

The Fifth Sunday of Easter – 2022

Acts 11:1-18

Revelation 21:1-7

John 16:12-22

We are all familiar with leaders. Good or bad, we are all familiar with leaders. Children know what leaders are. Both the powerful and weak recognize leadership. Ancient civilizations and contemporary societies alike are littered with leaders of one sort or another. Armies and industry and sports teams and organized crime all know the importance of leadership. In the 1960's Bob Dylan told us: "Don't follow leaders; watch your parking meters" (Subterranean Homesick Blues). Commenting on the death of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, a fellow by the name of Walter Lippmann wrote this: "The final test of a leader is that he **leaves behind him in other men the conviction and the will to carry on.**" The church has a leader, a captain, and a guide. Your life has a helmsman and it is not Mr. Sulu.

Satan would lead us straight to the pit of hell; in a charming way, of course; in a sensible and amusing way, but straight to hell nonetheless. Satan is not our leader. The world would lead us to unbelief, to the abundant emptiness of self and rank paganism and all things vain – vain philosophy, vain religion, vain entertainment, vain education and vain politics. America is much further down that road than she was when I was a boy. The world is not our leader. Our own sinful flesh would lead us to the pig pen – the pigpen of self-indulgence. I have spent time there, in that filthy place, in the company of dark minded peers, those stuck in self-absorption, stuck in perpetual adolescence. Our sinful flesh with its unholy desires is not our leader. You have a leader of the highest order. You have a divine and triumphant captain in whose path we discover what it means to be human, what it means to be gifted with life. Jesus said: "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth" (John 16:13).

The Spirit of Truth is your leader. The Holy Spirit, the third person of the Holy Trinity, He is your leader and He leads you into all truth. Unlike Pontius Pilate (who sarcastically dismissed the value of truth) and others who intentionally blindfold themselves to reality, we know what truth is. Jesus said: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). The Holy Spirit leads us to Christ, to His feet, to His heart, to His mind, to His teaching, to His blood, to His pierced hands, to His cross, to His empty tomb, to the right hand of the Father, to Jesus' font and Jesus' altar – the Spirit always leads us to Christ because *that* is where truth is found. No pilot other than the Spirit leads us to Christ, and He leads to no other place than to the crucified and risen Messiah. You have a leader. He leads you into all truth. Is that where you wish to go? How far?

Every time you get on a plane these days one of the crew always reminds the passengers just where that plane is going so that no one who thinks that they are going to Cleveland ends up in Tallahassee. Okay, so this church is not a plane; it's an arc. But like a dutiful airline steward, let me be really clear – the arc of Christ the King Lutheran Church is sailing into the waters of all truth, the Holy Spirit is our captain and helmsman, and He doesn't take us part way. Here's an example. Jesus said: "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). The Spirit of Truth leads you to discover what that means. This is no mere churchly slogan. Nor is it intended to be a hook verse for stewardship campaigns. Nor is it simply a religious dictum that exists in a

spiritual vacuum or a hermetically sealed doctrinal box. Truth; it is more blessed to give than to receive is truth because it describes Christ. He has very lovingly told us: “I am among you as one who serves” (Luke 22:27). He is the blessed One (Romans 9:5). The posture of our Lord is one of giving and serving and the Spirit of Truth leads you into *His* life. The Spirit of Truth leads you to see how your life is connected to Christ, how He is alive in you, how you then begin to reflect His character.

Yes, it is better, more blessed, to give than to receive because it is our Lord who has shown us what it means to give, shown us how to give and why to give. It is the Spirit who leads you to *savor* this truth. No one else, no mere human vessel, no lofty thoughts of your own, but only the Holy Spirit, who works through the Word, leads you to this and many other truths – all of them based on Christ and His life. And what is more, the Spirit leads you to behave in a way that matches what you believe. The harmony that you know in your life, when your behavior matches what has been revealed to you about Christ, that harmony comes from the Holy Spirit acting to lead you.

Now, is that where you want to go? Will you follow the Holy Spirit into all truth? Or would you rather go to Cleveland? “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God” (Luke 9:62). Jesus said this in response to a man who wanted to moderate his devotion to Christ. When you plow a field, you are to look forward. If you look back, the furrow you make will be crooked and unusable. Sadly, our devotion to Christ is conditional, partial. We look back. We say that we want to be led into all truth when in reality a large part of us really wants to go to Cleveland. We hear the truth: “love God above all things and love your neighbor as yourself,” but as the Spirit of Truth leads us into that reality, as opportunities arise in our lives to put this truth into action, we take the helm into our hands and crank it toward Cleveland.

We hear the loud voice from the throne of God saying: “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God” (Revelation 21:3). We hear the voice, we know the reality, that God is with us, and we know that He is with us through His Word, we know that the Spirit of Truth leads us into this truth, that we are to read, mark, learn and inwardly digest His Word and instead we take the helm into our own hands and say, “no, that’s far enough,” and we crank the wheel around and set our sights on Cleveland. We neglect His Word. We don’t read the Bible. Are we more enamored with Cleveland than being led into all truth? It sounds silly when I say “Cleveland,” doesn’t it? It’s not silly. How could anyone ever value Cleveland higher than the Truth and Blessings and Life of Almighty God?

Our children manifested a marvelous quality just two weeks ago. They stood in front of y’all and recited the section on the Lord’s Supper in the Small Catechism. They learned the Truth by heart. They will be confirmed in less than a month’s time. Here’s what they know. They know that “the Word became flesh and made His dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). The Spirit of Truth will ever lead them, and you, ever deeper into the One who came to take you out of Cleveland and into the kingdom of His Father. On the cross, Jesus bore our flirtations, our adultery with Cleveland. By His suffering and death, the Lord Christ made all things new. The grief of the

disciples was turned to joy – He is risen. For a little while the disciples did not see their Lord and fear, doubt, and sorrow ruled the day, from Friday to Sunday morn. The pains of childbirth, as it were, pressed them sore. The world danced its little jig and sneered its cruel sneer but our King did not stay in His tomb.

He is alive and His Word is living and active. “Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades” (Revelation 1:18). There is no truth like this, and the Spirit of Truth is leading you there, into the depth of that wonder, into joy and confidence and peace and love and gratitude and into all that is holy. As a Christian, you know it. Intellectually, spiritually; you know it in your guts. He leads you to heaven, the land of truth and light and fulfillment and beauty. Christ is risen. Because He is risen you too shall rise. The Spirit of Truth has further into that joy to lead you. Truth and Heaven – they are not so different. He will not lead us part way.