

John 14:15-19 - 7th Sunday of Easter / Exaudi - 20.5.2007
Church of the Living Lord!

¹⁵ “If you love me, you will obey what I command. ¹⁶ And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counsellor to be with you forever; ¹⁷ the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. ¹⁸ I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. ¹⁹ Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. [NIV]

The period between Ascension and Pentecost is a time of waiting - a time during which the disciples were to wait for the Holy Spirit. Those first disciples did not know how long this time of waiting would be - that is different for us today.

The question is: can we still wait? Many may wonder: do we still need to wait? After all we have received the Holy Spirit - surely He does not leave us! Waiting for the Spirit of God - we are to wait for Him to guide us. Is that what we do in the church? Don't we often do exactly as we would in other spheres of our lives: we sit down, weigh up the pros and cons, see what we can do - and then make our decisions accordingly.

Yet, that is not how things ought to be in the church. The principle of passing decisions simply because a majority is in favour can't be how we deal with things, because we are

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We are the church in which it is about His direction, about doing what He has given us to do.

Of course there are things which we don't first have to run by the Holy Spirit - also in the congregation. There are the various practical issues, where it does not matter what brand of tea or coffee we use.

Yet, it is important that we are able to distinguish clearly between the things

which we can decide on our own and those in which we need to listen for the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and seek the answers He leads us to find. That is where we need to ask ourselves: are we still able to wait for His guidance, or are we too much in a hurry to get things done?

Church of the Living Lord! There is so many spheres where we are totally dependant on Him. That is why we need this reminder to wait for God's Spirit. To be on the look-out for His guidance and presence in our lives. We need to hear what He says about being the church of our Lord.

The first thing Christ mentions here is: *“If you love me, you will obey what I command.”*

We know that love is not something which can be measured - at least not the quantity in which we love somebody. The lack of love is something which can be observed, however. In this case it has to do with cases when we do not obey what Jesus has commanded!

“If you love me” - in the previous chapter in John Jesus demonstrated what love means. This love of which John 3:16 speaks - almost as the theme Jesus has for His task: God loved the world so much ... There can be no doubt of God's love for mankind - for us.

If we consider Jesus' call to obey His commands on this background, it should be abundantly clear that He does not expect anything of us by which we would 'lose out' on life. His commands were not given to rob us of really enjoying life to the full. In fact the purpose of these commands is that we should have life - above all the life which will never end. To this end He directed His disciples to 'teach' those they brought into the church 'to obey everything He had commanded'. The heart of His commands is the love of God and then also to love those people we are in contact with from day to day.

“If you love me” - then how you live will be influenced by this love. The decisions we make as a congregation and church will be influenced by His love for us, and our love for Him. As our love for the Lord grows, our decisions will not be influenced by the thought, 'What is best for us?', but we

will look to what He wants - and so truly be His church.

Loving the Lord and obeying His commands - that is not something we are able to do from one day to the next. The great danger is that we start making our own 'rules' which we can observe - and which often enough are used to measure whether others are worthy to be truly acknowledged as Christians. It is not about our rules, however, but about Christ's commands. That is why we need the Holy Spirit - this Counsellor who guides us to hearing the commandments of our Lord, who calls us and invites us to receive the love of Christ into our lives, so that we may respond to this love - and so truly be His church.

Above all we need Him,

the Spirit of Truth that He will lead us to realise the truth - about this world, about ourselves. We need Him to open our eyes to what really is important; to realise what will last, and what not. We need Him to guide us, so that we don't lose sight of the ultimate goal by doing any number of unimportant things, and thereby neglecting what really counts.

We need this Spirit of Truth, so that will not be deceived by those false values our world propagates. Especially where we have adapted His commandments to our liking, we are in danger of thinking that we are OK, and can just carry on as we are, when in fact things have gone badly wrong in our relationship with God and with people around us..

The Spirit of Truth must stand by us, because so often the answers to the questions we face , are not simply the answers of yesterday. Questions e.g. about the place of women in our church, questions about contacts with other Christians and how we can work together with them. It is not enough to say that this is how people before us responded to these things. We need to hear what this Spirit of Truth tells us for our time - how we are to apply the command of Christ now. At the same time we need to be careful to hear His voice, and not simply the voices of the world around us.

We need the Spirit of Truth to bring us back to what the church really is about:

that the concern of our risen and ascended Lord is that people should be saved and get the eternal life He died for. He did not die so that we, as His church, can live as we choose - and keep His Word to ourselves.

This Spirit has been promised to us - and at the same time we keep on looking for Him to come to us, to be our Counsellor and Helper. We need the presence of this Spirit to direct what we do, and how we do it. We need Him, to continually bring the presence of Christ into our midst - so that as we hear His Word we know the presence of God with us, and experience the depth of His love for us. We need this Spirit to open our eyes for the many around us who don't know Him - and who will be lost in eternity without His Word. We need His prompting not to withhold this Word from people around us, but to share out the saving message with open hands.

The Holy Spirit is with us - there is no doubt of that, but we need to learn it over and over to look to Him. So it is our prayer: Come holy Spirit, make us to be true church of our risen Lord: obeying His commands, and living by His presence with us. Come, and remove those things from our lives which separate us from you. Come, fill us with your truth and life.