

Introductory

In the TLH one-year lectionary, the appointed reading for Jubilate (Easter 3) is John 16:16-22, and for Cantate and Rogate (Easter 5 and 6) 16:5-15 and 16:23-30 (31-33). LW removes the sixteenth chapter of John altogether from the Easter Season, and instead has readings from this chapter on Pentecost A and Trinity C. LSB has us in this chapter this week and next week during Series C.

It would be a good idea to point out that in this text we are travelling back in time, going back to Maundy Thursday. You might also want to briefly review the contents of The Prayer up to this point, which will continue next week. These are among the last recorded words that will be uttered by Jesus during His earthly life, and the stress on both Him and His followers is palpable.

At the end of chapter 15 and the beginning of chapter 16, Jesus talks to the disciples about how they, like He, will experience the hatred of the world. He particularly talks about the persecution that will come from those who think they are “offering service to God” by killing His followers. They do this because they don’t know the Father, and neither do they know the Son, or us.

He continues with what, to them, must have sounded like even worse news; that He will be leaving. He assures them that His going is a good thing actually, because after that, “the Counselor” will come, a reference to Pentecost and the coming of the Holy Spirit. Pentecost is the moment of revelation and enlightenment, the instant when the disciples finally seem to get it about Jesus.

We see the Creator of Time, who is Himself timeless, talking here about time. From our perspective, we think that some things last longer than they should, and that other things should last longer than they actually do. It must have seemed to them like a terribly long amount of time that Jesus was in the grave – those three days drag – but to God it was but a moment or timeless.

When all is said and done, there is a time and season for every purpose under heaven, and God’s timing is impeccable. The Christian sees this all the time small picture and big picture. Often, we wonder what’s God thinking, and if He’s going to deliver me, why doesn’t He just deliver me already? Then, in retrospect, it’s all good, and God’s timing is God’s timing, and it was correct.

Textual Notes

12. Jesus has spoken of many things, and He has taught them a great deal, and now He tells the listeners that He actually has a lot more things to tell them, “ἀλλ’ οὐ δύνασθε βαστάζειν ἅρτι – but you are not able to carry them now.” Note the emphatic “but – ἀλλ,” emphasizing the disconnect between the knowledge that Jesus is able to impart and the ability of the hearers to absorb it.

The verb “δύναμαι – to be able,” preceded by the negator “οὐ - not,” speaks to the utter inability of one to have the power or ability to do something, like the inability of these men to “carry” the teachings of Jesus beyond a certain point. In educational terms, it’s not their fault. Their spiritual brains are not sufficiently developed and are unable to grasp formal spiritual learning just yet.

The problem is certainly not with the teacher. Jesus knows what He’s talking about, the *sine qua non* for a good teacher. In fact, Jesus is omniscient; He knows all things, and He knows the basics of communication, and He perfects them. The problem rather is with the learner and our inability to grasp certain concepts. There are things that are simply beyond the grasp of the six-year-old.

Besides formal math, things like chemical reactions, the hit-and-run, certain aspects of parenthood, and how a fax machine works. Come to think of it, I wish somebody would explain to me how a fax machine works. We know that they have yet to get their heads around the coming trip to Jerusalem, and even on Easter and the week after they seem unable to process the Resurrection.

Even post-Pentecost, there are things about God that our small human brains are simply unable to process, and that’s a difficult for the Modern Man to get his head around. Even while living in the midst of a plethora of things we can’t understand, we think we *should* be able to understand them, and there are certainly people who *do* understand those things, and maybe I’ll listen to a Podcast.

Because Americans have been force-fed that Kool Aid and have also been taught that Christianity and Science are incompatible and probably opposed to one another, I mention the concept of our humanity and the inherent limitations that come with that whenever I get a chance. Having been with Jesus all these years, these men know Jesus and what Jesus is about better than any others.

The second verb “βαστάζειν – to carry” is the present infinitive of “βαστάζω,” a word that occurs twenty-six other times in the NT. The picture painted here by the words of Jesus is that of a person or persons who have picked something up and are carrying it around with them, and there is a sense in which the Apostles, modern pastors, and laymen do just that with the clear Word of God.

The last word in the sentence – “now – ἄρτι” is a subtle hint that there will be a time when they *will* be able to receive more of the knowledge that He has to give. We now know that the time is Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit is made manifest on them. When the Bible is completed, then the revelation of God to man to man is complete, and that knowledge is canonized in the NT.

It’s what we see in the revelation Peter relates in today’s Acts reading. It’s what Paul is talking about in First Corinthians (13) when he talks about the coming of complete knowledge and prophecy, and the ending of tongues. It’s what we see in two thousand years of Christian contemplation, study, and digesting of the Word; we know more than we used to about God.

That’s the Church. As for the Individual, at Baptism, when the Holy Spirit is made manifest to us, we get it like the non-Christian will never get it. When we hear the Word of God in our ears, it

changes us in a good, meaningful, and fundamental way, and as we learn more, we know more about God and our religion. But some things will still always be off-limits to the human brain. In fact, post-Pentecost, a lot more has been learned about God and the Christian religion, and after two thousand years of theological study, there's a lot out there. Lately, most of what is out there has become much more accessible because of travel and especially because of the Internet, we know about discernment, I do this study at biblehub.com et al, and occasionally I reference a book.

13. Jesus talks about the several aspects of the Holy Spirit. In v. 7, He has called the Holy Spirit the “παράκλητος – advocate,” (parakletse) the attorney who argues the case for his client. In this case the Spirit acts as the advocate of the sinner before the Righteous Judge. Now Jesus calls the Holy Spirit “πνεῦμα τῆς ἀληθείας – Spirit of Truth” because the Spirit will reveal truth to them.

Well which is it? Is the Spirit an Advocate, or is it the One who reveals truth? Both, and more. My vocation is pastor. My vocation is father. Well which is it? Both and more, including citizen, husband, and employee. And Jesus is Savior, Son of God, the Christ, et al. The Holy Spirit and the work of the Spirit is multi-faceted, and that's not really a difficult concept to understand.

So in the context of their inability to comprehend, but later on they will be able to understand better, Jesus is talking about the Holy Spirit in terms of the “Spirit of Truth.” Epistemology is a subject in which most people are interested, even if they don't know the word. How do you know what is true and what is not true, about history, about politics, about man, especially about God?

A lot of Americans would give a lot of answers to that question, and some of those answers would claim that such a thing is not possible, and a lot of other answers would include a heavy dose of “me” and “I.” Jesus would have us to believe that the “Spirit of Truth” will reveal what is true about God. The Holy Spirit “ὁδηγήσει ὑμᾶς εἰς τὴν ἀλήθειαν πᾶσαν – will guide you into all truth.”

The verb “ὁδηγέω – guide” occurs four other times in the NT, twice in reference to the blind leading the blind, when the Eunuch asks Philip to explain the Isaiah passage to him, and in Revelation, in reference to a shepherd guiding His sheep to good things. The Holy Spirit guides us into truth about God and man through Word and Sacrament, mostly through the taught Word.

This verse, especially the second half of this verse, makes it sound like the Spirit who speaks through Word and Sacrament will speak through actual men. First, speaking of the Spirit, it says, “λαλήσει ἑαυτοῦ - He will speak from Himself.” That verb (λαλέω) is the word often used for the public proclamation of the Word from the pulpit, what we would call preaching/teaching.

He points out that “οὐ γὰρ λαλήσει ἑαυτοῦ - he will not speak from himself,” and then He uses the same verb (λαλέω), still speaking of the Spirit, and now saying emphatically “ἀλλ' ὅσα ἀκούει λαλήσει – but whatever he hears he will speak.” The voice is not speaking for self, but is speaking what he has heard from the Spirit – the Church – are the Apostles and those in the apostolic office.

And now, finally, He says that The Holy Spirit “τὰ ἐρχόμενα ἀναγγελεῖ ὑμῖν – will proclaim the things coming to you.” Preaching is an apocalyptic exercise; the preacher always points the hearer

to the end of all things and the imminent coming of Judgment Day and heaven for us. Americans are very much here and now people, and spend little time thinking about heaven, hell and eternity.

All the more therefore must we hold the joys of heaven before their eyes on every Sunday morning. On Pentecost, it will be that very same Spirit who “ἀναγγελεῖ ὑμῖν – announces to you” things. After that, these men went out and proclaimed the Gospel of Christ to the world, and as Jesus had promised, the Holy Spirit told them what to say when and where they needed to know what to say.

These Apostles, working under inspiration of the Holy Spirit, wrote the Bible, of which one of them (Peter) says that it is “more certain” than what he saw at the Mount of Transfiguration, for example. By its very nature, the Bible is limited – like any other book is limited – but what we have extant is more than sufficient to communicate to us what we need to know about Theology.

In like manner, now that the Word has been canonized, the preacher “hears the voice of God” speak to him when and as he does his exegetical work, and he passes along what he thus hears to his own hearers on Sunday morning. This is a fundamental description of what ought to happen from text to sermon every week, and is the basis for actual, not just claimed “biblical” preaching.

The preacher digs into the text and God teaches him something new or something even different. He learns from listening to God, and then he proclaims and teaches those things that he has been taught and learned, often in the same manner in which he has been taught by God and learned it. The preacher becomes the conduit for God’s speaking to His people in a particular time and place.

The Holy Spirit – The Church – is surely active in this entire process. The Church Fathers often appear to think that when they spoke from the pulpit, they were speaking God’s Word, and in so thinking they are not incorrect. Likewise, when the faithful pastor speaks from the pulpit, are we not to think that we are speaking God’s Word, and if you don’t, then just what are you speaking?

14. This kind of preaching glorifies Jesus. When He says “ἐκεῖνος ἐμὲ δοξάσει – he will glorify me,” He is speaking of the Apostles in that day and of the faithful preacher in these days. And what does it mean to be faithful and true? Again, we look at preacher as conduit, “ὅτι ἐκ τοῦ ἐμοῦ λήψεται καὶ ἀναγγελεῖ ὑμῖν – because of that which is mine He will take and declare to you.”

In one regard, preaching is a fairly simple undertaking; you take the text of the day, study it to better understand it, and you then communicate its meaning to the hearer. But if that were all there is to preaching, then just read from the Bible for twenty minutes, or better still – for many LCMS Pastors – read from the Book of Concord for twenty minutes to make sure to get it right.

That verb “ἀναγγέλλω – disclose,” which occurs in the previous verse, this one, and the one to follow, at its root means to announce something that you know to be true. The prefix gives the word connotations of increasing understanding of a concept, like God, for example. Talk to most Christians, and they will tell you that they know a lot more about God than they used to know.

That is especially true for Christians who go to church every Sunday and listen to preaching that is both true to the Word of God and proclaimed in the way God models in the Bible. That's why the teaching aspect has always been a part of Christian preaching. Some would say that preaching and teaching are the same thing. If you do other things on Sunday morning, then not so much.

The worst is to listen to TV preachers or Podcasts that are not true to the Word. There's a lot out there, and it's easily accessible, and a lot of people are teaching a lot of things about God that are variously and to various degrees false. Far from increasing your knowledge and understanding about God, you digress, and maybe even lose your faith. Be discerning or avoid that altogether.

15. He continues by telling His hearers, “πάντα ὅσα ἔχει ὁ πατήρ ἐμὰ ἐστίν – whatever things the Father has are mine.” The flow here is said by Jesus to be from the Father to the Son to the Spirit, the typical ordering within Persons of the Trinity, Who is One God. That ordering is consistent with other places where Jesus talks about the Father and the Son, but not so often about the Spirit.

The “whatever things” can and probably does mean a lot of things, but the thing being talked about here is The Word, the primary source of knowing about God. To state the obvious; the flow of the Word – which travelled from Father to Son to Apostles, who wrote it down – now comes to the modern, faithful pastor, who is given to preach the Word from the Bible to the People of God.

16. This verse begins with the word “Μικρόν – Micro,” a word that appears often in the NT. It's the word that Jesus uses when He talks about things like the mustard seed and the “little ones” who believe in Him (Mt. 18). It is a prefix in the modern SI, and it means “millionth,” and it is a word with which Americans are familiar from such places as the microwave oven and micromanaging.

Here, it means a very short period of time. We trace the metric system (SI) to the sixteenth century, including “micro.” At the time of Jesus, “micros” was the smallest unit of measurement, and by using that word, Jesus is using the absolute shortest period of time possible to tell them how soon “a little while” will be upon them, and that just as quickly as He leaves, so soon He will be back.

He talks now about how they will not “see” Him for a short time, and then they will “see” Him again. The verb “ὁράω – to see” is the word that emphasized the perception of sight, one of an almost constant stream of assurances in John especially that the bodily resurrection of Jesus did actually occur, not to mention the visible ascension, all of it and other things seen by human eyes.

Some manuscripts add that they will not see Him “ὅτι ἐγὼ ὑπάγω πρὸς τὸν πατέρα – because I go to the Father.” A quick perusal of the apparatus indicates that this is a later addition, and it seems like a no duh, but it does clarify where Jesus will be during His absence from them. Like most variant readings, the addition may make clearer the meaning, but the meaning is not changed.

17. Now they talk among themselves, revealing what we have been saying all along; they don't quite get it. Because of what Jesus has just said (οὗν), they now talk “πρὸς ἀλλήλους· τί ἐστίν

τοῦτο ὃ λέγει ἡμῖν – among themselves – what is this thing that He says?” They specifically are having a hard time with the “little” remarks and the business about Jesus “going to the Father.”

If the variant in the previous verse were indeed a later addition, then this verse would explain why it was added; the disciples are said to be specifically asking about two things, and one of them is about His “going to the father.” Not that you need that variant reading for them to know to where Jesus is going to be located. It’s not a novel concept, and shortly before this (10) He said that.

18. But what about the timing of the coming events, and that’s a question of which many Christians are very fond. In their own individual lives we wonder when this, that, or the other thing is going to take place – and finally we wonder about our death. Big picture, we believe in the Second Coming of Christ, but we feel like we have to somehow nail down the timing of that certain event.

19. As is often the case, the ignorant men share their ignorance, the blind leading the blind, blindness and ignorance increasing geometrically, until the omniscient “ἔγνω Ἰησοῦς ὅτι ἤθελον αὐτὸν ἐρωτᾶν – Jesus knew that they wanted to ask” follow-up questions. Perhaps He overheard them discussing among themselves. Theological discussions can often become quite heated.

Being a good active listener, Jesus, “εἶπεν αὐτοῖς Περὶ τούτου ζητεῖτε μετ’ ἀλλήλων – says to them, ‘about this you ask among yourselves,’” and then He repeats their words back to them, which are the words that He had spoken to them, just to make sure He gets it right. That, and maybe to show them that He hears them talking, and they are talking about Him, so why not talk to Me?

20. He now goes funeral language, telling them that “κλαύσετε καὶ θρηνήσετε ὑμεῖς – you will weep and lament,” both future tense verbs, and while you are doing that, “ὁ δὲ κόσμος χαρήσεται – the world will rejoice.” The mourning of these friends and disciples of Jesus at His death is very understandable and real. Not so easy to comprehend is the rejoicing of “the world” at His death.

When I saw Londoners, at the death of Baroness Lady Margaret Thatcher, holding signs and singing “ding, dong, the witch is dead” I was stunned. And then I recalled what my leftist, atheist brother-in-law said to me a few days after the passing of Sir Ronald Reagan, “well it’s good to know that Reagan is in hell now.” His murderers had a similar reaction to the death of Jesus.

We may be relieved at the removal of an evil person from this earth, but Christians generally don’t “rejoice” at the deaths of even their worst of enemies. We may even feel bad that they are in Hell. But if we understand “the world – ὁ κόσμος” the way that John understands that term, then it ought not to surprise us that “the world” should rejoice at the death of Jesus, sworn enemy of “the world.”

From the beginning, where John tells us that “He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, yet the world knew Him not,” (1:10), the world has been opposed to Jesus. We can see that same thing today, and much of the opposition to Jesus comes from His greatest modern enemy; those who bear His own name. They call themselves “Christian,” but reject all He has been saying.

But that's not the end of the story, He rose, and he who rejoices last rejoices best. We can and do rejoice during our time here, but it will be as nothing compared to the joy in heaven. When John – Revelation – talks about a “new heaven and a new earth,” he's using the word “καινός,” meaning not only new but new and different, “new as to form or quality, of different nature.” (Vine).

When I talk about just “new” as opposed to this “new and different,” I might talk about how my grandfather marveled at what a great thing it was when he bought his first new Model T. I will then talk about what a great thing it was when I bought my new Rav4, which can drive itself, read from the phone to me, and it will go several hundreds of thousands of miles. It's new and better.

I might change that up and talk about The Phone. The telephone was a great thing when it first came out. You could talk to people without being there! When we got married, we bought a new phone. The new Phone my wife bought a couple of weeks ago is new and different, and everybody will know what you're talking about. Earth will be to heaven what old is to the new and different.

If you would have told my grandfather back in 1925 that one day cars would be able to drive themselves, and that I can talk to the car, and she talks back – this in a day when the radio was a novel idea – he would not have been able to comprehend it. Paul talks about these bodies being like the seed you put into the ground, and the heavenly bodies will be like the plant that comes up.

Who could look at a kernel of corn and comprehend – if you didn't already know – the corn plant, which butters my bread? Take any seed and have a look, and if you didn't know what the plant was going to look like...and who knows what cars and phones will be able to do in the future. I think I have the telegraph figured out – finally – but still trying to get my head around the fax.

21. One of the ways that Aristotle would have the speaker create pathos (emotion), as well as understanding (logos) in the listener is by using of figures of speech. God does the same thing all the time in the Bible. Here Jesus uses the metaphor of labor pains and the birth of a child to help the hearer to understand and feel the contrast between life on this fallen planet and life in heaven.

Who among us is not familiar with the intense pain of childbirth – mothers especially are – contrasted with the unmatched joy of having a new child? The young women are aware of it, and most of the older women have experienced it, and most fathers have observed it up close, like I have observed it up close. The pain is like no other, but once the child comes, it's all good.

22. The things of which He has been speaking will be like that, Jesus says. They will see Him again, victorious over sin, death, Satan, and “the world,” and the tables will be turned; it is now the Christian who will “χαρήσεται – rejoice” at the Resurrection of Jesus, and we do a lot of that during the Easter Season, and the pagans do other things, and our joy will endure into eternity.

It would be well if we reminded our listeners, like Jesus reminds these listeners, that “οὐδεὶς ἄρ᾽ ἂφ' ὑμῶν – nobody can snatch from you.” It's a word used by Jesus last week, one that is often

used in the NT in connection with Satan wanting to get to us, and take us away, but nobody can take that Easter joy; no matter what happens temporally here, we know what eternity will bring.

Law/Gospel

You may note that some of these Law/Gospel applications seem to be repeats. Death and Resurrection, for example, will work with most any text, especially those for the Easter Season. Death and Resurrection are always of interest any time of the year. The greatest felt need of humans is that they will die. They spend their entire lives aware of this and trying to work out how it will be when death comes. Speak to that felt need of what happens after you die by proclaiming the Resurrection of Jesus and that of the Christian into eternal life.

Church Militant/Triumphant - Christians need to be reminded that this is not heaven. Life on this earth is will always involve conflict because of sin. The most important conflict is the one between God and Satan because that conflict involves the fight by Satan to get Christians into his kingdom. Satan, the World, and the Flesh will always be fighting against the life-giving Spirit for the eternal soul. The good news is that this conflict is only temporary, and we win, provided that we endure. (It=s ok to tell the Christians to endure.) One day, in “a little while,” the conflict will be over and we will join the Lord in triumphant bliss in heaven.

No Spirit/Spirit - This is another one of those sort of recurring themes in the Bible. Without the Holy Spirit there is no life. With the Holy Spirit there is life. In the NT the word *Apneuma* can refer to wind, breath, or the Holy Spirit (see John 3 et al). The commonality in these three usages is that in all three cases they give life. The function of the wind is to move stuff like oxygen, carbon monoxide, nitrogen, hot and cold, and moisture around the planet. No wind, no life. Breathing is one of the functions that keep our bodies alive. No breath, no life. The Holy Spirit, working in the Church, gives and sustains the Christian life. No Holy Spirit, no Christian life.

Unseen/Seen - When we can’t see something, we become uncomfortable. It=s why we=re scared of the dark, some more than others. It=s why the parent wants to “keep an eye” on the toddler. It=s why the followers of Jesus were probably pretty uncomfortable when Jesus was in the grave. Now they see Him and can begin to come to grips with what has happened, which they do at a maddeningly slow pace. Direct the hearer to things that she can see, like the host and the cup, and explain why we sing, with Simeon, the Nunc Dimitis right after the Sacrament. NB: You can=t *see* the Word of God.

Death/Resurrection - This Law/Gospel theme works any Sunday, which we see as a “minicelebration” of the Resurrection, and especially during the Easter Season.

Lamenting/Rejoicing - Sort of along the same lines as the Church Militant/Triumphant, life on this planet is not heaven. Heaven is heaven, and that will come later. This theme is about the expectation that the Christian has for this life. Often the Christian expects too much; no pain or

suffering. You are well aware of the continuance of Calvinism, the “Health and Wealth” Gospel being the latest rendition of it. The Christian must be able to practice delayed gratification, sacrifice now for the future “reward” of heaven. Heaven is going to be a lot of rejoicing, a good time. Don’t make heaven sound boring or like hard work or people will wonder why they should want to go there anyway. (Repressed memories of sermons during childhood surfacing...)

Earth/Heaven - See above. You can talk about paradise lost in Eden and paradise found, or restored, in heaven. If you’re going to quote Milton, make it a short and pithy quote.

Asking/Receiving - You ask for something because you don’t have it. When you receive the thing for which you asked, then you have it. Are you with me so far? Life on this earth is a time of want and need. Heaven is a time of neither. Often God will give us a foretaste of heaven by giving us things that we want and need even before we get to heaven; jobs, houses, children, and the Sacrament, for example.

Falsehood/Truth - Another recurring theme. To be caught in a false religion is worse than having no religion at all. Truth is a good thing, especially when it comes to God.

Labor/Life - Jesus gives us this great metaphor. Use it.

Humiliation/Glorification - This is the life of Jesus, and it is the life of those who follow Him. Wait for it, Christian!

Temporary/Eternal - Even when we have times of joy on this earth, they are only temporary. In heaven those joys will be multiplied infinity, and they will never end. Talk about enjoyable times, like the wedding reception, a sporting event, or a family vacation and about how you were sorry when that thing ended and it would have been nice it would be if that good time had never ended. My wife and I spent a week just sort of hanging out in northwestern Ireland a couple of years ago. We didn’t want to leave. Heaven is like that only better, and for eternity.

Hymns

Sing Easter hymns during the Easter Season

Sermon Titles

How Long is a Little While?

Of Childbirth and Christianity

Rev. Steven L. Anderson, Pastor
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