

## The Day of Pentecost

May 15th, 2016

Gospel: John 14:23-31

Epistle: Acts 2:1-21

Lesson: Genesis 11:1-9

Psalm: Psalm 143

### CLB Commentary by Dr. Gaylan Mathiesen

John 14:23-31

Love's Eternal Fruit

The deep and loving fellowship that the believer has with God through Christ and His indwelling Holy Spirit manifests itself in several kinds of wonderful fruit! One of those fruits that Jesus mentioned is that we “keep” or “obey” His word (from tay-reh'-o, forms of which appear in both verse 21 and 23). We Lutherans tend to be very reluctant to speak of obedience to God's commands—it sounds like law. At times our zeal to avoid legalism even propels us to the other end of the spectrum, and we succumb to license or antinomianism. To illustrate, Desiderius Erasmus once said: “Lutherans seek two things only—wealth and wives. . .to them the gospel meant the right to live as they please.” (Erasmus, Letter of March 20, 1528 to W. Pirkheimer.) But Luther openly taught that obedience to God's Word comes with being a follower of Christ. Consequently, while Luther stressed justification apart from works, he was not shy about also teaching the necessity of good works in the believer: “If works do not follow, then Christ's suffering and death have done you no good: you are still in death, you belong to the devil; for you do no works, bear no fruits of faith. . . [But] Once salvation is yours, you are to do everything and be full of good works.” (E. M. Plass, ed., *What Luther Says*, vol. 2, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1972, p. 724). And elsewhere, “For as naturally as a tree bears fruit good works follow upon faith” (Plass, vol. 1, p. 475).

The critical issue for us is knowing what produces this obedience, and it is quite clear in our passage that this new obedience flows not from law, but from gospel-centered love. Jesus said, “Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them” (v. 23). Jesus is referring to the work of the Holy Spirit who indwells us, and this indwelling Spirit works obedience in us through the power of His cleansing Word. The Spirit “will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you” (v. 26). For a time, it was popular to ask the question, “What would Jesus do?” That question has misled some into a kind of works righteousness. But we get closer to its biblical meaning if we ask that question with this in mind: “What would Jesus love?” As Paul Louis Metzger put it, “Such trust and assurance do not lead

to inaction or a negative reaction to God's Word, but to a profound response of radical obedience...I am not speaking of a quid pro quo orientation in which we give in order to get from God. Rather, it involves each party engaging the other out of love and affection. From this standpoint, we respond to God's initiative of pursuing intimacy with us. God gives himself to us in the freedom of his love as an unmatched gift, and we respond to his love and grace in trusting, loving obedience and gratitude" (Metzger, *The Gospel of John: When Love Comes to Town*, IVP, 2010, pp.183-184).

Such deep fellowship with God also brings us the fruit of peace. This peace is not the mere absence of conflict, the absence of trouble. Rather it is a deep inner peace that results from the victory that Christ has already won over sin and death. It is a peace "not as the world gives," but a peace grounded in the fact that "This is my Father's world," and that we have assurance that one day we will see His reign fully exercised over it and implemented within it. Paul said it best: "for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose" (Phil. 2:13).

And finally, in addition to the fruit of joyful obedience and the peace that passes all understanding—there is our gospel witness to this lost world. We proclaim the gospel that breaks the power of sin (1 Jn. 3:8), that breaks down dividing walls and works true reconciliation with God and our neighbor (Eph. 2:14-19; 2 Cor. 5:18-20). Jesus Christ who saved us sends us into our lost and broken world (Jn. 20:21) with news of the only healing cure available to humanity: the saving Name of Christ (Acts 4:12). What an amazing gift is God's redeeming, and transforming love!