

St Paul's Lutheran Church (Latimer, IA)

Exaudi – May 12, 2024

John 15:26-16:4 – Hear Our Cry

Rev Peter Wagner

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and Christ our risen and ascended Lord! Amen.

On Thursday we celebrated the Ascension of our Lord, when Christ ascended into heaven and sat down at the right hand of the Father. Next Sunday will be Pentecost, when we celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit to the church. So today, between Ascension and Pentecost, we hear that Christ is ascended for our good, and we pray that he send us the Holy Spirit in the church.

When a baby wakes up and realizes that it's hungry and alone, it starts crying. But babies would not cry unless they had hope. Unless they knew someone was nearby to help. If there was no hope, babies would give up. But babies do cry because they do have hope. They expect to be heard. They expect help. They expect their mother to hear, because she's close by.

We're thankful to our mothers today, who heard our cries when we were children. Who answered us and comforted us and gave us whatever we needed. They are a picture of our God, who always hears us because he is close by.

Like babies, we cry to our God in prayer because we have hope. We expect him to hear us. And we know he hears us, because he is close by.

Close by. Not far out of reach and out of touch in heaven. Our God is with us here in the church, as he promised. The man sitting on the throne at the right hand of the Father hears you now. He intercedes for you. He knows everything you need, and he is glad to hear your prayers.

For our Lord and God is the man Jesus Christ, ascended to the Father's right hand to intercede for us. What a great comfort, for us as we wait here on earth. And a blessing, because he ascended to bridge the gap between God and man, heaven and earth. O Lord, you are not stranded up there like we are stuck down here. You are with us, close by, in the church to hear us. You suffered like us in every way imaginable, so you can sympathize with our weakness. Yet you endured it all without sin, so now you can speak to the Father and offer your blood on our behalf.

This is the meaning of Exaudi Sunday. Hear our cry. Hear us, Exaudi, Holy Lord. Hear our prayers when we cry to you.

We cry out because you commanded us, Lord Jesus, you commanded us to ask in prayer. "Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full." Call upon you in the day of trouble, and you will answer. So we are praying, heavenly Father. Praying because we expect you to hear. Praying in the name of your dear Son, because he is close by. And he is also at your right hand; he always has your ear.

But in your sight, heavenly Father, we are mere children. Babies really. And not in a very good way, not like when Jesus praised the faith of a little child. Our faith is weak. And our efforts to please you are as feeble as a newborn trying to wiggle its way to mom. Our prayers are clumsier and weaker even than a baby crying for attention. At least babies put all their energy into their prayers, but ours are so halfhearted.

So teach us to pray fervently. Teach us to pray for all the spiritual blessings you promised in Ezekiel 36. You said, "I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleanness, and from all your idols I will cleanse you... And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes."

When we pray for things like these, O God, we know you will hear. We know you will do it. You are glad to keep your promise and send the Holy Spirit. "I will give you a new heart," you said, "and a new spirit." The Holy Spirit. "And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my just decrees."

So send him to us, in the church. Use your Spirit to draw us out from the nations of the world, to make us a holy nation in the church. Send him to sprinkle clean water on us in baptism, to wash the filth of our uncleanness. Send him to tear the idols from our hearts, the vanities we foolishly chase. And send him to bring us to faith in the church, to teach us the statutes of God.

This is the aim of the Holy Spirit's work: our sanctification. That we live holy and God-pleasing lives. So

in the Spirit, through Jesus the Son, we pray to you, Father, for everything you commanded, for the grace to live holy, sanctified lives.

Since the end of all things is at hand, as we heard in the epistle, we pray for self-control to endure. Remove our impatient, hard and bitter hearts and replace them with soft, repentant hearts. Then we will be able to pray in faith, not for our will, but that your will be done. And above all, O God, send your Spirit to take away our hearts of stone and give us hearts of flesh, humble hearts toward you and our neighbor. Make us love one another, forgiving and overlooking each other's faults, since love covers a multitude of sins.

And as you loved us and gave up your Son for our redemption, give us opportunities, O Lord, to love our neighbors. Open our eyes to see their needs. Teach us hospitality, as you commanded, hospitality without grumbling. And since you've blessed us with so many gifts in the church through your Spirit, since you've given us many callings and abilities, put those gifts to use in us. Make us good stewards of your gifts. Open the mouths of all who are called to preach to speak the oracles of God. Open the hands of us all to cheerful generosity. And open our ears to hear your word and respond with praise and thanksgiving.

When we pray for things like these, Almighty God, we know you will hear, we know you will do it. You will give us the Spirit, so we learn to love one another, to cover each other's sins, to show hospitality and serve one another according to your will.

But our prayer is not done yet, gracious God. There is more. Hear us when we cry to you in the midst of our trials. Save us and keep us from falling away. Teach us to receive the hardships you send with thanksgiving. For all of it is for our good. Give us your Spirit, so we learn not to be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon us to test us, as though something strange were happening. But teach us to rejoice insofar as we share in Christ's sufferings, that we may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. For if we are insulted for the name of Christ, we are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon us.

When these things take place, O Lord, when we pray for help in time of need, we know for sure that you will hear. We know you will answer. You will give us the Comforter, to uphold us through our trials, so we come through unscathed. The hour is coming when whoever kills us will think he is offering you a service. But you will keep us firm, you will not let us fall away.

This, then, is our first and greatest prayer. Send us the Holy Spirit, as you promised. You said, "When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me." So send him now. Give us this Helper, this Spirit, to turn our eyes always back to our crucified, risen and ascended Savior, the faithful advocate on high, who is close by to hear us.

Send your Spirit, heavenly Father, the Spirit who bears witness to Christ, so we may learn to bear witness also. When we pray for this, we know for sure you will hear; we know you will send him. Then he will take everything that belongs to Jesus and give it to us. He will give us the word and sacraments of Jesus, solid means of grace, so we never fall away.

This is all summarized in our opening hymn, "Since we have a priest who suffered, Knowing weakness, tears and pain, Who like us was tried and temped, Unlike us, without a stain, Since He shared our lowly place, Let us boldly seek His grace."

This is a paraphrase of Hebrews 4. "Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need." Draw near to his throne, here in the church, at this altar. Not far above, not out of reach, but here with us. Approach this mighty throne. Receive his merciful body and blood. Cry to him in prayer. Confidently seek his grace in all your need.

Oh what a privilege to pray to our God with confidence. What a comfort that the man on the throne knows our weaknesses, that he helps and intercedes for the children he bought with his blood. He has pity on us. For he knows our frame, he remembers that we are dust. To him be glory forever! Amen.

Now may the peace of God which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, unto life everlasting. Amen.