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## The Revised Common Lectionary Notes

May 7, 14, 21, 25, 28, and June 4

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### May 7, The Fourth Sunday of Easter: John 10:1–10

The contents of this section are a continuation of Jesus' attack on the Pharisees that surfaces in ch. 9.

In 10:11, Jesus refers to Himself as *the* Good Shepherd (*the*, not *a*). The term *shepherd* denotes *king* and *kingship*. Here, note the references to *shepherd* in Psalm 23, Jeremiah 23, and Ezekiel 34, where the term *shepherd* means *king*. The language used in these passages surfaces in John 10:1–10. The following cultural comments are helpful here.

In today's western world, those dealing with sheep walk behind the flock, as do also the sheep dogs that they use. However, in the world of the Middle East, the shepherd walks ahead of the flock and blows on a whistle or makes a noise that the sheep recognize, and then follow the one who blows the whistle or makes that noise.

When two or three shepherds decide that they would like to spend some time talking with each other, their respective flocks mix together. But no problem! When the shepherds go their own way once again, they simply make the traditional call or sound, and the flock divides, with each sheep following its own shepherd.

A sheepfold is usually a circular area surrounded by a stone wall, open to the sky, with an opening or gate set in the wall. Someone can be stationed at the gate (a *gatekeeper*), or the shepherd himself (after leading his sheep into the sheepfold) rests/sleeps across the gate opening.

John 10:1-6 contains a figure of speech about the sheepfold; vv. 7-18 contain four "I am" sayings that throw light on the meaning of vv. 1-6. Jesus addresses the Pharisees' situation indirectly through the figures of speech embedded in this chapter.

**10:1–3a:** Jesus defines who is and who is not the shepherd by defining who has access to the sheepfold. The shepherd's identity is endorsed when the gatekeeper grants him access to the sheep.

**10:3b–5:** These verses focus on the positive relationship between a shepherd and his sheep, and the negative relationship between a stranger and the sheep.

**10:6–10:** The figure of speech Jesus draws on is found in Ezekiel 34:1–10 and 34:11–31. Ezekiel referred to the kings of Judah as bad shepherds who endanger the flock, and God has to intervene and tend His sheep until they can be entrusted to David’s care. Although Jesus’ words point to the Pharisees as those who endanger the flock, they do not see this. They think of themselves as shepherds, not as a thief or a stranger. However, Jesus is the *gate* who provides His flock with life and access to His Father. And Jesus calls His sheep not merely to *believe* in Him, but also to *follow* Him. The implications are big indeed, for Jesus walked the way of a Servant-without-limit throughout His ministry.

The following statement points to Jesus’ call to believers to follow Him, and therefore deserves much thought. It was written by Rev. Dr. Ernest Campbell, who once served as pastor of Riverside Church in New York City.

“It began innocently enough—a friend recommending a book by Jon Sobrino. The Salvadoran Jesuit blew most of my ducks out of the water. He threw a hat down on my scrabble board and messed up many of my combinations. He forced me to contend for the ground that I had claimed. The question that Jon Sobrino put to me I must share with you: ‘Are you *following Jesus*, or *believing in Christ*?’

“Plunge into the Gospels anywhere and you will likely find Jesus asking someone to follow. The Greek verb is *akoloutheo*. It represents a dominant motif. Why, then, do we hear so little about following Jesus in the church today? I’ve been in, with, and around the church for more than 50 years. Not when I was in the communicants’ class; not when I joined the church; not when I became a candidate for the ministry; not when I was ordained; and never in any of my services of installation. Always the questions have dealt with belief. ‘Do you believe in God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit? Do you believe in the veracity of the Scriptures and the Westminster Confession? Do you believe in the unity and purity of the church?’

“Do you believe in Christ? It isn’t hard to answer that. What is wanted is an affirmative response to treasured propositions about the Second Person of the Trinity. But when someone asks, ‘Are you *following Jesus*?’ this can get to be expensive. This question has to do with my lifestyle, my attitudes, my values, my surrender.

“If I’m following Jesus, why am I such a good insurance risk? If I’m following Jesus, why, when I have done my giving, have I so much left over for myself? If I’m following Jesus, why do my closets bulge when so many are unclothed? If I’m following Jesus, why do I have so many friends among the affluent and so few among the poor? If I’m following Jesus, why do I have so much privacy in a world that is starved for love? If I’m following Jesus, why am I tempted to overeat in a world in which so many beg for bread? If I’m following Jesus, why am I getting on so well in a world that marked Him out for death?

“Are you following Jesus or believing in Christ? Unfair, you say; the two are inseparable. Theoretically, yes, but pragmatically, no. We separate them all the time. If we must, let us err on the side of *following*, for *one can believe without following, but one cannot follow without believing*.

## May 14, The Fifth Sunday of Easter: John 14:1–14

John 14:1c–16:33 is often referred to as Jesus' Farewell Discourse. We find similar discourses in Genesis 49, Deuteronomy, Joshua 24, and 1 Chronicles 28–29. None of the first three Gospels contains such a lengthy discourse. In these chapters, Jesus explains the significance of His death and departure before these events take place. The hope is that when these events do take place, the disciples will not despair but will interpret them through the eyes of faith. Surfacing throughout the discourse are assurances of Jesus' continuing presence, comments about why He must return to His Father, the promise of the coming of the Holy Spirit, the future of His community, and a call to focus on living a life of servanthood.

In the preceding chapter (ch. 13), Jesus celebrates a meal with His disciples and washes their feet. Although John does not make reference to Jesus praying in a garden, he does include what is referred to as Jesus' High Priestly Prayer in ch. 17.

**14:1:** In John 14, Jesus speaks of His departure and return. Vv. 1–14 consist of a dialogue between Jesus and His disciples. Note the bookend statements that Jesus makes in 14:1 and 14:27: "Do not let your hearts be troubled."

**14:2–3:** Although these verses contain "departure" language, Jesus' ascension did not mean a withdrawal of His presence. It had to do with a *transformation* of His presence in that Jesus continues to dwell among His people invisibly. Vs. 3 contains a rare Johannine reference to Jesus' *parousia*. Indeed, the invisible but ever-present Jesus will eventually reappear visibly.

**14:4–7:** Thomas seems to have interpreted Jesus' reference to "the way" in terms of a geographical road-map. Jesus' "I am" statement in 14:6 points to something much more profound; He refers to Himself as the point of access to life with God. Note again Jesus' reference to Himself as "the gate" in ch. 10. John 14:6 expresses the central theological conviction of John's Gospel: Jesus is the tangible presence of God in the world (cf. 1:1-18). Jesus' words point to the intimacy of the relationship between God the Father and Jesus His Son. To embrace Jesus in faith makes possible a new experience of God as Father.

**14:8–11:** Philip's request points to the fact that the disciples do not understand Jesus' very presence in the world as the incarnate Word and that all He says and does reveals God to them.

**14:12–14:** In this section, Jesus focuses on the works that the disciples will do after His "hour" (cross), resurrection, and ascension. After they understand the full story of God's love for humanity, they will be empowered as never before to tell and live that story. They will devote themselves to making the invisible presence of Jesus visible in their own lives. Still today, Jesus' brothers and sisters are to show others the Jesus they want them to believe in and follow in all that they believe, think, do, and say.

## May 21, The Sixth Sunday of Easter: John 14:15–21

John 14:15–31 focuses on the promise of the Holy Spirit. Note again the introductory comments made above in relation to the role of the Holy Spirit.

**14:15:** Once again, Jesus links *commandments* to *love*. It is important to understand that *love* is not merely about emotions and feelings. It has to do with caring, compassionate servanthood. Faith in Jesus reveals itself in never-ending service to others—without concern for borders, flags, or skin color.

**14:16:** This verse contains the first reference in John to the Holy Spirit as *Advocate* or *Paraclete*. The Greek term derives from legal terminology for an advocate or defense attorney, and it can mean spokesperson, mediator, intercessor, comforter, counselor, consoler, helper—although none of these terms reflects fully the meaning in John.

In 1 John 2:1, Jesus is referred to as the *first* Advocate in that He intercedes for His people before the presence of His Father in heaven. John 14:16 describes the *second* Advocate, the Holy Spirit, as a witness to Jesus and a prosecutor of the world. The Holy Spirit represents the continuing presence on earth of the Jesus who has returned to the Father. The Holy Spirit uses the Written Word and the Sacraments to continue to make known God’s truth about the Living Word, Jesus the Messiah.

Although people sometimes say, “The Spirit told me this or that,” the truth is that if the “this or that” does not reflect completely Jesus’ teaching and ministry as revealed in the Gospels, the message did not come from the Holy Spirit!

**14:17:** The Spirit will continue to abide with God’s people after Jesus withdraws His *visible* presence from among them. The term “the spirit of truth” was also used in the Dead Sea scrolls found at Qumran to refer to a moral force put into a person by God, as opposed to the spirit of perversity.

**14:18–21:** In v. 18, Jesus says that He will not withdraw His presence from His own and leave them to live as orphans; He will come to dwell within and among them. (Here, the reference is not to His coming *parousia*, His final re-appearing, at the end of history.) Jesus’ brothers and sisters will continue in faith to “see” Jesus in their hearts, even though they will not see Him with their eyes. The message of v. 20 is profound: Jesus will be in the Father, and His brothers and sisters will be in Him as He will be in them. Indeed, a divine relationship! In v. 21, Jesus once again points out that love (servanthood) is the mark of discipleship. Worth pondering is the following statement by H.G. Wells:

The doctrine of the Kingdom God, which was the main teaching of Jesus, and which plays so small a part in the Christian creeds, is certainly one of the most revolutionary doctrines that ever stirred and changed human thought.

## May 25, Ascension Thursday: Luke 24:44–53

Luke reports Jesus' ascension in two of his writings—in Luke 24:44–53 and in Acts 1:1–11. In the first of these two passages, Jesus ascends on the evening of His day of resurrection. In Acts 1:1–11, He ascends 40 days after His resurrection. It is possible that the focus in the Acts narrative is that Jesus remains among His disciples for 40 days after His resurrection, even as God dwelt among His people in the wilderness for 40 years after the Exodus from Egypt. During this 40-day period, Jesus equips them to perpetuate His ministry after He withdraws His *visible* presence from their midst.

When Jesus ascended, He did not withdraw His presence; He *transformed* it. He remains among His brothers and sisters as the God-Man—although invisibly. His brothers and sisters live out life before His eyes and seek to make His presence visible in the way they reflect His servant lifestyle.

In the opening section of Acts, Luke summarizes the source and extent of the apostle's power as well as the basic truths that they are to preach and teach.

**Luke 24:44–45:** The salvation achieved by Jesus the Servant Messiah fulfills, but transforms, all Old Testament expectations. To understand and appreciate what Jesus taught and accomplished, we must become familiar with the Old Testament narrative and the hopes that surface within it. In instructing His disciples, Jesus made use of a large study guide: the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms (*Law*: Genesis–Deuteronomy; *Prophets*: Joshua–2 Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea–Malachi; *Psalms*). The Hebrew books referred to as the *Writings* (Psalms was one of these) were accepted into the Jewish canon (collection of approved writings) during the years following AD 70.

**24:46–47:** Jesus instructs His disciples concerning His death and resurrection. They in turn are to proclaim Jesus' message of the forgiveness of sins and salvation, not just to the genetic descendants of Abraham, but to all nations. In the final chapter of Acts, Paul is proclaiming God's Good News at the ends of the earth (as many in Judea would have understood that term) in Rome!

**24:48:** The disciples had been witnesses of the things that took place in Jesus' life and ministry. That gave their message validity and authority. They would proclaim what they had seen and heard—not a concocted story!

**24:49:** In his Gospel, Luke says nothing about the disciples returning to Galilee. They are to remain in Jerusalem until Jesus sends to them what His Father had promised: the Holy Spirit. The life of Jesus' community (the Church) will begin with the events of Pentecost—ten days after Jesus' ascension (according to Luke's time frame in Acts 1–2).

In His discourses in John 13–17, Jesus teaches that the Holy Spirit will take what is His and reveal it to His disciples (and eventually to us). Behind this thought is the concept of *methurgeman* (an Aramaic term). When the exiles began returning from Babylon to Judah and Jerusalem in 538 BC, they spoke Aramaic, not Hebrew. However, in synagogues, rabbis had to read the scriptures and preach in Hebrew. So, an interpreter (*methurgeman*) stood beside the rabbi and translated into Aramaic what the rabbi read and said in Hebrew. So too the Holy Spirit takes Jesus' words and explains them to us. It is so important that Jesus' followers read the Holy Scriptures regularly; they alone reveal the message of Jesus that the Holy Spirit wishes to explain to us.

**24:50–53:** It would seem from this narrative that Jesus’ ascension occurred on Easter Sunday evening. The statement “was carried up into heaven” reflects Old Testament concepts of the sweet savor of sacrifice ascending toward heaven. The ascension marked the end of Jesus’ post-resurrection appearances. The apostles felt great joy because Jesus was more intimately present and more personally understood through the presence of His Spirit, which He sent among them. The narrative outlined in the third Gospel begins and ends in the Jerusalem Temple. The little group of poor and lowly ones who in the beginning expected the Savior of Israel (Luke 1–2) live on in the risen Jesus’ people of faith.

### **Ascension Insights**

(The following thoughts can prove helpful for the present pericope, and the pericopes that follow.)

The disciples play a remarkable role in the Gospel narratives. Throughout each narrative, they remain slow learners. When they eventually wake up to the fact Jesus is the Messiah, they have no idea what that implies for Jesus or for them. Think, for example, of the way Mark tells the story. As Jesus carries out His ministry, although He says little about Who He is with words, He indicates Who He is through actions. He gives sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, speech to the dumb, and healthy bodies to the crippled—things Isaiah said would take place when the Messianic Age broke in (Isaiah 35:5–6). In addition, Jesus demonstrates His power over nature (Psalm 107:23–32). He does battle with the realm of the demonic and overcomes it. He raises the dead; see Isaiah 26:19; Daniel 12:1–3.

Having done all these things, Jesus heads north toward Caesarea Philippi and asks the disciples who the people say that He is, and then who *they* say that He is (cf. Mark 8:27–38). They reply that although the people do not say that He is the Messiah, the disciples do. But when Jesus predicts His coming death in Jerusalem for the first time, Peter explodes in protest.

When Jesus predicts His passion for the second time, the disciples ask Him which of them will be greatest (His “Prime Minister” or “Secretary of State”) when He sets up His Kingdom in Jerusalem; see Mark 9:30–37. And after the third passion prediction, James and John ask if Jesus could arrange for them to sit, one at His right hand and one at His left hand, when He is crowned King (Mark 10:32–45).

Little wonder then that as the hour of the cross draws closer, the disciples fall asleep, deny, betray, and run. And little wonder that when Jesus is finally lifted on to His cross, they are not around. And little wonder that when word begins getting around on Easter Sunday morning that Jesus is alive again, they refuse to believe it until they check out the empty tomb for themselves.

After the resurrection, some moving meetings take place in John’s Gospel between Jesus and the disciples. In these, Jesus never rebukes the disciples for deserting Him in His hour of agony. Rather, He greets them with “Peace be with you!” He invites them to have breakfast with Him. He asks them if they love Him (cf. John 21). However, note that in Mark’s “longer ending”—possibly a later addition—we read in 16:14, “. . . Jesus upbraided them for their lack of faith and stubbornness, because they had not believed.”

Finally, in Luke 24, Jesus takes them a mile or so out of Jerusalem to Bethany, on the southeast section of the Mount of Olives, where He had raised Lazarus from the dead (John 11). He raises His hands, blesses the disciples, and rises from the ground—apparently on the evening of His resurrection day. The disciples then return to Jerusalem and continue to bless God in the Temple there.

Luke presents us with a second ascension narrative in Acts 1:12—an event that takes place forty days after Jesus’ passion/resurrection (1:3). Again, the conversation is an interesting one. The disciples ask if the time has finally come when Jesus will restore the kingdom to Israel. The question amounts to this: “Lord, Your crucifixion came as such a shock to us. We are so glad that You are alive again. We had such hopes prior to Your cross about what You would achieve. But has the time now come when You will rise up against Rome and restore the Kingdom to Israel?”

Apparently the disciples hope that the time has come when Jesus will drive out the Roman overlords and establish His own political kingdom in Jerusalem and Palestine. No doubt they hope that He will restore the so-called good old days of David, with its extensive territories and international prestige. And no doubt some of them still have thoughts about being Jesus’ Prime Minister or Secretary of State, including all the perks that might go with such a position.

Jesus gently but clearly points out that their view of His kingdom is totally misguided. He did not come to set up some kind of political kingdom in Palestine. Rather, the Holy Spirit will come on the disciples and they will be sent to the ends of the earth to witness to Jesus the Messiah as forgiving Savior and Servant-Lord. And while Jesus talks, He rises from the ground. It would have been interesting to see the looks on the disciples’ faces when this was happening. Jesus rises higher and higher, and finally His presence is swallowed up in a cloud—a symbol of God’s presence. And while the disciples stand around confused and flabbergasted, two persons in white robes appear and tell the disciples that just as Jesus has departed from them, so He will eventually reappear. So much for the biblical narrative. What does it all mean for us?

Note again: Matthew presents us with what we might call *ascension theology*. Jesus’ last words in Matthew’s Gospel are: “I am with you always, even to the close of the age.” Mark’s last words describe the women fleeing from the tomb on Easter morning. His closing comment in 16:8 is, “They fled from the tomb, for trembling and astonishment had come upon them, and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid!”

John telescopes Jesus’ resurrection, ascension, and the giving of the Spirit into the events of Easter Sunday.

Only Luke reports Jesus’ ascension *event* (but again, note also Mark’s longer ending).

To try to harmonize all this is beside the point. The real issue is: What does it all say to us?

The German composer George Frideric Handel wrote a work titled *Zadok the Priest*. It begins with a series of broken chords. Then, as it seems to be developing into something more consistent, it reverts back to broken chords—this way and that, some in a minor key. But then it really begins to go somewhere. It begins to swell and surge. And then the whole work explodes as the choir crashes in! King Solomon is being crowned! And Zadok is playing a key role in the coronation ceremony. The Gospels are like that. They lead you here, they lead you there. And suddenly they explode with their descriptions of Jesus' coronation. The Gospels celebrate the coronation of Jesus, the Savior-King. The shock is that Jesus' throne is a cross!

Jesus' crucifixion has *royal significance*: Jesus is the restored son of David and the King of the Jews. Jesus' crucifixion is a *saving act*. Jesus saved humanity from the consequence of sin by dying for it. Jesus' crucifixion is also the *defeat of evil*. When the forces of evil did their worst to Jesus, He conquered those forces. Jesus' crucifixion was also an act with *eternal consequences*. Jesus achieved the saving purposes of His Father and opened the doors into eternity for those locked in time and held captive by the powers of sin and death!

The post-resurrection appearances of Jesus are sublime. (Only in Mark 16:14 do we read of Jesus rebuking the disciples for letting Him down, for sleeping, denying, and running.) He shows the disciples the scars in His hands, side, and feet, and then says, "Peace be with you" (cf. John 20). And when we look up into the sky and think of the God who made the universe and fills every corner of it, we hear Him saying the same to us: "Peace be with you."

Some questions: When Jesus ascended, where did He go to? And where is Jesus now? Let's think back to Jesus' post-resurrection appearances. Jesus appears—and He disappears. When He appeared, where did He come from? When He disappeared, where did He go to? The answer in both cases is: *He came from nowhere and went nowhere. Or, He came from everywhere and went everywhere.*

Think for a moment about those soldiers who were guarding Jesus' tomb. Matthew tells us about them in His Gospel. There is a divine humor about what transpired in relation to their response to Jesus' crucifixion. To begin with, they were guarding a sealed tomb that had a body in it. And we might *imagine* that there was a big sign up near the tomb: *Resurrection Illegal*. However, as the hours ticked by and the soldiers and the sign stayed in place, there came that moment when the soldiers were guarding an *empty* tomb. Jesus had risen—the tomb was empty!

How did Jesus get out of that tomb? Did He pass through the walls in some miraculous way (Hollywood style), like a mist of some kind? Not at all! From the moment that Jesus came back to life in the tomb, He filled every corner of the universe not merely as God but also as man. Beyond the resurrection, His human nature shares *fully* in His divine nature. That means that He did not have to pass through the rock walls to escape the tomb. Furthermore, when He appeared beyond the resurrection, He was merely letting the disciples know that He was still around. And when He finally "ascended," He was not departing. He was merely saying, "No more little visits, but I am not going away. Even so, although I will remain with you until the close of the age, you will not see Me again until I reappear." In short, when Jesus ascended, He did not withdraw His presence—He *transformed* it.

We might well say that although Jesus' crucifixion was His *coronation* before human eyes, His ascension was His *enthronement* as Lord of the Universe. When in The Apostles' Creed we speak of Jesus seated at the right hand of the Father, we should not think of Him as sitting on a literal chair next to a literal right hand. In the ancient world, the term *right hand* denoted the place of honor and authority. This means that God the Father endorsed Jesus' life and mission, vindicated His Son's ministry by raising Him from the dead, accepted all that He had done for a fallen humanity, and declared Him to be King of the universe. It follows in turn that the only way the universe, history, and humanity can work is when it submits to Jesus the Messiah as forgiving Savior and Servant Lord. This in turns means that we have to think through the fact that the one declared to be Savior, King, and Lord walked the way of a humble servant-without-limit, and calls those who believe and trust in Him to walk the same way in all that they think, say, and do.

### **May 28, The Seventh Sunday of Easter: John 17:1–11**

In his Gospel, John makes no reference to Jesus praying in the Garden of Gethsemane. However, in John 17, we read of Jesus praying in the Upper Room prior to going to a garden (18:1). Since the sixteenth century, the contents of John 17 have been referred to as Jesus' High Priestly Prayer—a prayer in which Jesus speaks directly to His Father as an intercessor, although no doubt the disciples heard what Jesus was saying. In this chapter, Jesus prays for Himself in relation to His approaching crucifixion (17:1–5), His immediate disciples (vv. 6–19), and His future disciples (vv. 20–24). One might ask why those who determined the content of this set of pericopes divided this chapter as they did.

- The historical context is as follows: Jesus' visible ministry on earth is now all but over. Although He had previously called the disciples to follow Him (13:33, 36), He now prays that they will be with Him in union with the Father (vv. 12–14). The prayer highlights the unity of the Father, the Son, and the believing community. What precedes this passage in John's larger framework?
- Jesus reveals His Person and mission to His own people (chs. 1–11). No one seems to understand Jesus' message, and, after He raises Lazarus from the dead on the Mount of Olives (11:1–44), the religious and political leaders plot to kill Him (11:45–56).
- In 12:31, Jesus declares that He is about to conquer the kingdom of Satan. This verse has profound implications for the world still today. God's people are to be aware of the continuing presence of the "satanic liar" and the demonic goals that he would have humanity pursue.
- In chs. 13–16, Jesus focuses on demonstrating the true nature of His Servant-Kingdom. He washes feet (something that only a Gentile slave would do!), emphasizing that He gives His brothers and sisters only one commandment (not 613 as in Exodus–Deuteronomy!). He also assures His disciples that, after He withdraws His visible presence, the Holy Spirit will continue to make His message known (which stresses our continuing need to soak ourselves in the study of God's Word so that the Holy Spirit can continue to communicate with us).

- The Holy Spirit is Jesus' Interpreter. The Spirit seeks only to share Jesus' message with humanity and to involve them in Jesus' continuing ministry and mission. The "textbook" is the Bible. If we pray "Holy Spirit, speak to me," we commit ourselves to study God's Word, regularly and passionately. If we do not listen to the Holy Spirit, we listen to the "unholy spirit," Satan. There is no middle or neutral ground! Life is about either "servant-hood" or "serpent-hood."

**V. 1:** When praying, Jesus looks up to the heavens and uses the term *Father*. Jesus' coming "glory" will consist in giving away His life on a cross—the ultimate act of the ultimate Servant! Here, note 19:30. The word *hour* has sounded like a muffled bell numerous times prior to ch. 17; it is used 20 times in John's Gospel, most times referring to Jesus' coming crucifixion (or *coronation*). It is now about to sound forth loudly and clearly in Jesus' enthronement on a cross. Jesus' definition of *glory* is the reverse of that embraced by the world-at-large. Jesus devoted life to giving Himself; human nature devotes life to gaining for self. The events of Jesus' coming hour will complete His revelation of His Father's heart and will.

**V. 2:** Eternal life is not only the realm that God's people will eventually enter. It is also a servant lifestyle that they are to practice already in this life. God's people are to live *now* as they will then in the life to come. Jesus' message is, "My Father's eternal kingdom has already broken in—in and through Me! Enter it! Participate in it!"

**V. 3:** Jesus nowhere else refers to Himself as *Jesus Christ (Jesus the Messiah)*.

**Vv. 4–5:** God's (and Jesus') glory is not merely of recent origin. It is eternal, beyond the limits of time. Jesus demonstrates the life that God intended (and still desires) humanity to live.

**V. 6:** "Your name" is perhaps the name *I Am* (8:24, 28, 58, 13:19). The mission of Jesus was to know and show His invisible Father.

**Vv. 7–8:** Positive words—but the disciples began to catch on fully only after Jesus' resurrection and ascension.

**Vv. 9–11:** Jesus prays that the disciples will be bound in unity with a bond like that which binds the Father and Jesus together. A profound thought with profound implications! If only we could place above all church altars (in addition to those beautiful polished crosses) an image of Jesus on His knees washing the disciples' feet—with perhaps the subtitle, "*As I—so you.*"

## **June 4, Pentecost Sunday: John 20:19–23 (or 7:37–39)**

Some preliminary thoughts:

- At Passover, the Jewish people remembered and celebrated the events of the Exodus from Egypt. In Luke's transfiguration narrative (9:28–36), Moses and Elijah, both of whom had met with God on Mt. Sinai (Mt. Horeb), spoke with Jesus about His coming "exodus" (lifelong rescue event) that He would soon "complete" on a cross in Jerusalem.
- The Israelites spent 40 years in the wilderness before entering the Promised Land. According to Acts 1:3, Jesus spent 40 days with His disciples prior to ascending into the Eternal Promised Land.

- The Jewish people celebrated the events of Sinai 50 days after Passover (hence Pentecost, “fifty days”). In the Pentecost event recorded in Acts 2, the Risen Lord—through His Holy Spirit—takes up permanent residence among His people, and seeks to teach them to know and do His will throughout their “wilderness journey” in this world while on their way to the Eternal Promised Land.
- Those present at the Pentecost described in Acts 2 were Jews and proselytes (converts to Judaism). The Holy Spirit falls upon Gentiles for the first time in Acts 10 (cf. 10:44–48). Note also 11:1–3 where two women, Martha and Mary, share their insights concerning Jesus’ authority over the powers of death.

**Vv. 19–21:** Jesus meets with ten disciples in a room—with a locked door. (Thomas was not present.) He greets them with “Peace be with you,” and shows them His hands and side. They rejoice! He says “Peace be with you” a second time (again, no rebukes!), and commissions them to undertake a mission to the world on His behalf.

**V. 22:** Jesus breathes on the disciples and gives them the Holy Spirit. In Genesis 2:7 we read of God breathing into Adam the breath of life, “and the man became a living being.” The parallels are profound.

Jesus’ ministry brings about a new beginning to *creation* and *humanity*!

**V. 23:** Faith never creates forgiveness; it merely lays hold of what has been there all along. Note well that we can say to anyone in the world, “God loves you and has forgiven you all your sins.” Some will believe and rejoice. Some will frown and perhaps dismiss us as a little crazy. Even so, the forgiveness that we proclaim in the name of Jesus is true. How people respond to our proclamation has profound implications for them in this life and the life to come.

### **An Alternative Pericope: John 7:37–39**

The setting is the Feast of Booths or Tabernacles (7:1–2). This festival was held on the fifteenth day of the seventh month (September–October). It commemorated the wilderness wanderings (Leviticus 23:39–32; Deuteronomy 16:13–15). During this celebration, water was carried in a golden pitcher from the Pool of Siloam to the Temple as a reminder of the water from the rock in the desert (Numbers 20:2–13) and as a symbol of hope for the coming Messianic deliverance (Isaiah 12:3).

The setting is that Jesus is traveling around in Galilee. He did not wish to go to Judea because Jewish leaders there were looking for an opportunity to kill Him. However, His disciples encourage Him to go to Judea so that people there might see what He is doing and hear what He is teaching. Although Jesus does not go to Judea, His disciples do. However, sometime later Jesus also goes to Jerusalem—a rather secret visit—to reveal His presence and to do some teaching.

Jesus is the true water of life who turns the symbol into reality (Isaiah 44:3, 55:1). Believers become channels of life to others through Christ’s Spirit given at Pentecost after His ascension when He was glorified (crucified, risen, ascended). The gift of the Spirit is a mark of the breaking in of the Messianic Age (Joel 2:28–29; Acts 2:14–21).