

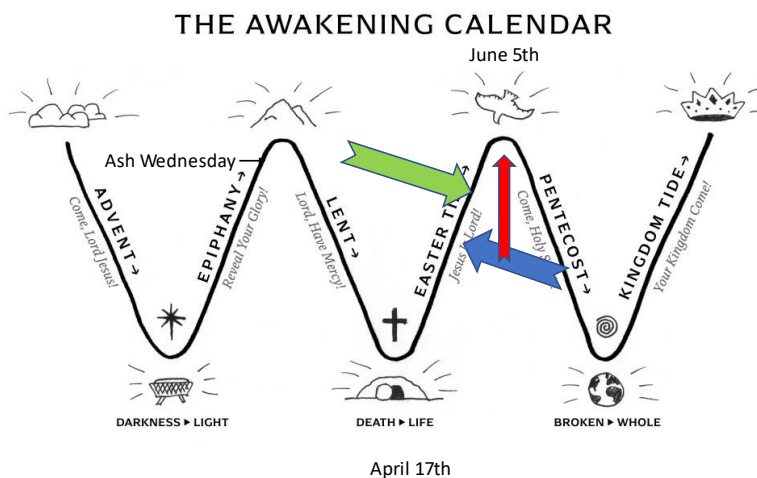
Sermon – May 22, 2022  
“Keep My Word”  
The Rev. John C. Wright

Text: John 14:23-29

*Pray with me: Father, let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. Come, Holy Spirit, come, visit, fill and enter the sharing of these words. Make them to be a blessing for your people that leads to life eternal and fruitful labor as we tarry on this mission field. Amen*

Christ is Risen! He is Risen indeed!

Let me catch us up as to our location on the Christian calendar. This is the sixth Sunday in Eastertide. As we move through the season of Eastertide, we are still looking at the significance of the resurrection of Jesus Christ and what the resurrection means to us today. Next week is Ascension Sunday, the time when we focus on Jesus’ ascension into heaven to sit at the right hand of God the Father. And then the following Sunday, June 5<sup>th</sup> is Pentecost. That will be the Sunday when we will celebrate the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the early church and ask the Holy Spirit to come into our life more fully. This week might be a good time to start looking for that bright red, orange, or yellow shirt or dress to wear on June 5<sup>th</sup> and, more importantly, to begin to pray, asking Jesus to open our hearts for a new experience of the Holy Spirit in our lives.



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As we heard the Scripture read this morning, we should realize that what each of us heard was different even though only one set of words was read. We, as those who hear the Word, encounter the Word, or even miss the Word, do so under the influence of many factors that impact what we hear. We may be distracted by some movement in the room or noise from outside and miss a few words as they are read. Some of the words we hear may bring forth memories that grab our attention and pull us from hearing the Word to a moment locked in our memories. As examples, we might recall another time when the Word was read and our hearts were stirred, we might wonder who the Advocate is in this text, we might wonder who Jesus is talking to when a text was first heard, or we might find ourselves wondering what Jesus means by a particular word, such as peace. As we are pulled from hearing to wondering, we cease to hear the text and our experience of hearing is different from our neighbor's. Some of us may wonder about the love of the Father. Maybe some of us get swept away into a moment when we have experienced the Holy Spirit and then find ourselves yearning for another similar experience. Some of us may hear words that we have never heard in the same manner before that open our hearts to a fresh encounter with Jesus through the Holy Spirit. We all hear the Word as it is read, yet within our minds, we experience the words in so many different and wonderful ways, some that are distracting and others that are life transforming.

Let me put this morning's Scripture reading into some context. This reading is a small part of Jesus' response to questions the disciples are asking him after he has told them he is going away and they cannot go with him. They are at a supper somewhere in Jerusalem, most likely the Last Supper. Judas has left the supper and gone to find those who will come, bind Jesus, and take him to the Romans. Jesus is giving his disciples the last instructions before he leaves. Jesus has begun this time of instruction by telling the disciples that he is going away and they cannot follow him now. Peter has asked the first question and declared that he will follow Jesus even to death, only to be told by Jesus that before the cock crows, he will have denied three times that he knows Jesus. Thomas has asked the second question about where Jesus is going and Jesus has responded with a description of who Jesus is, the way and the truth and the life. And the partial response from Jesus that we have just heard read this morning is part of Jesus' response to Philip who has asked Jesus to show the disciples the Father.

Jesus tells Philip and the disciples listening that those who love Jesus will keep Jesus' Word. Jesus' Word is the total of what Jesus has taught since he has been teaching, healing, and

walking with these disciples and, because of the references Jesus uses to the Old Testament, it includes what we find there as well. We might think of the Sermon on the Mount found in the other Gospels as the summary of Jesus' words. We would all do well to work to keep the words Jesus shares in that sermon. When we keep something, we often put it away so that it is not harmed or tarnished and it will always be available. Keeping Jesus' Word is different. When we seek to keep Jesus' Word, we first need to get the Word into our minds and on our hearts. We do this by hearing the Word, but hearing in the New Testament also implies that those who hear will live what they hear. We are not to come to church on Sunday morning and listen to Jesus' Word and then go home and go on about our lives as if nothing has occurred. We are to be those who hear Jesus' Word and live it out in the now of our lives in the places we go as we live in this community. So, we come together with others to begin to keep Jesus' Word.

We also need to keep Jesus' Word in our hearts. We need to work to grow the amount of Jesus' words that we have stored away in our minds so that they may be brought forth for us to apply as we seek to keep or live Jesus' Word in our lives. As we keep Jesus' Word, we are those who love Jesus. As we keep Jesus' Word, we are those who grow to love our neighbors as ourselves. And Jesus tells us, as we keep his Word, his Father will love us. We see again Jesus inviting us into the relationship that he has with his Father. As we keep Jesus' Word, we are invited into this loving relationship between the Father and the Son.

Let me also point out that in order for us to hear the Word, words must be spoken. Jesus has breathed these words and the disciples have heard them, but they will need help to recall Jesus' Word. Jesus promises his disciples that the Holy Spirit, the Advocate, or the Counselor, will come after he has left. Don't miss the connection with the coming of the Holy Spirit to the idea of breath. The Spirit is pneuma, breath. Jesus breathed the Word, and the Holy Spirit, breath, will be sent to teach us everything and remind us of all Jesus has said. Through the Holy Spirit, the writers of the Gospels have been reminded of Jesus' Word and inspired to write down those words that we also might hear the Word and keep it. In just a few more days at Pentecost, we will celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit and all that Jesus and the Father seek to allow to occur among believers through the Advocate. Whenever we engage Jesus' Word, we should seek to be open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit to alert us to passages, words, and corresponding actions that Jesus wants us to keep. The Word of Jesus is living Word, and if we will allow ourselves in groups or alone to engage the Holy Spirit when we hear the Scriptures, we also open

ourselves to be taught and reminded of all Jesus has breathed in his Word. Let me encourage us to join a Bible study and listen to each other and share with each other what we are reminded of and taught by the Holy Spirit as we hear the Word. This same Holy Spirit is also with us to remind us of Jesus' words, not so that we might write them down, but so that in those moments of need in our lives we may be reminded of Jesus' Word that we might keep it. When we face conflict, challenges, or doubts, we need to see those times as a time to ask the Holy Spirit to remind us of Jesus' Word for us that we are to keep in those difficult moments. Too often I find myself being reminded later of what I needed to recall and apply in the heat of my trying to react as a Christian to some conflict or difficult situation in my life. How I need the Holy Spirit to remind me of what Jesus said in those moments. How I need to learn to listen to the Advocate's guidance in life in the heat of the moment and not as an afterthought long after the challenge is past. How we all need to learn and to share with each other a growing dependency on the Holy Spirit. Many of us may have learned to count to ten before we respond to some challenge. How much more powerful would it be if we asked the Holy Spirit to remind us of what we have heard before we respond? Come, Holy Spirit, and remind us each of what Jesus has said that applies to the now of our lives.

In verse 27 we find the first occurrence of the word "peace" in John's Gospel. Jesus tells us this is not the peace that the world gives. This is not the peace symbol that was worn in the days of the Vietnam War or flashed around during riots. That was a peace that was the absence of conflict, yet was given in conflict. The world's peace is the lack of conflict. Many of us have been praying for months now for peace, the ending of conflict, in Ukraine. This is not the peace Jesus speaks to here and it is not the peace we are praying for in Ukraine. When we pray for peace, we are praying for the Prince of Peace to enter into the hearts of all involved in the Ukraine conflict and bring true peace. This goes beyond the ending of conflict. This is the beginning of the love of neighbor more than self. Jesus is speaking to a peace found in our hearts. Jesus' peace is a peace that remains even when we have conflict in the world. Jesus' peace is the peace that passes understanding. Jesus' peace is the peace that in the midst of persecutions Christians find to sustain them as they face the world's reaction to their love of others. Many of the ancient Christian writers speak to the peace of Jesus. Caesarius of Arles describes this peace as "Peace, indeed, is serenity of mind, tranquility of soul, simplicity of heart, the bond of love, the fellowship of charity. It removes hatred, settles wars, restrains wrath,

tramples on pride, loves the humble, pacifies the discordant and makes enemies agree. For it is pleasing to everyone. It does not seek what belongs to another or consider anything as its own. It teaches people to love because it does not know how to get angry, or to extol itself or become inflated with pride. It is meek and humble to everyone, possessing rest and tranquility within itself.”<sup>1</sup> That is peace, Jesus’ peace. Another ancient writer, Ambrose, describes this peace of Jesus by saying, “It is the part of those who have been perfected not to be easily influenced by worldly things or to be troubled with fear or tormented with suspicion or stunned with dread or distressed with pain. Rather, as if on a shore of total safety, they ought to calm their spirit, immovable as it is in the anchorage of faith against the rising waves and tempests of the world. Christ brought this support to the spirits of Christians when he brought an inner peace to the souls of those who had proved themselves, so that our heart should not be troubled or our spirit be distressed. . . . The fruit of peace is the absence of disturbance in the heart. In short, the life of the righteous person is calm.”<sup>2</sup> This is the peace of Jesus, heart peace. Many of us may also recall that Jesus’ peace is a fruit of the Spirit that Jesus will send, and when we are indwelt by the Spirit, this type of peace is present and is a witness to others. Jesus’ peace is also an aspect of the banding experience found in John Wesley’s small accountability groups. One of the questions asked of members is “How is it with your soul?” This question allows the band members to share what is disquieting or calming their soul and then allows another member of the band to pray over those things that stir the soul and remove the peace of the heart. It has been amazing to me to experience the peace I receive as those external and internal stresses that stir my soul are calmed and the peace of Christ returns to my heart. If we desire to experience Jesus’ peace, then we need a place where we can safely share the reasons our souls are stirred and find someone we trust who will extend Jesus’ love to us and who will pray for our souls to find the peace of Christ.

Jesus’ peace is also what we seek to pass to one another on a Communion Sunday morning when we pass the peace. This is not a time to welcome each other in Christian fellowship. Passing the peace is a time when we ask the Holy Spirit to remind us and convict us of any relationship we have with another in our congregation or outside that is broken and needs Jesus’ healing touch to restore and bring peace to that relationship. On a Sunday morning when we pass the peace, we should expect to be led to another person in our congregation where there is conflict, a broken or harmed relationship, and extend the peace of Jesus to that person, asking

for forgiveness and extending forgiveness so that whatever might be an issue between us is set aside and the love of Christ replaces it and we find again the peace of Jesus in our relationship with our brother or sister. If the person or persons the Holy Spirit brings to mind are not present, then we can come to the altar and ask Jesus to restore his peace to those broken relationships and to forgive us and restore us.

Let me make one final point about the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, that Jesus speaks to here. And yes, pastors make a lot of final points in their sermons. The Holy Spirit is not a physical presence but a spiritual presence. We are not physically marked or filled with the Holy Spirit, but the Holy Spirit resides within us, with our spirit, in our hearts, that we might be taught everything and reminded of all Jesus has said to us. Pentecost is coming soon. Are we ready to not only celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit but to open ourselves and allow our hearts to be touched anew by the Spirit that the Father sends in the name of Jesus? This week on May 24<sup>th</sup> we will mark the anniversary of John Wesley's Aldersgate experience, the place and time when John Wesley encountered the Holy Spirit. In John's own words, "I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation; and an assurance was given me that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death." John Wesley was not physically changed, but he was never the same from that moment on. Let us prepare our hearts and open them to the coming of the Holy Spirit that we also may find our hearts strangely warmed, assured of the forgiveness of our sins, and readied for ministry to the lost.

*Pray with me: Jesus, we desire to be those who love you by keeping your word. Jesus, open our hearts to the coming of the Holy Spirit and pour out upon us anew this Spirit that teaches and reminds so that we may have the peace you give to us. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit we pray, Amen.*

<sup>1</sup> Joel C. Elowsky; Thomas C. Oden. John 11-21: 4B (Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture) (p. 152). InterVarsity Press. Kindle Edition.

<sup>2</sup> Joel C. Elowsky; Thomas C. Oden. John 11-21: 4B (Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture) (p. 152). InterVarsity Press. Kindle Edition.