

An Exhortation, an Amazing Promise and an Extraordinary Gift

Introduction:

Have you ever been told something that made no sense to you at all until later? Perhaps it was your parents, a school teacher or a friend who gave you information about something and then days, weeks, months or even years later, it all made sense.

Part of our Gospel reading today is a bit like that. As Jesus prepared for his death, he also prepared his Disciples for his departure. John Chapters 13 to 17 have been called *The Farewell Messages of Jesus*. It is clear from this section that at the time, the Disciples did not understand some of what Jesus was saying to them. In John 13:12 after Jesus had washed their feet, he actually asked them: *Do you understand what I have done for you?* In John 16:17-18 some of the Disciples said to one another: *What does he mean....we don't understand what he means.*

This is now the fifth Sunday after Easter. Next Sunday we remember Jesus' ascension and the following week we remember the coming of the Holy Spirit. The resurrected Jesus kept appearing to his followers over a period of six weeks before he ascended into Heaven. The Disciples must have thought deeply about everything that Jesus had said to them during the previous three years of his ministry and especially during the time leading up to his crucifixion. They were starting to understand things that they had previously not understood, such as the passage we have heard read today from John 14. Jesus didn't waste words. Here we find three things which were important to Jesus' first followers and should be important to Christians today:

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1. JESUS' EXHORTATION: IF YOU LOVE ME, OBEY ME!

It is easy to say that we love Jesus but is there any evidence for such love? Jesus repeats what he'd said earlier, such as in John 14:15-21: *If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching.* Obedience is one test of genuine love for God. It is in fact one test of whether a person is a genuine Christian or not. Jesus put the same idea in a negative form as well: *He who does not love me will not obey my teaching.*

To be a Christian involves accepting Jesus as our Saviour, our rescuer, the one who paid the penalty for our sin on the cross. But it also involves accepting Jesus as our Lord, our boss, our Master. To have Jesus as our Lord means that we live for him and obey him. As someone has said, *If Jesus is not Lord of all then he is not Lord at all!*

This is one excellent reason to be regularly reading the Bible. If we want to obey Jesus then we need to know what he says! If we want to improve our golf, our cooking or anything in life then we go to the experts, to books or DVDs or attend courses so that we can learn and grow in our particular interest. If we want to grow as a Christian and our obedience to our Lord then we need to go to the maker's manual!

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2. JESUS' AMAZING PROMISE:

Jesus made an extraordinary statement at this time about those who genuinely love Jesus: *My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.* Jesus was speaking about the coming of the Holy Spirit into the lives of all of those who repent of their sins and accept Jesus as their saviour, as we see from John 14:25-26. This Holy Spirit *will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.*

Jesus had taught his Disciples about many things before his death. Now, the Holy Spirit brought those things to their minds and they began to understand! Jesus' promise was being fulfilled. As we read the Bible and listen to sermons and read good Christian books, the same Holy Spirit will help us to understand. In conversation with others, He will bring to our minds parts of God's Word that would be helpful to mention.

3. AN EXTRAORDINARY GIFT:

While the Holy Spirit is certainly a great gift to every Christian, Jesus gave the Disciples another one as well. The Disciples were anxious about Jesus leaving them; they were afraid. Jesus gave them peace: *Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you.* When Jesus appeared to the frightened Disciples in the Upper Room after he had risen from the dead, John records that he said to them on at least two occasions: *Peace be with you!*

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How we need God's peace: in family life, in the life of our church, in our personal life, in our concerns over money, wayward family members, in times of drought, fire and flood; the loss of our job, as we age, as our memories are challenged, in times of illness and bereavement. There are so many circumstances in life which have the potential to cause us stress and anxiety. How we need God's peace!

Jesus said all of these things by way of preparation of the Disciples for the time when he would no longer be with them physically: *All this I have spoken while still with you. ...I have told you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe.* What a loving Saviour!

Conclusion:

Before Jesus was crucified, he prepared his Disciples by teaching them things that would be helpful when he was no longer with them: He exhorted them about obeying him.

He made the amazing promise of the coming of the Holy Spirit.

He gifted them peace for their troubled minds.

May God help us this week to live for Jesus as our Lord, made strong with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. And may we experience the peace of God every day and in every situation.