

Sermon 5-17-26
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Based on an extended reading of the Gospel for the 7th Sunday of Easter, John 17

God's Dwelling

The seven Sundays of the Easter season are based on the Jewish cycle of festivals described in the Torah. On the fourteenth day of the first month of the Jewish lunar calendar, Israel was commanded to celebrate the Passover. On the fifteenth day of the first month, Israel was commanded to begin the week long festival of unleavened bread. On the Sunday that occurs in the week of unleavened bread, Yahweh commanded Israel to make an offering to Him of the firstfruits of the spring harvest. From that Sunday Yahweh commanded Israel to count off seven more Sundays. On the seventh Sunday, Yahweh commanded Israel to celebrate another harvest festival, Shavuot — what we call Pentecost. We call it Pentecost because in Greek “pente” is fifty. And fifty days were counted off between the Sunday in the week of unleavened bread and the Sunday of Pentecost.

In 33A.D., the Sunday in the week of unleavened bread was the day of Jesus' Resurrection. Thus, the Apostle Paul refers to Jesus as the firstfruits from the dead. In 33A.D., on the seventh Sunday, the festival of Pentecost, 3,000 people were brought into the Kingdom of God through the preaching of the apostles and the work of Lord Holy Spirit. So, those 3,000 were the first fruits of the harvest of souls that is the true church of Messiah Jesus. See how Yahweh has turned harvest festivals into a harvest of souls.

Now, from the Sunday of Jesus' Resurrection, the church also counts off 40 days. For on the fortieth day after His resurrection, Jesus ascended into heaven, as is told us in the book of Acts. Therefore, from the fortieth day onward, the team that Jesus had carefully prepared for three years, the twelve apostles and the rest of His disciples, took the field for the fourth quarter of the greatest contest ever played. We, the spiritual descendants of the apostles, are still on the field 2,000 years later. Satan and his horde are still the adversaries. But, victory is assured because Jesus won it for us in the first three quarters.

We've noted multiple times that throughout Jesus' ministry, the disciples couldn't understand what Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms teach about a suffering Messiah, even though Jesus clearly explained it to them. Even the two who walked with Jesus on Easter afternoon couldn't get it. But on Easter evening everything changed. Jesus breathed Lord Holy Spirit into the apostles and disciples and opened their minds to understand the Scriptures. From that point on they completely got it.

This is confirmed in this morning's first lesson. The event we read of took place sometime in the ten days between Jesus' ascension into heaven and the Day of Pentecost. The apostles were on their own. And apparently in His resurrection appearances, Jesus had said nothing about replacing the failed apostle, Judas Iscariot. However, Lord Holy Spirit led Peter to two obscure passages in the Psalms — Psalm 69:25 and Psalm 109:8. From these verses, Lord Holy Spirit led Peter to declare that another man had to take Judas' place so that there would be twelve apostles. This was Peter's first act of leadership in the church. And so, a man named Matthias became the twelfth apostle charged with giving public

witness to all that Jesus had said and done, and especially Jesus' resurrection from the dead. For, only a select group of about 600 people had been given the privilege of seeing Jesus resurrected, and an even smaller group had seen Him ascend into heaven.

Looking closely at the action Peter took, we can see that it was based on two things. First, is Lord Holy Spirit. Without the guidance of Lord Holy Spirit, Peter never would have been able to find the passages of Scripture. Indeed, we're not even sure Peter had a copy of the Psalms to look into. For, there were no published Old Testament bibles in those days. Everything was hand copied on scrolls. Such scrolls were very costly and usually only found in synagogues. Nevertheless, the two passages of Scripture were the second basis of Peter's action. Put together, then, Peter's action was based on Lord Holy Spirit and The Word of God working together in the heart of a believer. And, this is the foundation upon which every action of the apostles stood — The Word and The Spirit. It is still the foundation of the true Church to this day. It's why we confess in the creeds that we believe in one holy catholic and apostolic church. There can be no other true church other than that founded upon the actions of the Apostles. And, by the way, it's why the book is called the Acts of the Apostles.

Now, for the last several weeks we've been looking at the work of Lord Holy Spirit. For, without Him, no one can believe any of what has been written in both the Old and New Testaments. But with Him, faith comes that these things are not only true, but real, powerful and world changing.

Let's take an example. I read in the past week that [Walgreens is closing a store](#) in South Chicago. Even the lock boxes in the store that we've all had to learn to live with in recent years were being destroyed. Liquor and cigarettes were sold behind the counter in that store. So, people were hopping the counter and helping themselves to the liquor and cigarettes, endangering the clerks. The money spent on security guards wasn't doing anything. The store had a theft rate four times higher than any other store in the country.

Now imagine for a minute if the Word of God and the power of Lord Holy Spirit were to take effect in the community around the store so that the community would be transformed. Consider these verses from 1Corinthians 6:9-11, "9... Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, 10 nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. 11 And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God."

Some members of the Corinthian Church had been thieves. But they were no longer. They were washed, given a righteous heart, and declared righteous before God by the powerful Name of Jesus declared in God's Word and by Lord Holy Spirit. They no longer stole. Now, if a powerful thing like this were to happen widely among the population of South Chicago, would it transform the community? Of course it would. Theft would mostly cease. And things like this have happened in the history of this world.

Real power is displayed when Lord Holy Spirit makes the Word of our God active in people. For as we've seen in recent weeks, righteous Yahweh Himself inhabits the people He calls and gathers to Himself.

Today's Gospel lesson is sometimes called the High Priestly prayer of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Jesus prayed it on Holy Thursday just before He and the apostles left for the Garden of Gethsemane. Let's consider this part of the prayer.

John 17:20-26, “20 ‘I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, 21 that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. 22 The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, 23 I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me. 24 Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. 25 O righteous Father, even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these know that you have sent me. 26 I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.”

First, this part of the prayer was not for the apostles, but for us who believe in Jesus through the preaching of the apostles. What did Jesus want for us? First, a oneness similar to the oneness Jesus has with the Father.

Now, the oneness of Jesus with the Father is on two very different levels. First, is the union that Yahweh, the Son, has with Yahweh, Father and Holy Spirit — the mysterious God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit, yet is but One. Our Trinitarian Creator God is a mystery beyond our comprehension.

But, there is also a union within our comprehension. God, the Son, became incarnate of the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary and was born man. He was and is one of us. He experienced everything in this world that we experience, including death. When Jesus was baptized in the Jordan, Yahweh the Holy Spirit descended upon Him and took up residence in Him. Here in John 17 we learn that Yahweh the Father also took up residence in Jesus. It's this union of God with man that Jesus is speaking of here. The Father is in human Jesus just as human Jesus is in the Father. And this is what Jesus is praying will happen to us — that we should become one in heart, mind and will with our glorious, righteous Creator.

Jesus continued on in prayer that we'll also be in Him as well as the Father; and as a result of this union with God, that we'll naturally become one in heart, mind and will with each other. Indeed, this is the way things will be in the resurrection. However, it's truly a miracle of God if we even begin to approach such oneness in this life. I mean, look at the craziness that has to be gone through to get a family to church. If you've ever done this, you know what I mean. Yet, Jesus prayed that we'll become one. And it will be so.

Then, at the end of the prayer, Jesus prayed that He may be in us so that He may make known to us the Father's loving commitment to us just as the Father is committed to Jesus, the human being. Thus, only through Jesus can we know the Father's loving commitment to us. For, it's through Jesus' atoning work on the cross that we have forgiveness of sins. And it is only through the forgiveness of sins with which Jesus covers us that the Father's love and commitment to us can come to us.

Certainly, when Lord Holy Spirit within us brings home to us the Truth of what Jesus prayed for us, the effect is rich and powerful. We even have assurance that our very existence in this world of tears and trouble is absolutely worthwhile. Indeed, the Apostle Paul spoke of this great richness when he wrote of himself in Galatians 2:19-20, “19 For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. 20 I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the

flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." Messiah living in His people makes all the difference.

Peter spoke of this same rich and powerful grace when he wrote in 2Peter 1:3, "1 His [God's] divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him [Jesus] who called us to his own glory and excellence, 4 by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature. . . ." Did you see that? You and I are meant to partake of Yahweh's divine nature. How? Through the man, Jesus. For, the man, Jesus, partakes of Yahweh's divine, righteous nature and enables us to do the same.

St. Paul gives a tremendous picture of Jesus in Colossians 1:15-20, "15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. 16 For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. 17 And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. 18 And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. 19 For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, 20 and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross." Then Paul goes on in verse 27 to speak of "the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory." The great Creator of everything, the great Reconciler of everything created a great mystery — namely that He should dwell within all those He has won to Himself out of this world of sinners, and that He should be in us the greatest and most powerful hope by which humans can live: the hope of righteous, unhindered eternal glory with Him, resurrected with Him from the dead.

Here's another glorious passage from Ephesians 2:18-22, "18 For through him [Jesus] we both [Jews and Gentiles] have access in one Spirit to the Father. 19 So then you [Gentiles] are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and 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."

A dwelling place for a god is a temple. And so Paul uses the metaphor of a building to describe the church. Each of us individually and all of us corporately are a dwelling place for our Creator, Yahweh. Indeed, Paul writes in 1Corinthians 3:16, "Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?"

Unfortunately, many Christians tend not to know this. But, now you do. Well, what of it? It can change your life for the better. That's for sure.

So two things. First, do I have to do anything to enable God to indwell me? Actually, it's all been done for you. When Jesus came off the field at the end of the third quarter, He had won everything necessary for Yahweh to indwell us. Everything necessary to satisfy Yahweh's justice and wrath had been accomplished. On the cross Jesus had suffered all punishment necessary. Therefore, the way was clear for Yahweh to call sinners to Him, to baptize them into Jesus Christ, forgive them, cleanse them, establish them in His goodness and indwell them. Yahweh also provided apostolic preaching and teaching so that we can know all His gracious will and purposes. He also provided His Holy Spirit so that all who hear the apostolic teaching may have faith to believe it. And when faith comes to us to believe the Truth and submit ourselves to our King, then within ourselves we begin to

recognize the difference that comes from having Yahweh, Father, Son and Holy Spirit dwelling within.

The second thing. If Yahweh is dwelling within me, what happens if I sin? First, of all we have to recognize that as long as Christians live in the present age, we have enemies. Satan is insanely jealous of our standing with Yahweh. He works overtime on those who Yahweh is taking away from him. Then, there's the problem of the sinful nature we're born with. The sinful nature hates Yahweh and hates the Lord Jesus. It will do anything to separate us from Yahweh and make us our own gods again. The sinful nature has been put to death with Christ in all those baptized in Christ. However, it is a zombie and refuses to stay dead. And, lastly, there's the problem of the world system — everything in this life that's in league with Satan and opposed to Yahweh. It lures and goads into sin. And so the believing Christian is caught in the middle. Yahweh within and the zombie sinful nature within vying for allegiance and control.

The answer to this situation is fairly simple. Who is stronger — Satan or Jesus? What is stronger — the sinful nature or Jesus? Who is more determined to have you — is it not your loving Father in heaven? We're told in Romans 6 that our sinful nature has been crucified with Christ. Therefore, when the urgency of sin comes — and come it does — all we have to do is call upon the Lord Jesus to put the wicked thing to death with Him. We might also have to move away from the people, places and things that aggravate the urgency to sin. But the Christian who urgently calls upon the Lord to put the wicked thing to death will be surprised at the power he or she has invoked. It may take a little bit, but the urgency of the sin will eventually collapse and freedom from the slavery of sin will once again set in. The Lord is as good as His promises. For it says in 1 Corinthians 10:13, "No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it."

And one more thing. The true Church is more powerful than our enemies. For, collectively the people of God are indwelt by Yahweh as we saw above in Ephesians. We can call upon our brothers and sisters in the warfare against sin, just as they can call on us.

We close, then, with this reminder. 1 John 4:4, "Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he [Jesus] who is in you is greater than he [the devil] who is in the world." And as we saw in our Gospel lesson, Jesus has prayed for us and is praying for us. Amen.

All Bible quotes are from the ESV.