

Easter 4 (2025)

I am sure you are familiar with movie trailers.

A trailer is a short, promotional video designed to generate excitement and interest in an upcoming feature film.

I don't know that I would call today's Gospel a movie trailer, but it does have that flavor. It does have affinities to one. Here we have Pentecost anticipated.

Jesus' words about the coming of a Comforter would certainly have generated excitement among the disciples if they had understood His words. But almost certainly they did not.

They would become clear only after His resurrection and indeed on the Day of Pentecost itself.

Regardless, Jesus' words about the coming of the Comforter should generate anticipation and excitement among us. They should as we make our liturgical approach to Pentecost.

Pentecost, after all, is the 'gasoline' that powers the Church. For example:

--The Holy Spirit opens people eyes and ears to their need for a Saviour and brings them to saving faith when the Gospel is announced. No one becomes a Christian on his own.

--The Holy Spirit brings the scriptures to life when they are read and preached.

--The Holy Spirit corrects believers when they go astray.

--The Holy Spirit encourages and prods Jesus' people to greater service.

--The Holy Spirit comforts and strengthens those who find themselves overwhelmed by the circumstances of life. We are never alone.

--The Holy Spirit takes Jesus of Nazareth out of the realm of an historical figure and makes Him our great contemporary . . . makes Him present at the Communion Table.

Let's go back now and take a closer look at today's Gospel. The conversation recorded here is part of our Lord's Upper Room discourse. It took place just prior to His arrest in the garden.

Before they go out, Jesus tells disciples that He is going away. Understandably, they are in a state of disbelief and panic.

After all, He had come to mean so much to them. The prospect of facing life without Him was a fate too fearful to contemplate.

But their Lord had an answer to their gloomy doubts and anxious fears. In a word, it was PENTECOST!

Instead of loss, the withdrawal of Jesus' physical presence would spell gain. **“It is expedient for you that I go away,”** He tells them. But how?

First – and I mentioned this in last week's sermon – His leaving . . . going to the Father . . . signaled that the work for which He had come had been accomplished.

It meant the prison house of death had been stormed and opened.

More than that, it meant that He was now enthroned in heaven and reigning. Allow me to flesh this thought out:

About 500 years before Jesus, the Old Testament prophet Daniel had been given a

vision in which he sees a human figure doing battle with the forces of evil down below. He scores a great victory.

As the vision continues, this one Daniel calls “Son of Man” goes to the Ancient of Day – God the Father – on the clouds of heaven and is enthroned as co-regent.

What Daniel saw in this vision was played out in real time 40 days after Easter at the Ascension. Jesus goes into a ‘cloud’ and returns to the Father. Ascension is the day of our Lord’s enthronement.

But there is more.

In the ancient world what would typically happen *after* a new king was enthroned was that he would give gifts to his people.

On Pentecost, this ancient pattern would be carried out on a cosmic scale. Jesus would send down a gift to His people.

That gift would be One like Himself – the Holy Spirit – the divine person we know as the third person of the Trinity.

Tying all this together, the first reason Jesus' going away was good news was that it signaled the completion of Jesus' mission.

The dark power that had held sway over the human race all the way back to Adam and Eve had been defeated. Daniel's vision had come true. Jesus was now reigning in heaven.

And if we know our scriptures, we know that God's rule will not end in heaven. It will come to our dimension as well.

We pray for this Sunday by Sunday, day by day, in the Lord's Prayer: **"Thy kingdom come on earth . . . as it is in heaven."**

As we look out on our world in this year of grace and sorrow 2025, evil may well appear to be winning.

In the words of the American poet Longfellow: "Hate is strong, and mocks the song / Of peace on earth, good will to men."

Yet, Jesus' people know otherwise. They know Jesus is already reigning and will appear a second time to put all wrongs to rights.

But there is a second reason Jesus' announcement that He is going away is good news.

It is because the Holy Spirit working through Jesus' people allows the work He did in one place to be done in many places. No doubt

this expansion is what Jesus has in mind when He says in John 14:12:

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father.”

And it is here you and I come into the picture. We are called to be Jesus’ hands, feet and voice in the post-Pentecost world.

Resolve to do your part. Feed the hungry, encourage the downcast, share the hope you have been given. Live the Good News.

But there is a third reason Jesus’ going away is expedient.

The Holy Spirit will lead the new Christian community into all truth, says Jesus.

And this is what happened following Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension. The Holy Spirit enabled chosen ones – the writers of the four Gospels -- to accurately record the key events in Jesus' life.

During the same century, the Holy Spirit enabled people like Paul in the Epistles to explain the meaning of these key events.

But the work of the Holy Spirit does not end with the writing of the New Testament. No, the same Spirit continues to illuminate the scriptures when they are read today.

He continues to convict and convince of sin and the need for doing an about turn.

He shows us what we should be about in our daily lives and gives us power for doing God's will, for being God's man or woman in the world.

I want to leave you with a little assignment.
It is this:

When you arrive at church on Sunday morning, before the service begins, take time to pray for your needs, the needs of those you love, the needs of the world, but after that, pray that the Holy Spirit will come with great power in the service that day.

Pray that the scripture will be opened to the intent that they may be obeyed.

Pray that the indifferent may be brought to faith; that the half-hearted might be stirred to fervant action; that all present will be given a clearer vision of their duty to God and man.

Pray for this church that it may be place of bold witness and Pentecostal power in a post-Christian culture. ///

In closing, we are on the road to Pentecost. May the 'trailer' given to us in today's Gospel build excitement and cause us to go into the battle of life with courage, conviction and confidence. ///

Come, Holy Spirit, come!