

We have finally reached the end of our sermon series “There and Back Again.” Just as Jesus went from His Heavenly Father back to Him Again, so too God wants to take us, His fallen creation from the Garden of Eden back to Paradise. The Holy Spirit gives us four provisions to accomplish this.

The first provision is perspective. The Holy Spirit grants us perspective to let us see that all our trials in this life pale in comparison to the glory of heaven waiting for us. The second provision is prayer. The Holy Spirit grants us the gift of prayer that we can talk to God whenever and wherever with concerns, thanksgivings and fears. The third provision is presence. On Ascension day, we discussed the fact that even though Jesus bodily ascended to heaven through the bread and wine of communion, Jesus is truly present even according to His human nature. Jesus has ascended to heaven to fill all things so we can say He is truly present.

Finally, we are going to talk about our last provision, peace. The Holy Spirit grants us peace so that we can work alongside other Christians getting “There and Back Again” to our heavenly goal. To accomplish this goal, we need to be one for the road. **PEACE WITH GOD FLOWING OUT TO OTHERS MAKES US ONE FOR THE ROAD.**

We are continuing on with the Upper Room Discourse and we are moving on to chapter 17 which is known as Jesus’ High Priestly Prayer wherein He prays for Himself, His disciples, and then—of all people—for us. Jesus prays, “**I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.**”

I. Peace with God makes you one for the road to heaven. Throughout this text Jesus is asking His Heavenly Father that we may be one just as they are one. Mankind was made for unity with God. We were made to be in communion with God just as the Lord walked with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden.

As we are united with God we become more like God. As we are one with Christ, we become more Christlike. What this means is that His patience, His love, His kindness, and His perfection become ours. But that’s not the state we find mankind. We’re in a state of sin. We chose to reject God and in place of those good attributes we get impatience, hatred, cruelty, and corruption. There can be no peace with God if we’re the ones at arms.

The Holy Spirit gives us the provision of peace. Jesus tells us earlier in the Upper Room Discourse, “**Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.**” This is a peace that comes not from us making peace with God, but from God making peace with us through His Son.

Jesus says, **“I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.”**” We have peace with God because Jesus showed us the Father’s love. He lived a perfect life and paid the penalty for our sins. We have peace because Jesus came to us and made Himself one with us through baptism and continues to unite Himself to us through the Lord’s Supper. Our peace flows from sins forgiven and that makes us one with God so we can journey on the road to heaven to be with Jesus where He is and behold His glory.

And from peace with God flows peace with others. II. Peace with other Christians makes us one for the road to heaven. The Peace the Holy Spirit gives us flows out to our fellow Christians. And through this peace of God, we are one for the road to heaven.

When Jesus talks about “they” and “them” in this text, He is talking about His Church. When I think of this passage, I can’t help but think of a children’s walking rope. You remember something like this? Perhaps your child or grandchild used it in preschool or daycare. The idea is that each child holds onto a loop and the teacher leads the line of children so they can get to their destination. This is most useful for crowded places like a museum.

The advantage of this rope is that the children are essentially one unit. If the teacher leads the children through a crowd, all of them are to follow. If a stranger tries to cut his way through the crowd, he’s going to trip on the rope.

The Church are those who are united by the Spirit and led by Christ to heaven. In this analogy, the Holy Spirit is the rope who has His hold on us through His Word and Sacraments, and Jesus is our teacher leading us through the crowd which has its own temptations and distractions. Christ as our leader is how we get there and back again to paradise.

And this is how the Church can be at peace—one with God and one with another—it is through the Word and Sacraments. We are united when the Holy Spirit blesses our reading, marking, and inwardly digesting of Holy Scripture. The Holy Spirit unites us when we join together to partake of Christ’s body and blood under bread and wine in the Sacrament of Holy Communion. The Holy Spirit unites us when we live out our baptisms by turning from sin and believing we are children of God purchased by Christ’s blood.

Of course, the reality is not that simple. What do preschoolers do? They let go of the rope and wander off to the butterfly exhibit. They bend over to pick a dandelion. They start yanking the rope and cause their classmates to fall over. Rarely are they one for the road. Seldom would you say a gaggle of preschoolers is peaceful. Can’t we say the same of the Christian Church?

We can say that the Church at large is a mess. Sometimes it’s due to our human sinfulness causing disagreements over relatively silly things like the color

of carpet. Sometimes new churches start for sinful reasons: because one party refused to turn from sin and would rather start a new congregation. Look at your own life and if you ever caused strife in the Church over something silly or because you refused to turn from sin, repent and receive forgiveness from Christ who wishes we all are one just as the Trinity is one.

But there are serious issues that warrant divisions in the Church at large. Just as it is a serious thing if a preschooler lets go of the walking rope to wander off into the crowd, there are many ways church bodies have wandered off into the crowd. Some have compromised Biblical teachings on sexuality, others on the teaching of being saved by grace alone. Still others want to make the Baptism and the Lord's Supper something we do for God rather than something God does for us.

It's sad there is disunity and strife in the Christian Church, but the way of peace is found in following the Teacher. All we can do is follow the teachings of the Bible and lovingly call out to the other Christians who have strayed from the way of true unity and peace with God. Of course, that doesn't mean LCMS Lutherans are the only ones going to heaven, but the point is that in as far as we compromise doctrine, we run the risk of abandoning God, losing peace, and forfeiting salvation.

But when the Holy Spirit has His way with us to bring unity with God and the Church, III. Peace makes us one for the road, and the world sees it. The Holy Spirit grants us this unity and peace so we can be one for the road to heaven, and so that others can see it and join us!

If you're in a museum you can see a preschool on a field trip a mile away. Why? Because they're all holding onto that rope and usually, they're all wearing the same t-shirt! It makes you wonder where they're all headed, maybe the museum is having a special program in one of the activity rooms. Maybe they know about a new exhibit that opens today. Have you ever wanted to follow them and see where they went?

Throughout Jesus' High Priestly Prayer, His concern is that the Church could be one "**...so that the world may believe that [the Father] has sent [Him].**" The Holy Spirit gives us the provision of peace not only for ourselves, but for others. That's God's rescue plan to get a fallen world that went from the Garden of Eden back to paradise.

This happens one soul at a time. There are extra loops on the rope that others can hold onto. If the line of children holding onto the rope had extra loops and you just grabbed onto one of them, the kids would look at you funny and the teacher would ask what you're doing. However, in Christ's Church, everyone is welcome. There's a loop for your neighbor next door. There's a loop for your cousin who left

the Church. There's a loop for your friend who claims she's spiritual but not religious.

The thing that will attract them is the peace, love, and unity that we receive from the Holy Spirit alone. The thing that will awaken them to faith is the Holy Spirit showing them the glory of who Jesus really is. Our congregation may be relatively small. It may have its little oddities, but it is the love and peace of Jesus that will warm others up to Christianity here in this place.

Four provisions: perspective, prayer, presence, and peace. "It's a dangerous business... going out your door." Yet the Holy Spirit gives us all that we need to get "there and back again" safely. Amen!