

The Church Of Jesus Christ.

Text: John 14:23-31

Suggested Hymns:

131, 125, 191, 283, 186

1) Its True Members

2) Its Undeceiving Marks

3) Its Firm Foundation

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is John 14:23–31, ²³ *Jesus answered and said to him, “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him. ²⁴ He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine but the Father’s who sent Me.*

²⁵ *“These things I have spoken to you while being present with you. ²⁶ But the [Comforter], the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you. ²⁷ Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.*

²⁸ *You have heard Me say to you, ‘I am going away and coming back to you.’ If you loved Me, you would rejoice because I said, ‘I am going to the Father,’ for My Father is greater than I. ²⁹ “And now I have told you before it comes, that when it does come to pass, you may believe. ³⁰ I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming, and he has nothing in Me. ³¹ But that the world may know that I love the Father, and as the Father gave Me commandment, so I do. (NKJV)*

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Our Gospel does not refer to the great historical fact of the day. It does not tell of the wonderful outpouring of the Holy Spirit. It goes a step further and tells of the fruit and the result of the great miracle of Pentecost.

The great miracle of Pentecost is narrated in the Epistle of the day.¹ The Lord Jesus had told His disciples, before His ascension into heaven, not to depart

from the city of Jerusalem, but to remain until they would receive the Holy Spirit. It was on a Sunday morning, the tenth day after His ascension, when they were all assembled in a certain building in Jerusalem.

This was a festival day for the children of Israel. It was the fiftieth day after the feast of the Passover, called in the Greek language “Pentecost,” meaning the fiftieth.

On this day Jerusalem was generally filled with throngs of people coming in from the provinces, to worship the Lord in the temple and to thank Him and offer sacrifice for the first fruits of the harvest. And what was done when the disciples of Christ were assembled for prayer on this day?

Suddenly there was a peculiar sound from heaven as if a cyclone was approaching. The noise was that of a rushing, mighty wind, which descended upon the place where the disciples were, and filled the house.

The people of Jerusalem must certainly have felt alarmed and therefore rushed out into the streets to find out what was the trouble.

They entered and, behold, not only was the building intact, but a sight greeted them such as they had never seen. There stood the disciples of Christ, the believers in Christ, both men and women, and upon the head of each of them was seen a living flame in the shape of tongues as of fire, fire burning and yet not consuming.

Amazement seized upon the people at what they saw; but still greater was their amazement at what they heard. These simple, uneducated men, filled with the Holy Spirit were preaching. They were proclaiming the great deeds of God.

And the greatest marvel was that they spoke languages which they had never learned, so that every foreigner could hear the wonderful works of God in his own language.

This, my friends, is the great historical fact of the day as recorded in the Epistle. But what was the immediate fruit and result of this fact? It was the establishment of the Christian Church.

On this day the first Christian congregation was formed in the city of Jerusalem, and not less than three thousand souls were added at once as a result of that great miracle.

On this Pentecost Sunday let us consider *The Church of Jesus Christ*. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST

Its True Members

According to the divine Word the entire human family is divided into two classes of people: children of the world and children of God. The children of the world are those who walk the broad way that leads to eternal destruction, and the children of God are those who walk the narrow way that leads to eternal life.

The one class is the world, and the other class is the Church of Jesus Christ; and there is no third class of people. You must either be a member of the Church of Jesus Christ or a member of the world. You must either be walking among those who are bound for eternal damnation, or among those who are making for eternal life.

But how may you know whether you are walking in the narrow path? How may you know whether you are a true member of the Church of Jesus Christ? Jesus says in our Gospel, "***If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him.***" The abode, the dwelling place of Jesus Christ is His Church.

And what does He say of those with whom He will make His home? What does He say of the members of His Church? By what is a person to know whether he is a true member? Jesus says, "***If anyone loves Me.***"

Note then, a person may be baptised in the name of Christ, he may be called a Christian, he may make an open profession of the true doctrine, he may be enrolled as a church member: and yet he may be in such a state that Jesus cannot make His home with him. He may not be a true member of the Church of Jesus Christ.

All is in vain, all is as nothing, if at the same time he does not love Jesus. It is his relation to Jesus that makes a person a true member of the church of Christ. But the love of Jesus cannot exist without faith in Him.

Love is the first fruit of faith. The total number of those who love Jesus is the total number of those who believe in Him. And these people are the Church of Christ. And of each of these Jesus says: "***he will keep My word.***" Note well:

Jesus does not merely say, He will hear my words, or read my words, or receive my words, but, keep my words.

Keep them, that is, retain them as what they are, and for what they are given, the word of truth, the word of life, the word of our salvation. For Christ's word is properly the Word of the Gospel, the saving truth whereby God offers us the benefits of Christ and works in us acceptance of it. Those who reject this Word in unbelief are not members of the Church of Christ.

But those who receive the Word of the Gospel and keep it, believe what it teaches, confide in its promises, follow its guidance, those, and those only who love Jesus, are the Church of Christ. And to emphasise this truth the Lord also presents it in a negative form, saying, “²⁴ ***He who does not love Me does not keep My words.***”

And if anyone would ask, ‘Why must I keep Christ's sayings in particular?’ Christ answers and says, “***and the word which you hear is not Mine but the Father's who sent Me.***”

The reason, then, why the keeping of Christ's words is of such paramount importance is because His words are not man's words, but God's words, the Father's words, the last of God's revelation to the sinful world, containing the fulfilment of all previous prophecies concerning the coming of the Saviour and the divine seal of His testimonies.

Who, then, are the true members of the Church of Jesus Christ? Those who love Him and keep His words. Let a person be ever so prominent a church member, if he does not love Jesus and keep His words, he is in the Church, but not of the Church; he is not a true member; he is a foreign element in the Church, as the tares among the wheat.

We call the entire assembly of those who are baptised in the name of the Triune God and profess the Christian faith “***the Church of Jesus Christ.***” But properly speaking, the Church is composed of those only who love Jesus and keep His words, with whom the Father and the Son have made their home, the true believers who have been regenerated by God's Holy Spirit and sanctified in Christ Jesus.

Consequently, the Church of Jesus Christ is an invisible institution. God alone knows who are its true members. Yet we are not to think that, since the

Church of Jesus Christ is an invisible Church and known to God only, it is immaterial to which community of Christians we belong, to which church or denomination, as long as we only make sure of it, that we are true members of Christ's Church.

For there are undeceiving marks of the Church, and where these marks are in a Christian community there is the invisible Church hidden, as it were, under the outward surface.

2. THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST

Its Undeceiving Marks

Jesus, in the words preceding our text, had told His disciples that He would soon leave them. Now when He told them in our text that with the Father He would come and make His home with them, they probably thought: *'How can He make His home with us when He is going to leave us? How can we in future times be His home, His Church?'*

And how does Jesus meet these thoughts of His disciples? He says, *“²⁵ “These things I have spoken to you while being present with you. ²⁶ But the [Comforter], the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.”*

So Jesus directs His disciples to the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, and assures them that the divine Spirit will be a most powerful agency to impart and explain to them His Word, and through them to keep His Word among men in the world, so that there would be a Church unto the end of days. Jesus declares that His words, His sayings, are the undeceiving marks of His Church.

Could it be otherwise? Did not Christ just say that His home, His Church, are those who love Him and keep His words? Since love is something which we cannot see, but the words of Christ are perceptible to our senses, must not the words of Christ be the true, infallible marks by which we may know whether the Church is to be found in a community of people or not?

The Word of Christ, His Gospel, is the power of God unto salvation. It is the incorruptible seed which has the divine promise² that it shall not return void, but shall accomplish that which He pleases, and shall prosper in the thing for which He sent it.

We may be sure that where the Word of Christ is preached, there also the Holy Spirit is efficaciously active and sinners are born again, endowed with faith and the fruits of faith, love of Christ, and hope of life everlasting. And thus it is that the words of Christ are the infallible marks of the Church of Christ.

If you get into an assembly where they do not accept Christ's Word as the Word of God, but as human traditions, then you are in a congregation of blasphemers, but not in the Church.

If you get into an assembly where the words of Christ are still accepted as the divine Word in their essential parts, but, at the same time, distorted and made to conform to the dictates of human reason, then you are in a corrupted church, in a church disseminating both truth and error: truth, producing true members of Christ's invisible Church, and error, leading people astray.

If you get into an assembly where the words of Christ are received and taught as they were spoken, where His Word is proclaimed in its purity and His sacraments are administered according to His institution, then you are in the true Church of Jesus Christ.

This is the glory of our dear Evangelical Lutheran Church. We know that we have the marks of Christ's true Church. We know that our doctrines are not human inferences or deductions from the Scriptures, but express statements of Christ.

We know that in matters of faith our Church neither pays any attention to traditions, nor to the objections of human reason, but simply asks, *What does Christ say?* and then abides by His express words.

Let us always abide by the letter and spirit of Christ's Word, and His Church shall be with us, and ours shall be the promise, *"If you [continue] in My word, you are My disciples indeed. ³² And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."*³

3. THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST

Its Firm Foundation

But the question is, *'Can we be sure of the Church of Jesus Christ? Can we be sure that all those precious promises will come true which Christ has given to*

His Church?’ The answer is, Yes, sure beyond question and doubt. For this Church also rests on a firm and solid foundation.

Jesus says, ²⁷ *Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.*

²⁸ *You have heard Me say to you, ‘I am going away and coming back to you.’ If you loved Me, you would rejoice because I said, ‘I am going to the Father,’ for My Father is greater than I.* ²⁹ *“And now I have told you before it comes, that when it does come to pass, you may believe.* ³⁰ *I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming, and he has nothing in Me.* ³¹ *But that the world may know that I love the Father, and as the Father gave Me commandment, so I do.*

What, then, is the firm and solid foundation of the Church and its glorious promises? What should make us sure and certain that it is necessary to be a member of Christ’s invisible Church? It is that in His Church, and in His Church alone, is salvation, and that He will fulfil all His promises given to His believers.

Christ’s going to the Father, His victorious combat with the ruler of this world, His obedience to the Father, or, in other words, His life, suffering, and death, or, in one word, His redemption, is the solid foundation.

In *Luther’s Small Catechism* we learn that Christ our Saviour “*At great cost He has saved and redeemed me, a lost and condemned person. He has freed me from sin, death, and the power of the devil - not with silver or gold, but with His holy and precious blood and His innocent suffering and death.*”

That is the immovable foundation upon which the Church of Christ is built. If Jesus Christ had not come into the world and suffered and died for the fallen human race, there never would have been such an institution as the Christian Church.

What a firm foundation! It is a foundation not made by the hands of mortal man, but by the immortal God; not built in time, but reaching back into eternity, into the council of the Triune God.

The Church's eternal foundation is, in the first place, the love of the Father, who decreed from eternity to have a Church among the fallen race and to send His Son into the world to seek and to save that which was lost.

The Church's foundation is, furthermore, the grace of the Son, who, in obedience to the Father, atoned for the sins of all people by the sacrifice of His life, that all who believe in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

The Church's foundation is, finally, the communion and power of the Holy Spirit, who, on this day, came down visibly upon the disciples of Christ and ever since has His work among people, calling them by the Gospel, enlightening them with His gifts, sanctifying and keeping them in the true faith; gathering them from all nations and tongues and peoples into one fold with one Shepherd, into one holy Christian Church, the communion of saints.

May the Lord, then, grant to us all, His grace that every one of us be a true member of the invisible Church of Jesus Christ, that we always bear in mind the true marks of His Church and not be deceived by false prophets, and that, finally, we neither doubt our Lord's promises, nor fear for the future of the Church, because it rests upon a foundation which the world and the devil and all the powers of hell cannot overthrow.

Let us conclude with the words of the hymnist,⁴

The Church's one foundation
Is Jesus Christ her Lord;
She is His new creation
By water and the Word:
From heaven He came and sought her
To be His holy bride;
With His own blood He bought her,
And for her life He died. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Acts 2:1-18

² Isaiah 55:11

³ John 8:31-32

⁴ Hymn 191