

**+ John 16:5-11 + You're (Not) on Your Own +
+ Cross of Christ Ev. Lutheran Church – Liverpool, NY + The Day of Pentecost + 4 June 2017 +**

Have you noticed it yet? Around the country, people are going out on their own. People do that all year long, but did you know that from mid-May to early July, the number of people moving out on their own increases significantly?

You see, around mid-May, school years start ending at colleges and universities and in school districts elsewhere in the country. Graduations take place every weekend through the end of June. A couple weeks ago, it was SU and Martin Luther College. Last weekend it was Cornell and the United States Military Academy at West Point. On top of all that, June through July is wedding season. Weddings take place every day of every weekend this summer. This time of year all over the country people are going out on their own.

There are new starts for individuals and couples and families. Graduates leave the comforts of home and dorm life to enter the workplace. Couples form families living on their own apart from mom and dad. Families change as grown children leave the nest. Even in our church body, graduates from Martin Luther College go off to teach at early childhood centers and Lutheran elementary and high schools, while graduates from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary go off to serve or start congregations. Yet they all have one thing in common. All of them go out on their own.

For some of us that wasn't too long ago. For others it's been a little longer, but no matter when or how it happened, there are always the same feelings. Going out on your own can be very exciting, but also very intimidating. Wouldn't it be easier to stay at home or at school where you have a protective bubble of family and friends around you? Of course! A lot of people try to do that, but the bubble doesn't last. School ends. Families change. Couples get married. Friends move away. Eventually we all have to go out on our own.

It's only fitting then for us to celebrate Pentecost this time of year. When the disciples came back to Jerusalem after Jesus had visibly ascended into heaven, they certainly seemed to be on their own. Jesus wasn't visibly with them, but before his suffering began 50+ days earlier, he had promised to send help—his Holy Spirit. Ten days after his ascension, Jesus fulfilled that promise and still does today. So today we go back to the Upper Room once more with Jesus' disciples to receive the assurance, **YOU'RE (NOT) ON YOUR OWN.**

The disciples were troubled. Jesus had told them earlier in the evening, ***“Children, I am with you a little while longer...Where I am going, you cannot come.”*** (John 13:33) This shook Jesus' disciples to the core. It was as if they heard Jesus, but didn't get it. Peter declared his undying loyalty to the Lord. Thomas expressed his frustration over not knowing where Jesus was going, but none of them actually tried to find out where or why. In fact, the idea that Jesus was leaving them emptied their anxious hearts of hope and filled them with worry and grief. They didn't want to be on their own. They wanted Jesus to stay with them. They wanted things to say the same, but that couldn't happen. Jesus explained, ***“But now I am going away to him who sent me, and not one of you asks me, ‘Where are you going?’ Yet, because I have spoken these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart. Nevertheless, I am telling you the truth. It is for your benefit that I go away, because if I don't go away the Helper will not come to you. If I go, I will send him to you.”***

It didn't make sense. Why did Jesus have to leave? It would be for their benefit? Yes, Jesus had to go out on his own, because his plan to save them could never be completed if he did not go out on his own. In a sense, Jesus was tearfully leaving his disciples to save them like a soldier who volunteers to leave his company besieged by an overwhelming force to bring them help even at risk of his own life. What was Jesus leaving to do? He was leaving his friends to bring them the help of forgiveness and life, of hope and deliverance at the cost of his own life. He had to leave them to save them.

So are we on our own? Sometimes it feels that way, doesn't it? It's tough being a believer in a world that hates the Savior and all who follow him. It's tough being in a congregation that takes God at his Word and refuses to compromise even though what's taught is offensive to those around us. It's tough being the only believer or one of only a few in your workplace or your school or among your friends. It's tough when temptation constantly attacks from the culture outside or your sinful nature tries to betray you from within. It's tough when you fall into selfish acts on the one side or self-centered attitudes on the other. It's tough when your memory of recent guilt or of sins long past still attacks your conscience. It's tough to be on your own.

Such thoughts can empty your heart of hope and fill you with grief, doubt, worry, or fear, maybe even frustration or self-righteousness. Yet at times like that, we need to hear the words of our Savior again. ***“...I am telling you the truth. It is for your benefit that I go away...”***

Jesus had to go out on his own to save us. The disciples couldn't go with him. Peter couldn't go with him. His mom couldn't go with him. None of us could go with him. He had to do it on his own. The prophet Isaiah knew this 700 years before when he wrote, **"Yet he himself bore our sicknesses, and he carried our pains; but we in turn regarded him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted. But he was pierced because of our rebellion, crushed because of our iniquities; punishment for our peace was on him, and we are healed by his wounds."** (Isaiah 53:4-6)

Did you notice who did all the work in those verses? It wasn't "me" or even "you." It was "him" who had to do it. He had to leave his heavenly throne and take on our humanity. He had to live a perfect life from infancy to adulthood. He had to suffer and innocently die on a cross. He had to be buried and he had to rise from the dead—all to save us so we would never be alone. In doing so, Jesus opened wide the doors of heaven for his gifts of forgiveness and hope, life and purpose, joy and peace and deliverance to flow out. Among all those gifts, he also sent his Holy Spirit to be our ever-present **"Helper."**

Sometimes we forget that. Sometimes we think we can be like Jesus and go it alone. The disciples thought that way, but what happened when they did? Judas betrayed Jesus to his enemies. He soon fell into despair and committed suicide. Peter foolishly swung his sword out in the darkness and cut the ear off a servant, which Jesus promptly healed. Then they all fled for their lives while a mob hauled Jesus away. Later Peter melted under a little pressure and publicly denied Jesus three times. The rest simply hid in fear behind locked doors. When they tried to go it alone, every disciple failed.

What results when we try to do the same, when we try to go out on our own? The landscape is littered with the ruins of countless churches and Christians who have tried. If you and I go out on our own as individuals, it becomes very tempting to center everything on me, myself, and I. In spite of the name Christian, the focus in a congregation quickly shifts away from Christ to anywhere else it shouldn't be—to the pastor, to the numbers in the congregation, to the impressive nature of the programs or the building, to the amount of money raised, and so on. Soon Christian will just be a name and ruin will follow. So what do we do? On our own, you and I can't do anything, but Jesus did.

"...If I don't go away the Helper will not come to you. If I go, I will send him to you." Friends, Jesus promised that help would be on the way. He gave his life to guarantee that promise to you and me and his Church. The same Jesus who went alone to save us does NOT leave us on our own!

Even though we don't see Jesus, he has sent and still sends his Holy Spirit. We heard all about it in Acts 2. Ten days after his Ascension, Jesus poured out his Holy Spirit on his people, on young and old, men and women. Soon people from all over the known world were hearing a message they had never heard before—**"the magnificent acts of God,"** (Acts 2:11) the good news of One who on his own saved them and was pouring out his abundant blessings.

Yes, we don't see Jesus, but he still sends his Holy Spirit! Unlike the first Pentecost, we don't see tongues of fire or hear the sound of a rushing wind or instantly speak in foreign languages, but Jesus sends his Holy Spirit through his Word and through water and bread and wine connected to that Word to create and strengthen faith in our hearts. Paul writes about that Word, **"Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ."** (Romans 10:17) As we proclaim that Word as the disciples did on the first Pentecost, the Holy Spirit creates new life in dead hearts as he did in ours.

Through the water and Word of baptism, we are reborn from being hostile enemies of God to beloved children. **"[God] saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life."** (Titus 3:5-7) We are renewed and reborn with the living hope of eternal life. We are reconciled with God as his beloved sons and daughters.

The Holy Spirit works through bread and wine as Christ gives us his body and blood in his Supper to forgive our sins and strengthen our faith. Through this good news heard and seen, tasted and touched, the Holy Spirit comes to us and remains with us. Even though you don't see Jesus, he doesn't leave you alone because he sends his Helper, his Holy Spirit to you.

Soon it will be time for us as individuals, as couples, as families to go out on our own from here once again, but remember! You're not on your own! Jesus went out on his own to give you help, to save you, to bring you to be with him in heaven forever. So with great joy we join our voices with believers of every age and sing, **"Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful people, and kindle in them the fire of your love."** Amen.