

John 16:5-11

“But now I am going away to him who sent me, and not one of you asks me, ‘Where are you going?’⁶ Yet because I have told you these things, sorrow has filled your heart.⁷ Nevertheless, I am telling you the truth: It is good for you that I go away. For if I do not go away, the Counselor will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you.⁸ When he comes, he will convict the world about sin, about righteousness, and about judgment:⁹ about sin, because they do not believe in me; ¹⁰ about righteousness, because I am going to the Father and you will no longer see me; ¹¹ about judgment, because the ruler of this world has been condemned.”

I Will Send the Counselor

I.

It had been a day packed with emotions—conflicting emotions, really. For that matter, the whole *week* had been that way. There had been some incredible highs, and there had been some deep lows. A person wants to start at the low point and build up to the high, but that isn’t the way it usually happens. It started with a high, and went through valleys and peaks along the way.

The week was Holy Week, though it wasn’t known by that title yet. It began with a Sunday processional for their Master, accompanied by glad shouts of Hosanna. By Tuesday it was clear that the religious establishment was trying to discredit Jesus. From Tuesday to Thursday Jesus began his final instructions to his disciples, beginning to tell them very specifically that he must be put to death. They experienced both highs and lows in his instruction to them.

All the while the disciples knew they would celebrate Passover with Jesus. They were looking forward to it. It was a high point on the Jewish calendar. Passover happened on a Thursday that year. A Thursday the Christian Church has dubbed Maundy Thursday.

While Maundy Thursday is an important day in the Church Year, only a small portion of that evening is part of our Maundy Thursday worship. Bits and pieces from that evening crop up all over in the Lectionary—the system of readings for the Church Year. One such snippet from that evening is today’s Gospel.

Well before the events of our text on that evening the disciples had experienced a low point. Judas had been exposed as a traitor and left their group. The lows continued as Jesus announced: “Dear children, I am going to be with you only a little longer... Where I am going, you cannot come” (John 13:33, EHV).

Jesus was their *life*. What did he mean, they could not go with him? He had stayed with them for three years; they were completely devoted to him and his cause. Peter asked: “Lord, where are you going?” (John 13:36, EHV). But the question wasn’t really a logical, rational question about where Jesus was going. Peter was concerned about the disciples: especially himself. Peter insisted he *would* go with Jesus, and Jesus announced that Peter would betray him. It was a pretty low moment for the evening.

But then...one of the highest of highs—Jesus instituted the Lord’s Supper in the midst of the Passover meal, showing what Passover had really been pointing to all along.

No sooner was the emotional high of the Lord’s Supper completed than Jesus started dishing out the emotional lows again. John chapters 14 and 15 begin Jesus’ Farewell Discourse to the disciples. As he speaks to them, the group begins walking with Jesus to the

Garden of Gethsemane, completely oblivious to what is yet to come, even though Jesus had been trying to prepare them.

II.

Emotions can be crippling. “Yet because I have told you these things, sorrow has filled your heart” (John 16:6, EHV). Grief had taken its toll. Grief overwhelmed them. The disciples were wrung out with emotions. They were so depressed they were unable to think rationally.

“But now I am going away to him who sent me, and not one of you asks me, ‘Where are you going?’” (John 16:5, EHV). Remember that we mentioned earlier that Peter *had* asked “Lord, where are you going?” But Jesus can read the heart; he knew the question wasn’t genuine. Not one of the eleven disciples who remained after Judas left their group earlier in the evening even had the wits to formulate any rational and logical questions about what was happening. None of them really understands what is going on.

“Nevertheless, I am telling you the truth: It is good for you that I go away” (John 16:7, EHV). How can *that* be good? How can it be *good* that Jesus goes away?

It happens all too often: grief overwhelms and burdens to such a degree that we fail to listen to what the Lord promises. We fail to trust in him. He has promised to be with us—to never leave us or forsake us. He has assured us of the greatest blessings mankind can possibly imagine—blessings that are, in fact, totally beyond our imagination.

But the griefs of the moment overwhelm. We are wrung out. We forget to trust. We forget to pray. We forget to have confidence in the only One who can give relief.

III.

“It is good for you that I go away.” Jesus came for a purpose. It was true, the disciples didn’t fully understand the purpose. Jesus had tried to tell them, but their ears weren’t ready to hear.

“Nevertheless, I am telling you the truth: It is good for you that I go away. For if I do not go away, the Counselor will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you” (John 16:7, EHV). Jesus’ mission was the salvation of the world. If he did not go away—go to the cross—the mission would be incomplete. The Counselor, the Holy Spirit, would not be able to bring saving faith to people if there were no gift of salvation to bring.

It really *was* better for them that Jesus would go away. It was better for the world.

“When he comes, he will convict the world about sin, about righteousness, and about judgment” (John 16:8, EHV). The word for “convict” in the Greek has as its first meaning “to bring to light” or “expose.” Here the meaning is “to convince” or “to point something out to someone.”

In the next verses, Jesus explains what the Holy Spirit, the Counselor, would point out in these three areas. “He will convict the world...⁹ about sin, because they do not believe in me” (John 16:8-9, EHV). Sin needs to be exposed. We all need to see and understand that we have a sin problem. Sometimes the turmoil of emotions and grief gets us so carried away we forget the greatest need we have. Those who do not yet know Jesus, or who have so far rejected him, need to see their sin, especially the sin of unbelief.

“He will convict the world...¹⁰ about righteousness, because I am going to the Father and you will no longer see me” (John 16:8, 10, EHV). The world’s concept of righteousness is something that can be achieved by the individual. Those things we *perceive* as being good are thought to be righteous. People tend to think that righteous deeds ought to be rewarded somehow. Knowing the sin the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, pointed out in verse 9 makes a person understand that the world’s version of righteousness is completely lacking. The

thing the Holy Spirit convicts the world of, or points out, in this verse, is that we need a different *kind* of righteousness—the righteousness Jesus won on the cross.

“He will convict the world...¹¹about judgment, because the ruler of this world has been condemned” (John 16:8, 11, EHV). The Devil, this world’s prince, as Luther called him, is really nothing. He has already been condemned by Jesus completing the work of salvation as he hung on the cross, once for all. Satan has no power. The Holy Spirit will convict the world, or point out to them, that judgment has already happened to the prince of this world. Without Jesus, the same fate awaits every human being.

IV.

“It is good for you that I go away. For if I do not go away, the Counselor will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you. ⁸When he comes, he will convict the world about sin, about righteousness, and about judgment” (John 16:7-8, EHV).

Later the disciples *would* understand the work Jesus had come to do. Pentecost was the great, visible, arrival of the Holy Spirit resting on them with power to fulfill his Great Commission: “Go and gather disciples from all nations” (Matthew 28:19, EHV). It wasn’t *their* work of “making” disciples, but the Holy Spirit working in them and through them to make the disciples.

The work continues.

Like the disciples on Maundy Thursday evening, we experience a turmoil of emotions. At times we are overcome with grief. It’s hard to go on.

Yet the same Lord Jesus has promised you and me the same Counselor, the same Holy Spirit, to guide us and be with us. Jesus himself has sent him to us. He has convinced you of your sin and of the righteousness that you have in Christ Jesus. Because of this, you will never face the judgment to which the world’s prince has been condemned.

It isn’t just for your *own* salvation that Jesus has sent you the Counselor, just as it wasn’t only for the eleven disciples that Jesus was sending the Counselor. The Counselor has been sent to you so that *you* will continue to be his witnesses to the ends of the earth.

Another word for Counselor is Helper. The Holy Spirit will be your helper as you go about this task. He has sent you the Counselor, who has made you a redeemed Child of God. The Counselor will be with you, through highs and lows, wherever you go. Trust in the Lord, who sent you the Counselor. Amen.