

Pastor Geoffrey R. Boyle
The Feast of Pentecost
27 May 2012
Grace Lutheran Church, Wichita
John 15:26-27; 16:4b-15

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit

Saying goodbye is never easy.
The more you love and cherish someone, the harder it is to let them go.

That's how it is for Rocky.
And that's how it is for Christ.

If we had it our way, we'd always have Rocky.
And so it was for the first disciples—
if they had it their way, they'd always have Jesus.

But for as much as we like Rocky,
as much as we cherish his work and his gifts and his joyful personality—
there's a difference between Jesus and Rocky.

When Jesus said,
“**But now I am going to Him who sent me**” (Jn 16:5),
“**sorrow filled** [the disciples] **hearts**” (16:6).

But Jesus rebukes the disciples for this sorrow.
“**Nevertheless,**” He says, “**I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away**” (16:7).

Jesus leaves His disciples in a very different way than Rocky is leaving us.

Rocky will just be down in Tulsa.
You'll find him fishing and singing, and without a doubt, bowling.
He'll be with Peggy again, the way it should be.
But he won't be here.

And that, is nothing like Christ.

These same thoughts come in when someone we love falls asleep in Christ.
We often hear words of comfort like,
“Grandma Schmidt will *always* be with us.”
Or, Rocky, you may even find yourself saying,
“I'm with you in Spirit.”
Or, “You're all in my heart.”

There is a sense that we are always together in our thoughts and minds and hearts—
but that's not how Jesus is with us.

Remember at the end of Matthew's Gospel, Jesus said,
“**All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me.**”

**Go therefore and make disciples of all nations,
baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy
Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.
And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age”** (Mt 28:18-20).

Jesus is *with us always*—
but not just *in Spirit*, or in my heart, or in my remembrance of Him.

In Spirit, heart, and mind, Rocky will always be with us—
but he, with his bowling shoes and fishing rod, will really be in Tulsa.

Jesus, however, is really with us here and now.
And even though He hasn't brought His fishing rod or bowling shoes,
our Lord has come to us with His gifts of grace, the forgiveness of our sins, and life
everlasting!

But these gifts would not and could not be yours, unless our Lord Jesus went to His Father.

This is the mystery of the Ascension.
It's the pivotal point between our Lord's resurrected presence those 40 days after Easter,
and His constant presence with us today.

Again, recall what Jesus said on that very first Easter morning to poor, weeping Mary:
“Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father” (Jn 20:17).

Our Lord tells Mary not to cling to Him, not to keep Him here.
There's something more to come.

When Jesus rose from the dead, He rose with a real body and a real soul.
He could be located and found and held on to.
And with this resurrected body He spent 40 days eating and drinking and teaching His disciples.

But then came the Ascension.
And while the disciples were looking at Christ,
“He was lifted up, and a cloud took Him out of their sight” (Acts 1:9).

The Ascension to the right hand of the Father, is far different than Rocky going to Tulsa.

Because while Rocky going to Tulsa means that he is there and not here—
or when he visits, here and not there—
the Ascension of Christ to the right hand of God,
means that Christ is wherever the right hand of God is located.

So where is this “right hand of God”?
I'll give you a clue—it's not in some distant place, far away, locked up in the clouds—
the way we typically picture heaven to be.

No, it's wherever our Lord's work of forgiveness is being administered.
 Wherever sins are forgiven,
 wherever the word of God is preached in truth and purity,
 wherever the body and blood are given for the forgiveness of sins.

If you want to know where Jesus is located,
 then you must look to the places He has promised to be *for you!*

And you can only know where He has promised to be by His Word,
 that is, by way of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus says in today's Gospel,
"But when the Helper comes,"
 (and the word Helper, is also translated Advocate or Paraclete elsewhere)
"whom I will send to you from the Father,
the Spirit of the truth, who proceeds from the Father,
He will bear witness about Me" (Jn 15:26).

Today is Pentecost, the high feast day of the Jews who traveled from all parts of the world back to Jerusalem to offer their sacrifices.

And on this day, the 50th day after the Resurrection,
 the Holy Spirit was given to the disciples.

It must've been quite an experience,
 loud rushing wind, tongues of fire,
 and simple Galileans speaking every language under the sun!

This was the coming of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of the truth, the Helper, *our Paraclete*.

And in typical Holy Spirit fashion, the event is *all about Christ*.
 The wind and fire and languages were all there for one purpose:
"We hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God" (Acts 2:11).

What are the mighty works of God?
 Well, there're all about Christ.
 His incarnation into the flesh,
 His suffering, persecution, cross, death, and burial,
 His resurrection and Ascension,
 and now His coming again by the Word, the Holy Spirit, for the forgiveness of sins.

The Holy Spirit bears witness about Christ.

As Jesus says,
"He will glorify Me, for He will take what is Mine and declare it to you.
All that the Father has is Mine; therefore I said that He will take what is Mine and
declare it to you" (Jn 16:14-15).

Because our Lord Jesus went to the Father,
 because of His Ascension to the right hand of God,
 He is now with us wherever the Spirit does His work with the Word.

That is, wherever the Gospel is preached, there is Christ.
 Wherever the promise of forgiveness is attached, Christ is there!
 And not just spiritually, or in our heart, or by our remembrance of Him—
 no, He's really, physically, tangibly, present.

And because of this Ascension, our Christ can be located, can be *really present*,
 both here on this altar, at this font, from this pulpit,
 and also, much to Rocky's benefit, also at the pulpit, altar, and font in Tulsa.

While we can't figure out a way to be in two places at once,
 our Lord's Ascension to the right hand of God and His giving the Holy Spirit at Pentecost,
 is precisely what allows Christ to be really present with His resurrected flesh,
 both here and Tulsa, and wherever the Gospel is proclaimed in all the world!

That promise brings joy to our sorrowful hearts.
 That promise lets us know that Christ has not left us,
 in fact, by His Ascension and the giving of the Spirit,
 He's more with us now than ever before!

This promise also brings joy to our sorrowful hearts over Rocky's leaving.

For we know wherever the Gospel is preached, wherever sins are forgiven for Christ's sake alone,
 there is Christ with His gifts.

And because of the Holy Spirit's work with this Word,
 you are all in Christ!

So when Rocky kneels before the altar of God and receives the body and blood of Christ in Tulsa,
 and when you kneel before this altar and receive the body and blood of Christ in Wichita,
 you are together with Christ and with each other,
 and it's all a wonderful foretaste of our own Ascension with Christ.

What goes for Christ, goes for you.
 You are His, and He is yours.
 You are forgiven.
 And this is the Spirit's work.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit