

EASTER VI (Rogate) – May 9, 2021 – John 16:23-33

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

²³ In that day you will ask nothing of me. Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you. ²⁴ Until now you have asked nothing in my name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full. ²⁵ "I have said these things to you in figures of speech. The hour is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figures of speech but will tell you plainly about the Father. ²⁶ In that day you will ask in my name, and I do not say to you that I will ask the Father on your behalf; ²⁷ for the Father himself loves you, because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God. ²⁸ I came from the Father and have come into the world, and now I am leaving the world and going to the Father." ²⁹ His disciples said, "Ah, now you are speaking plainly and not using figurative speech! ³⁰ Now we know that you know all things and do not need anyone to question you; this is why we believe that you came from God." ³¹ Jesus answered them, "Do you now believe? ³² Behold, the hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home, and will leave me alone. Yet I am not alone, for the Father is with me. ³³ I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world."

Every day that goes by is one less day that we have to wait in eager expectation for the second coming of Christ. As Paul tells us, we are nearer now to the consummation of Christ's kingdom than when we first believed. Now, this might not sound like a specific answer, and it isn't, about when the Last Day will come – we don't know; not even Jesus knows when that day will be; only the Father knows. But, we can be prepared for it, welcome it, and strain with eager expectation for God to put an end to

this sinful world, and draw us to Himself. We can be confident and know that even though we sin against Him daily and hourly, He has not abandoned us to the grave, or the punishment that our sins deserve.

Jesus foretells a scary scene, indeed. He's just finished telling the disciples before our assigned text for this morning that He is going away to a place where they will not see Him for a little while; however, He holds out the hope that they will see Him again soon after that. We know from our previous study of this chapter of John's Gospel that this refers not only to His Passion, death and Resurrection, but also His Ascension and coming again at the end of time. Even though it's frightening, and the disciples will scatter once He is arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane, He will not leave them forsaken as orphans. He will send the promised Counselor to be with them, the Holy Spirit, that will create and sustain faith, and do what He does best – point to Jesus the Christ, the reason for hope in a hopeless world. In fact, it is much better for them that the Helper come, because He will convict the world with regard to sin, righteousness and judgment. That's probably the most complete definition of the work of the Holy Spirit that we get in all of Scripture.

After He finishes telling the disciples all of this in the Upper Room, He can sense that they need some reassurance of the Gospel. They're looking a little "down at the mouth" by this point. They're probably starting to think that there's not much hope – Jesus is planning to take off and leave them alone, and they will be at the mercy of the Romans and the Jewish religious leaders. They've pledged their fortunes, their families, and their very lives to Him, and He's planning to repay that trust by abandoning them? That's when He starts talking to them plainly, not in parables, not in "figures of speech", but clearly. The Greek text actually uses the word boldly to describe Jesus' words here – not a bad translation, since to speak of these things takes a lot of courage, which only comes because these words are from the very mouth of God. Otherwise, such promises would fall on deaf ears as mere platitudes – only God Himself can cause such wonderful things to happen in the lives of otherwise poor

and miserable sinners such as the disciples and us. He boldly gives them hope and a future to look forward to; even though things will be challenging for a while, He has overcome the world, and will restore them to the victory over sin and death that He would leave them to accomplish. Let's look a bit at some of the Gospel promises that we have here in this passage from St. John's Gospel, and how they apply to us today as well as to the disciples in Jesus' day.

Jesus says in our text, "Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you. Until now you have asked nothing in my name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full." We don't talk about prayer enough in the Lutheran church. I'm even guilty of this when teaching the catechism – the Lord's Prayer probably gets the least amount of attention – probably because I think that the kids already know it, so why dwell on it? But, I think that a deeper problem lurks beneath the surface here – it's not just that we take prayer for granted; I think that we don't want to admit that we need it. We want to think that we're just fine on our own, that we can provide for our own needs – after all, we work hard, earn a good wage – we can handle the daily problems of life by ourselves

The last thing we want to do is admit that even the ability to get up in the morning, and go to work, and do the daily tasks that are set before us, comes as a gift from our heavenly Father. If He decided to, He could strike us dead in our sleep, and we'd have no recourse – He'd be completely justified, because we are poor, miserable sinners. Everything that we have and everything that we are comes as a pure gift from our heavenly Father – Luther says it well – "our body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members, my reason and all my senses...clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home, wife and family, land, animals and all that I have" all come from our gracious heavenly Father. Our Father wants, no, commands us to pray to Him – it's part of our duty as His creation to recognize that He provides for all of our needs and wants and desires

That's not the only purpose for prayer, though. It's not just our "reporting in" to God every day, paying Him due homage, although that is certainly God-pleasing. However, we're also told in Scripture and in Luther's Catechism that He tenderly invites us to pray to Him. Our text also goes this way when Jesus says that whatever we ask in His Name, He will give to us. We do not have because we do not ask – how often do we stop and ask God for something that we need, before we check the budget balance or the credit card limit? Whether or not we should have something is up to God, more than us – He knows what is best for us, even when we sometimes don't know. We pray, along with Luther, for not too much so that we think that we are independent from God, and don't need Him; but also for not too little, so that we become bitter, and blame God for our dire needs. He's not like Santa Claus, where we write our wish lists, and He just provides them. No, He is a wise and all-knowing Father, and grants us according to what He knows would be good or bad for us to have!

It's not just limited to temporal goods, that we pray for according to God's will. Jesus is also talking here about spiritual prayers, for blessings of a constant and steadfast faith, even when things get rough. We are told that we can pray for these spiritual gifts unconditionally, because we know that God wants us to have them. Jesus tells the disciples, and us, that if they're worried about the persecution that is coming, they are to pray about it, for the strength to endure, for the faith to remain steadfast, for the tough times to only last for a while, according to His will.

Jesus continues, "The hour is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figures of speech but will tell you plainly about the Father. In that day you will ask in my name, and I do not say to you that I will ask the Father on your behalf; for the Father himself loves you, because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God." Right now, there needs to be a mediator between us and the Father. He is holy, we are not. We cannot be in His perfect presence and go on living – we will be destroyed if we see His face. Just like when Moses and the Israelites were in the desert, and they were

scared of seeing God face to face, and appointed Moses to be the one that went into the Tent of Meeting for them, so we are rightfully afraid of seeing or interacting with God directly.

That mediator is not any man here on earth, or any saint in heaven, but our one Lord Jesus Christ. We pray to the Father, through the Son, by the Holy Spirit working in and through us. I don't know if you've ever noticed, but in the pre-written prayers of the church, they often take on this format. The three Persons of the Trinity are mentioned, but this economy of Jesus being the mediator, and the Holy Spirit being the one that originates them in our hearts, and the Father being the One to Whom they are directed is often the case. Sometimes we take a little shortcut on this – and end a prayer, “In Jesus' Name we pray...”, but this still reminds us that Jesus is the only reason that we can approach our heavenly Father at all – it's because of His sacrifice that we have any hope at all

Jesus reminds us in this passage that this won't be the case forever – we will have our sin removed from us completely when we die, and are admitted into heaven, and this mediator situation won't have to endure – we will be able to be in the unveiled presence of God the Father once again. That's how He created us to be in the first place, in the Garden of Eden – it was His custom, we are told, to walk with Adam and Eve in the cool of the day, interacting with them. They didn't have a problem with this because sin had not entered into the world – there was no separation between them and God – at least not yet. But, from the fall into sin until we are ushered into heaven, sin is a barrier – it can only be overcome by God the Son, Jesus the Christ. We won't need to pray to Jesus to intercede for us to the Father anymore; things will be completely restored between us and God. That is a comfort, both to the disciples and to us – and something else to strain toward, which will come at the Last Day, hopefully sooner rather than later.

As you can see, there is great reason for hope and a future for us. Jesus reassures us and the disciples that He is going away, to be sure, but the Holy Spirit will be coming as the Counselor, and He specializes in creating and sustaining faith in the heart that once was unbelieving but now has faith. He

speaks of what He hears, which is totally and completely about Christ, the author and fashioner of our faith. Now, He speaks plainly to us that the barrier of sin that separates us from God the Father will be removed soon, and things will be restored to the way that they were intended by God to be from the beginning. We are given the ability in the meantime to pray to our heavenly Father for whatever we need, and we are promised that He will hear our prayers, and provide us according to His Fatherly, Divine goodness and mercy. Jesus speaks to us plainly so that even though dark times are ahead, we will have His words to cling to, to keep our faith strong, to keep us from abandoning the deposit that has been laid into our hearts at Baptism, sustained through Word and Sacrament throughout our earthly lives, and finally, when our Last Day comes, He will give us a “blessed end”, to summarize Luther.

Why are we able to have this positive attitude, that will influence those that we speak with within our own families, among our friends, and amid our coworkers and those who trust us? How can our attitude be so much different than the world around us? Jesus says it best in the last verses of this pericope: “Behold, the hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home, and will leave me alone. Yet I am not alone, for the Father is with me. I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.” He has overcome the world. He is risen! [He is risen indeed! Alleluia!]. That’s why we are so confident and know that His words are true – because the devil is defeated, our sinful nature is gradually being eradicated, and all this is done by our God and Father, the Author of truth and the fierce foe of lies. In fact, these two verses are a fitting summary of the Easter season; indeed, of the Gospel of Christ – we will be scattered; but the Son is not alone; there will be tribulation; but Christ has overcome the world.

It’s interesting when putting together sermons – often there’s a “bracketed” text, with a shorter and longer form of the reading. Usually, I elect to use the longer reading, to the chagrin of some (I know, sometimes it gets long during Holy Week!). But this week’s pericope illustrates why sometimes

the longer reading is the better one. Sometimes it gives more context; sometimes it gives more detail. In this case, however, I think that the last two verses, which would be omitted if we did the “shorter” reading, would cut off the most important verses of the text. Thanks be to God that He led the compilers of the series of readings called the Lectionary to give both options here – so that we didn’t just cut off such an important statement from Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed, and is powerful to create and sustain faith. But, some passages are clearer than others, and thanks be to God for providing us with this clear summary at the end of this text. May God be with us and He leads us and guides us to draw closer to Him, draw upon Him for strength, and draw life and a future from His once-for-all atonement for all of our sins and our sinful nature. He has truly done it all for our salvation! Amen.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now may the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Savior and Lord. Amen.