

05.26.2019
Rogate: Sixth Sunday of Easter
John 15:26-16:4a

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Adios.

Sayonara.

Auf wiedersehen.

Arrivederci.

Kwaheri.

Au revoir.

Good-bye.

No matter how you say it, it's never easy.

I don't know about you, but I usually hate goodbyes. As Shakespeare once said, "Parting is such sweet *sorrow*." I think Shakespeare was right—*sorrow's* the best way to describe parting ways.

Imagine how it must've been for the disciples. They'd just spent three whole years with Jesus, their rabbi. Forsaking all else to attend seminary with Him. He had unlocked for them the mysteries of the universe, He had shown them the meaning of life, nobody else could come close to making the kind of impact on them that He'd made. So, take *that* and combine it with the rollercoaster ride they'd just been on. Not only would they still be recovering from getting their hearts ripped out of their chests after suddenly watching Jesus die agonizingly on the cross. Not only would they still be processing the even more surprising shock of getting Him back again from the grave. But now, after forty days of getting used to being back together with Him again, they're being forced to say good-bye for good. After such a rollercoaster ride, it must've been just awful, absolutely heartrending to bid farewell to their teacher once and for all.

That's what faces them this coming Thursday. 40 days after Easter is May 30th—it's The Ascension of Our Lord. The day when Jesus goes up-up-and-away to His heavenly home, to take His seat at the right hand of God His Father. Of course, we'll celebrate it here next Sunday, June 2nd. But that's what's coming up for the disciples—they will be bidding farewell to Jesus forever this side of heaven. And no doubt, it's a hard good-bye.

I imagine we all know something about hard good-byes. I know that's why I don't like saying good-byes, because I've had years of experience saying hard ones. And maybe you have too. What are some of those difficult good-byes you've had to say? I'd like to take a moment this morning to talk about a few of those.

Maybe with these disciples left behind as Jesus ascends into heaven, you might as well be standing right there with them. Because something's happened that has made it feel like Jesus has flown the coop in your life. Now, I don't know what that is for you, but I know for a lot of people it can be a variety of things. It could be that you're praying and praying, talking to God, pouring out your heart to Him . . . but all you hear on the other end is a long painful silence. It could be that the joy of Jesus, the joy of His presence and His purpose in your life, used to be enough to make you do cartwheels . . . but that joy seems to have cooled off lately and you don't know where it went. Or it could be that maybe a little sin—a small, insignificant, little sin—that you knew was wrong, but you didn't think was *that* wrong, has grown and grown and taken up so much room in your heart, that it feels as if Jesus has been pushed out . . . and now there is no room left in there for Him. Like the disciples, does it feel like you've also said a difficult good-bye to your Lord?

Or maybe it's not so much saying good-bye to Jesus Himself as it is saying good-bye to one of His dearly beloved creatures. It was a friend . . . a sibling . . . a parent . . . a spouse . . . a child. And no matter what platitudes you hear, no matter what coping mechanisms you've tried, nothing helps—this is one wound that time just won't heal. Every day is a

constant reminder of the gaping hole in your life that that person used to fill. A constant reminder of their absence, and the distance that now stands between you and them. My friends, that's never an easy good-bye.

Or maybe it's not so much saying good-bye to someone else . . . as it is yourself. That is, saying good-bye to who you were, your life as you'd come to know it. For some, that means a major change in who you used to be and what you used to do—saying good-bye to a wellness you once knew or a lifestyle you once enjoyed. For others, that means something as drastic as saying good-bye even to their own lives. And in the end, that can be the hardest good-bye you ever have to say.

If you've ever had to say a difficult good-bye . . . if you ever have to say a good-bye like any of those—and you will—then this morning's Gospel text is for you! Here's Jesus, talking about His ascension, getting His disciples ready for when they have to go their separate ways. This portion of Scripture is aptly called His Farewell Discourse—it runs on for five whole chapters in John's Gospel. And just when Jesus is talking about not only their difficult good-byes but also the difficult days ahead for His disciples. Just when He mentions their expulsion from the synagogues, even the possibility of martyrdom hanging over their heads. Just when He's describing the same stuff we've been describing—saying good-bye not only to Him, but also each to other and even ourselves. In His own way, Jesus assures us that there's no such thing as good-bye—not really.

Maybe you remember how I quoted Shakespeare earlier? I mentioned that famous line from *Romeo and Juliet*—“Parting is such sweet sorrow.” At the time, I put the stress on the last word *sorrow*, but that's incorrect. Juliet, when she said it, would've put the stress on *sweet*—sorrow yes, but *sweet* sorrow. It could be sweet because she believed this wasn't really good-bye to Romeo, but that they would see each other again.

Well, in Jesus' Farewell Discourse, He tells us just how sweet our sorrow really is. Or, I guess to put it in the language of the Church, Jesus tells us just how joyous it is. Because when Jesus leaves and ascends into heaven, He's not really leaving at all. In fact, He promises, “But when the Helper comes whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, He will bear witness about me.” In other words, “I might be absent in body, guys, but I'm still with you in spirit—literally.”

So, if you're one of those who feels like Jesus is missing from your life, He's not! In fact, He can't be—it's impossible! Not when He just said He sends us the Holy Spirit. You see, when He does that, He's really giving us Himself. Think about the names Jesus gives the Holy Spirit today—He calls Him *Helper*, sometimes translated *Advocate*, even *the Spirit of truth*. Which means that He's Jesus' helper—the Holy Spirit helps Jesus to get to each one of us. The Spirit helps Jesus be everywhere with us at all times—something He couldn't do if He stayed down here on earth, confined to just one place. The Holy Spirit is like an extension of Jesus—His arms reaching down to us and pulling us close to Himself.

But then, He's also the Spirit of truth—in other words, He's the Spirit of Him who is the *Way*, and the *Truth*, and the *Life*, He is the Spirit of Christ. And so when we have the Holy Spirit, we have Christ's Spirit, the Spirit that bears Jesus' presence to us. Think about the Lord's Supper, for example—with His Word, the Spirit blows over this bread and wine, and delivers to us Christ's true body and blood according to that promise. And when He does, it's like Jesus never really left. So, if you've ever felt like you've said good-bye to Jesus—you haven't. Not if the Spirit has anything to do with it. In Word and Sacrament, the Spirit brings Jesus near to us.

And if you've ever lost a loved one in the faith, then there's no such thing as good-bye either. Because, Jesus says, “the Spirit of truth”—His Spirit—“will bear witness about me,” bear witness about Christ. What else is there for the Spirit to bear witness about Christ but His redemption on the cross and resurrection from the dead! Whoever believes in Jesus will live, even though they die. And whoever believes in Him will never die! Which can only mean that your dearly departed isn't gone, but just waiting for you. You will be together again forever—no more good-byes, only hellos. There's sorrow now, yes, but it can be sweet—joyous even—because of the eternal reunion ahead.

Then, when it comes to your day to say good-bye even to life itself, think again! Not when you have the Spirit of the risen Christ! Not when the very same Spirit that rushed into His lifeless body, is the same one that lives in yours! When you have that Spirit, you have life everlasting—life that won't quit! Death has been conquered, sin has been vanquished,

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not even the tomb can keep the dead from rising! What makes you think you'll be the exception? We don't just get Jesus back, but ourselves back too—better than ever! Good-byes aren't it for you, but you have endless hellos in your future! And that, my friends, is the sweetest—most joyous—sorrow.

Y'know, we really need to rethink this whole good-bye thing in the Christian Church. Such a word shouldn't really exist. Not after Easter! Not after the Holy Spirit gets a hold of us! Not after that!

I think the Cherokee tribe has it right. Apparently, in their language they deliberately don't have a word for good-bye. The closest thing they have is donadagohvi, which means "Until we meet again." For them, no farewell is forever because of the great hereafter. While that's fine for them, you and I have the Holy Spirit, we have Christ, we have eternal life. So, shouldn't we be the ones who purposely say "Until we meet again?"

Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed. Alleluia!