

Grace and peace to you my friends and fellow sojourners from Jesus Christ, our risen Lord and Savior.

Our gospel reading today begins with the words: "After Jesus had spoken these words." Now I must admit that my first thought was – what words? Did you also have that thought? After all, it goes to context, right? Well let me set the stage first and then we will get to the real context. Chapter 12, five chapters before our reading today, Mary washes Jesus' feet and Jesus enters Jerusalem. Chapter 13, Jesus washes the disciples feet, serves the Eucharist, goes to the garden, is betrayed and denied. Chapters 14 to 17 are the farewell discourse. Chapter 14 two weeks ago was comfort and promise and last week was commandments and love. Then we just flat-out skip chapters 15 and 16 to get to chapter 17 - today. The last five verses of chapter 16 have a statement by the disciples and Jesus' response. They read: "The disciples said, "See, now You are speaking plainly and without figures of speech. Now we understand that You know all things and that You have no need for anyone to question You. Because of this, we believe that You came from God."" "Do you finally believe?" Jesus replied. "Look, an hour is coming and has already come when you will be scattered, each to his own home, and you will leave Me all alone. Yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me. I have told you these things so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take courage; I have overcome the world!" That my friends is what Jesus spoke before our reading today, words of comfort, promise, and terror. My original intent was to expand upon those words and the reading today but I believe God had other plans, which often happens in a variety of different ways.

The graphic on the screen was shared on Facebook this week by two of my pastor friends with some comments, at least that I saw. Naturally, I liked the graphic and the comments so I saved it. A day or so later, I received a question from a member of KLC showing this same graphic and asking if this is what I have been alluding to and saying at times and is it accurate? My answer was, yes this is exactly what I have been trying to say but that I cannot attest to its absolute accuracy. I know that there are scholars that spend a great deal of time looking at exactly these kinds of things. I, however, am not one of them so I cannot say that it is literally correct but my sense is that it is, at least, figuratively correct. In fact, this was one of seminary textbooks that I still use as a reference and it has many charts comparing the stories in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, which are also often known as the synoptic gospels, because they include many of the same stories, often in a similar sequence and in similar or sometimes even identical wording.

One these pastors; Pastor Julia Seymour in Big Timber, Montana which should not be confused with Big Sky, Montana where Steve and Billie Moksnes are; made this comment about the previous graphic: "And then there is John." The Synoptic Gospels stand in contrast to John, whose content is largely distinct. This idea was also pointed out by Karoline Lewis in her commentary on our gospel reading which is ultimately why I changed my target or theme for this homily.

But first, a side note that will probably have more meaning for those in the Adult Bible Study on the Book of Revelation by watching the video series by Professor Craig Koester. Professor Koester said in his commentary on this gospel reading that the lectionary places Jesus' prayer concerning glory at the end of the Easter season, but in

John's gospel the prayer occurs at the end of the last supper, so that it leads into the passion. In typical Koester fashion, keeping the literary context in mind is important because the word glory can have a fine sense of honor or brightness, yet the key to its role in John's gospel is that it has to do with the way God is made known to human beings, you know - us. After all, John's gospel assumes that people were created by God for relationship with God. There is that word relationship again.

Karoline Lewis points out that, in this case, our gospel comparison detail is that Jesus' prayer to the Father in the Gospel of John is not off alone somewhere with clutched hands praying on a big rock while the disciples nap. You know, the typical synoptic image of - in the garden. No, here it is sitting around a table, after a meal and an extended conversation, with the disciples hearing every word. First, what difference does it make to overhear someone pray for you? How do you hear the words in their prayer? Second, think of these two questions if Jesus is the one praying for you. What difference does that make and how do you hear those words? Third, remember that in the Gospel of John there is not, "teach us to pray" followed by the Lord's prayer. This is the Lord's Prayer according to John.

Are you cognizant of ever having seen a straight forward definition of "eternal life?" Well, guess what, Jesus gives us a straight forward definition of eternal life in verse 3: "And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent." That my friends is pretty dang simple - eternal life is to know God and Jesus. Let us not complicate it with commandments, laws, rules, and beliefs. The real question, the real test is simply do you know God and Jesus. And only you, God, and Jesus can answer that question - period.

This is the seventh and last Sunday of Easter before the festival of Pentecost which occurs next Sunday, so do not forget to wear red. Then we begin the approximately six months long, green season After Pentecost. I cannot think of anything more important for us here at KLC and for Christians and people around the world than Jesus' blessing of unity in the last verse, verse 11, of our gospel reading today, which says: "And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one." Unity, my friends, unity. Can we make that our focus? All for one, and one for all?

Finally, two similar quotes from Chad Bird. First: "Jesus' dying words were not 'make it worth it' but 'it is finished.' Our sins are finished. Our guilt is finished. Our unworthiness, the beast within us, the accusing demons - all our finished. There is therefore now no condemnation for those - for me, for you, for all of us unworthy ones - who are in Christ Jesus." And the second quote is: "The absolution is absolute. Forgiveness is final. God does not keep score. It really is finished." This, my friends, is what God has done for you.

Hear then the good news:

Jesus is no longer in the world. The incarnation is over.

Jesus has been resurrected and has ascended to God.

But we are still in the world and Jesus' works are now in our hands.

Jesus is counting on us to be God's presence in the wake of Jesus' absence.

Hans von Keler said: "*Prayer cannot replace any necessary action, however, prayer is an action that cannot be replaced by anything.*"

Today is not only the first day of the rest of your life, but also the first day of the rest of your eternal life.

Amen