

Fifth Sunday of Easter – 2025

Acts 11:1-18

Revelation 21:1-7

John 16:12-22

One of our dear ladies sent me a brief prayer that she came across. See if you can relate. The prayer said: “Dear God, thank you for not allowing me to become who I would have been if it was left up to me.” God has intervened in our lives. That is Christian doctrine 101. Apart from Him intervening we would be careening toward hell. That also is Christian doctrine 101. Dear God, thank you for not allowing me to become who I would have been if it was left up to me. The prayer thanks God for making sure that it *wasn't* left up to us. I can relate.

*The Didache* is the oldest existing Christian document outside of the Bible itself. Didache means “teaching.” The longer title for the document is “*The Teaching of the Lord to the Gentiles by the Twelve Apostles*.” It is believed to have been written in the first century. The Didache begins with a simple statement: “There are two ways, one of life and one of death, and there is a great difference between the two ways.” Two ways – the way of life or the way of death, the way of faith or the way of unbelief, the way of heaven or the way of hell. Two ways – Christ or Satan, the Spirit or the flesh, truth or lies, light or darkness. There is a great difference between the two ways. Intuitively, you know this. You have seen it in vivid technicolor. You have lived it. Humility or pride; chastity or lust; contentment or greed; there are two ways and there is a great difference between the two ways. Dear God, thank you for not allowing me to become who I would have been if it was left up to me.

Jesus is consoling His beloved disciples. They are in a mental panic, a spiritual fog. The weight of the moment has scrambled their hearts, their minds. Fear, sorrow, worry – those phantoms are wreaking havoc on the disciples. They feel small, forlorn, vulnerable. And Jesus consoles them. “I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth” (John 16:12-13). The Spirit of truth; that’s a reference to the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity. The Holy Spirit will take what is Christ’s and make it known (John 16:14). Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6). The Spirit of truth takes Christ’s life and presents it to you, infuses you with His death and resurrection, infuses you with truth, with grace, with divine love. Dear God, thank you for not allowing me to become who I would have been if it was left up to me.

This journey, this life, this path that we are on – where are we going? How many of y’all are discovering *more* about life, *more* about love and sacrifice and beauty as we move closer to heaven? You’re maturing, aren’t you? Why is that? When Jesus promised the Holy Spirit to His uneasy disciples, this is what He said: “I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, who the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you” (John 14:16-17). In Greek, the word is παρακλητον. In English it is translated four ways that I know of. I will ask the Father and He will give you another *Helper* (1). All of these refer to the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth. I will ask the Father and He will give you another *Comforter* (2), another *Advocate* (3), another *Counselor* (4). All of these English translations of παρακλητον truly describe the Holy Spirit at work in your life. He is a Counselor, one who

guides and advises and helps us to see things aright. He is an Advocate, one who speaks to the Father in our defense. He is a Comforter, one who soothes, who brings peace to our soul by shining the light of Christ. The Holy Spirit is a Helper, one who assists, who provides support, especially in difficulty.

Dear God, thank you for not allowing me to become who I would have been if it was left up to me. The Holy Spirit has left His imprint on us. Jesus said that we know Him, know the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth, and so we do. Jesus said that the Holy Spirit dwells with us, and will be *in* us, and so He is! There are two ways, one of life and one of death, and the difference between the two is great. The Spirit of Truth leads us deeper into Christ – further up and further in. You are maturing because the Holy Spirit is at work, through God's Word, to lead you further up and further in. Jesus said: "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:32). Free! Free from what, pray tell? Free from the path of death? The path of death – who paved that road? The Lord Christ said that Satan has nothing to do with the truth. Big surprise! "[The devil] was a murderer from the beginning and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies" (John 8:44). There are two ways, one of life and one of death, and the difference between the two is great.

Do you know what intersects with lies? When lies take you captive, what is the product? The product is guilt and shame and the broken bonds of trust, the broken bonds of friendship, the broken bonds of honor. Christians will not traffic in lies. Christians will not allow the world to take us captive by its lies (Colossians 2:8). Here's one of the world's lies: we have autonomy; we can do as we desire. No! We don't have autonomy. We can't defy God's commands and pretend that we are on the path of life. I understand, we fail. No doubt about it, we fail. And we repent. Our lifestyle can't put the Ten Commandments in a corner. The Spirit of Truth won't allow us to put the Ten Commandments into a corner. He will call us to repent. Refusing to repent is to walk the way of death. Here's a little exercise. Pretend that you are blindfolded and you're holding a set of scales in your hand (like Lady Justice). In one weighing pan are the things that were just mentioned, the products of living by lies: guilt, shame, broken bonds of trust, broken bonds of friendship and honor (living in the shadows). In the other weighing pan are the things that intersect with truth: goodness, beauty, higher purpose, freedom, a clear conscience. Which way does the Spirit of Truth lead? Which way are you walking?

We are about to receive new members into our happy fellowship. I may be a romantic, but there's only one reason why people would join our congregation – because they want to go further up and further in, because they are highly interested in the Spirit of Truth leading them into all the truth, because they know that in this place the Holy Spirit takes what is Christ's and declares it to us. Here is where the Spirit of Truth is leading: He leads us to know that this is God's world, a gift to humanity. He created the heavens and the earth in six days by the power of His Word. The Spirit of truth leads us to know that we are fallen, yet loved, redeemed. We are the progeny of two historic individuals – Adam and Eve – Adam, who was created from the dust of the earth and Eve, who was created from one of Adam's ribs. Sin and death were unleashed by their rebellion and that is catastrophic. But God intervenes. God's love compels Him to intervene. He will not leave us to our own devices. God became man. That is the core of intervention. Conceived by the Holy Spirit, the Son of God became man. To deliver us from

sin and death, God became man. Further up and further in – we are growing, maturing, because Christ brings us further into Him.

Blood poured from His holy wounds. Atonement, forgiveness, and life poured from His holy wounds. The Lord Jesus was crucified to take away sin and it is so. In our place, the Son of God suffered God's wrath against sin. He died. Jesus Christ paid the price and we are forgiven. That truth intersects with beauty and goodness and love and grace and hope and joy. By the Word and Sacraments, that truth has invaded your soul (that reality continues to invade your soul). You know it. The Spirit of Truth is in you and you know it. The Spirit takes what is Christ's and makes it known to us. That makes us beautiful. Faith is beautiful. A Christian life is beautiful. A Christian is useful to others. You are useful to others as we travel the Way because you know the Lord Christ, who He is, what He has done. How blessed we are! What a joy it is to pray: Dear God, thank you for not allowing me to become who I would have been if it was left up to me. Until the day we die, and beyond, further up and further in.