21 [Jesus said], '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, 'Lord, how is it that you will manifest yourself to us, and not to the world?' 23 Jesus answered him, 'If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.'"

Jesus had commanded and taught His disciples throughout the three years of His ministry. Except for Judas Iscariot, they all loved Him and were devoted to Him. They were His chosen ones. Therefore, it was only natural that Jesus chose to manifest Himself to them in His resurrected, immortal body.

As we've noted before, Jesus did not reveal Himself resurrected to the world. The only evidence the world will ever get is the empty tomb. But, it's likely that the shroud of Turin is additional evidence. Nevertheless, Jesus only showed Himself alive to select witnesses. As Peter declared to Cornelius and his household in Acts 10:39-42, "39 And 'we are witnesses of all that he [Jesus] did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree, 40 but God raised him on the third day and made him to appear, 41 not to all the people but to us who had been chosen by God as witnesses, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. 42 And he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead.'" Yahweh did things this way so that from the very beginning on the Day of Pentecost 33A.D. up to the present time, the only way to come to Jesus is through the testimony of the original 600 witnesses who saw Jesus resurrected in an immortal human body.

But, notice what Jesus said about Himself and the Father. Again, those committed in love to Jesus will keep Jesus' Word. As a result, not only will Jesus make His home with such a person, the Father will also. Therefore, in this morning's Gospel lesson we see that Yahweh — Father, Son and Holy Spirit — desires to indwell the believer and take up residence in our inner temples. This is crushing grace upon grace. The holy, righteous Creator of this existence comes to live in those who are not yet fully sanctified and won't be in this life. Yet, He is treating us as if we were already as fully righteous as He is. We are at once citizens both of this age and the age to come. Therefore, there's only two things we can do in response to such incomprehensible loving grace — either shut our mouths in sacred worship, or glorify His name in holy joy. Both are appropriate.

Now that we've heard what Jesus had to say, what do you think? Is it simply interesting to know, or is it something more? The only way it can be anything more than merely interesting to any one of us is if Lord Holy Spirit Himself makes it so. For, the Word of God is often hidden behind all the conflicts, noise and chaos of this world. Can it be believed? Who says these things are so? Who says it even matters? Certainly, the rebellious human nature we're born with cares nothing about God's Word. What's on your phone is far more interesting.

But Messiah Jesus, the proven King of kings, said it. He has spoken it to you in the intimacy of this sanctuary. Indeed, that's why those who came before us built this room that will be 100 years old in 2031. This is a place of sanctuary set aside from the chaos of the world so that the voice of the Lord may be heard here by those drawn by the Spirit of God.

This morning, in this place Jesus has told you again that you are His temple. If so, there is a special union between you and your Creator; between you and your Savior via His Holy Spirit. The Lutheran theologians of the late 1500's and 1600's called it the "Mystical Union of the Believer with Christ." Christian Eastern Orthodoxy calls it Theosis or Deification — meaning the process by which we become more like our Lord and Master, more like our God. Recently, it has been called "Christification" by the AALC's Dr. Jordan Cooper.

Whatever, you want to call it, the union of the believer with Jesus, the union of the believer with Yahweh, is beyond comprehension because it's spiritual. But, it is Yahweh's power for good in this world. As Jesus said in John 15:5, "I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing." Bearing fruit is Jesus talk for doing good and living righteously.

A grape vine and its branches are one living organism. The vine supplies the energy for the branches to produce fruit. The root, vine and branches must be intimately connected for this to happen. So it is with Yahweh and His people. So it is with Jesus and His true disciples. As the apostle tells us in Galatians 5:22-24, “22 . . . the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. 24 And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.”

It takes spiritual power to live and behave this way — much more than any of us have on our own. For the old nature must die daily with Christ through baptism. The new nature must be raised up with Christ daily through baptism. That takes power.

And the only way this can happen is by Holy Spirit - given faith that the Word Jesus has spoken to us is not only true but powerful. For we know that when faith is given us in even the smallest amount, it pulls the power of God hidden behind the contrary noise of this world out into the open for us. And things begin to change. The Kingdom of God comes and His Will gets done in all our daily thinking, speaking and doing. Such is the union of the believer with Jesus. In true Christianity, God comes to make His habitation within His people. Amen.

All Bible quotes are from the ESV.