

St. Peter Lutheran Church - Modesto, CA

✠ Sixth Sunday of Easter ✠

May 13, 2007

Sermon by Pastor Johann Caauwe

“Jesus replied, “If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. ²⁴ He who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me.

²⁵ “All this I have spoken while still with you. ²⁶ But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. ²⁷ Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

²⁸ “You heard me say, ‘I am going away and I am coming back to you.’ If you loved me, you would be glad that I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I. ²⁹ I have told you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe.”

(John 14:23-29)

Last Sunday Pastor Janke asked us to imagine that Jesus showed up here at church on a Monday morning and wanted to talk. What if he came and patiently waited for an available moment in the day—but it never came? Well, what if I told that while he was waiting for Pastor Janke, he talked to me. Jesus talked to me and he told me all kinds of things. And what if I told you that our sermon this morning was based on what he told me, based on what Jesus said to me? What would you say? Would you listen? Would you immediately begin to question my mental health? Would you suspect that perhaps I made the whole thing up?

The truth is, as we see in the gospel for today, Jesus does still speak. But what does that mean, that Jesus speaks to us? How does he do that? Let’s look at that in this text, and let’s see that yes, Jesus our prophet does speak—even today. He speaks as a prophet from God the Father. He speaks through the Holy Spirit. And when he speaks in his Word, the triune God comes to us with his message of peace and forgiveness.

Jesus never actually called himself a prophet. Probably the closest thing to that was when Jesus said that he fulfilled the words of the prophet Isaiah and said, “**The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor.**” God anointed him to speak, just like the prophet Isaiah and Elijah, and Ezekiel, and Jeremiah. And Jesus spoke like a prophet. God told Jeremiah, “**You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you.**” And here in our text, Jesus says, “**These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me.**” Jesus spoke what God said, just like a prophet.

A prophet speaks what he is sent to say—and only what he is sent to say. A prophet doesn’t have the right to change the message. He can’t just make stuff up and say it comes from God. Those who do are called false prophets, like the ones to whom God said, “**I am against the**

prophets who wag their own tongues and yet declare, "The Lord declares." Jesus never did that.

It's pretty easy to see that Jesus acted just like a prophet—and a perfect prophet—who spoke only what was truly from God. But Jesus not only was a prophet, he is our prophet. The reason that Jesus can be our prophet even today is very simple: because it's Easter. Christ is risen. Jesus lives. His body is not lying decayed in a grave just like so many other prophets of long ago. Jesus lives, and he lives to be our prophet.

In a recent Bible study here at St. Peter, we spent some time talking about Mormons, the Latter-Day Saints. One of the things we noticed was that they have what they call a living prophet. The president of the church, they say, has the ability to receive revelations from God; and anything that he receives supersedes and may even overturn any previous revelation or scripture.

But their living prophet will die and another will take his place. We have a living prophet who lives forever, and because he is our true prophet, he only speaks from God, who never contradicts himself or changes his mind.

That is why Jesus can say, **"If anyone loves me, he will hold to my teaching (my word)."** The words that Jesus spoke to his disciples are the same ones he speaks today. They haven't changed; they won't change. So Jesus says, "Hold to them. Hear them. Obey them."

In the three years of his ministry on earth, Jesus had a lot of words with his disciples. Can you even imagine how wonderful that must have been? Just to sit and listen to Jesus. Can you imagine how they felt when they heard Jesus say, **"All this I have spoken while still with you."** Point is, I won't always be with you, but I'm talking with you now because I'm going away. Can you just imagine the sinking feeling in their stomachs to hear that their teacher was leaving them?

This Thursday we will be celebrating the Ascension of our Lord. On Thursday night, after we read the Gospel lesson and hear how Jesus disappeared from their sight, we will extinguish the Paschal candle. This candle, that has been burning all through the Easter season, is a symbol of the visible presence of the risen Christ. And so on Thursday we're going to snuff it out because we know that after the ascension, Jesus is no longer standing among us, visibly teaching us and preaching to us. He's gone. But listen, because he's not really done teaching us.

"But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you." Jesus promises that when he leaves, after he ascends, he will see to it that his work as our prophet continues. He did that on Pentecost, which we will celebrate two weeks from now, when the Holy Spirit came on the disciples and they were able to boldly speak the message about Jesus. He did that when some of those same disciples were inspired by the Holy Spirit to write down the words of Jesus into the Gospels. He did that when the Holy Spirit came to the apostles who went out to preach and to write down what Jesus taught them. Do you notice a trend? When God sends the Holy Spirit, when the Holy Spirit opens his mouth to speak, when he guides the pen that writes, what does he always say? He talks about Jesus—he teaches us what Jesus taught and he reminds us what Jesus said. And he still does that. Jesus, our prophet still speaks through the Holy Spirit.

There is a church body in the United States that has begun to use the phrase, “God is still speaking” as its motto. But their concept of God speaking seems to be that God isn’t necessarily saying the same thing he used to say. God might change his mind and we want to be welcoming and accepting of anyone who believes God says something different. But that’s not what Jesus says here. God is still speaking, but he still speaks through his Spirit who always points us to Jesus.

That’s what the Holy Spirit does in the Bible. He always points to Jesus. **“These words are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.”** When the Spirit points us to Jesus, he creates faith in our hearts to believe in him. He leads us to trust in Jesus and his word. He leads us to hold to his word and keep his word and hear his word.

He does that so that we, who gather here this morning, we who read his Word on the pages of the Bible, will hear exactly the same message that Jesus spoke to his disciples. This is Jesus’ message that he never wants us to forget: **“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”**

Jesus spoke these words on Maundy Thursday evening, in the upper room with his disciples. Just hours later, he would tell some of them, “Watch and pray” and they fell asleep. Just hours later, he would be arrested and every one of them would run away. Just hours later, one of them would betray him and one would deny him repeatedly. Jesus wanted them to remember this word when they were running away, afraid for their lives. Jesus wanted them to remember this word, when their lives were full of their own failure and their faults. And if it wasn’t so already, in a matter of hours their failings and faults were going to be all too real. But even though they were afraid for their lives, they didn’t die that night. The soldiers never came for them. Even when Peter was nailed for being one of Jesus’ disciples, he didn’t get nailed to the cross. Jesus did. And he died there; some of the disciples witnessed it. And then his lifeless body was taken down and placed in a tomb; some of them saw that, too. I wonder if these words were ringing in their ears, **“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”** They probably thought, “yeah, right. Peace. We failed him. We failed with our words; we failed with our actions. We failed him who was sent to us from God, who spoke to us from God. If we failed him, we failed God. He can’t be very happy with us. Peace?” I think we would also have to say along with the disciples, “No, not for me.”

But do you remember Easter? Do you remember when the disciples got together again Easter evening, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews? Do you remember how Jesus appeared to them? Do you remember what he said? **“Peace be with you.”** No wonder the disciples were overjoyed. **“Peace be with you,”** He said it again. Jesus made peace between them and God, and he gave it to them on Easter, he made their forgiveness certain by his resurrection from the dead.

Jesus lives to be your prophet. He lives to speak to you through his Spirit—that Spirit that works in his Word, who works in baptism, who works in his holy Supper. He lives to assure you that the word he spoke to his disciples is the word he speaks to you. **“Peace be with you.”** —no matter how grievous your sin, no matter how completely you’ve failed him and everyone around you, no matter how afraid you may be—**“Peace be with you. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”**

I don't think that the disciples were looking forward to Ascension Day. They didn't want Jesus to leave. And we can certainly understand that. But (you know what?), I'm looking forward to Thursday. I'm looking forward to hearing about Jesus going to his Father and I'm looking forward to smelling an extinguished candle in the middle of the service—because if Jesus went away, then Jesus is coming back, just as he said. If Jesus ascended into heaven, then he will certainly descend again from the clouds to take us to be with him. If Jesus is my ascended Lord, then Jesus is my prophet, our prophet. Then the Word he speaks, the baptism he gives, the meals he offers, is his way of coming to you and to me to give us peace—and how he will come to us until the day when he comes to take us all. And I'm looking forward to that as well. I'm looking forward to Thursday, to Ascension (and I hope you are too), because I'm looking forward to *our* ascension—to be with our Lord Jesus, the one who was dead, but behold, he is alive forever and ever, as our prophet, priest, and king. Amen.