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Crossways International  
Minneapolis, MN 55435 USA  
1-800-257-7308  
[www.crossways.org](http://www.crossways.org)

## The Revised Common Lectionary Notes

May 6, 13, 20, 27, and June 3

by the Rev. Dr. Harry Wendt, founder of Crossways International

### May 6, The Sixth Sunday of Easter: John 15:9–17

This passage is a continuation of the one surveyed in the previous section. The themes of divine indwelling, asking in Jesus' name, keeping Jesus' commandments (better, *one commandment*, 13:15; 15:12), and abiding in love are touched on in **15:7–10**.

**15:9:** Jesus has loved us as His Father has loved Him. The Father's love inspired and guided Jesus throughout His ministry. It empowered Him to walk the way of a servant in all that He thought, said, and did—even to the point of giving away life on a cross. Jesus' love for us is not merely about telling us to feel good. It is about inviting, directing, and empowering us to love and serve Him by loving and serving those around us in all that we think, say, and do. Discipleship is not about a part-time occupation; it is about a full-time commitment.

**15:10:** Jesus' manner of life kept Him within His Father's loving embrace. Walking through life in the compassionate, servant way of Jesus keeps us within His loving embrace. It is not enough to see Christianity as merely a matter of *believing*. We are to see it as a matter of lifelong, nonstop *following*. To express it in more colloquial terms: Believing in Jesus has to do with more than being *dry-cleaned from sin*; it has to do with being *discipled for life*.

**15:11:** Jesus' central desire is that the joy He experienced in life may dwell also within us. True joy is to be found only in believing in and following Him. It is never found in *getting and enjoying* the things of the world. It is found only in *giving* love and compassion.

**15:12:** This verse constitutes the “key signature” for the symphony of life! Jesus urges us to get beyond memorizing a collection of commandments to finding life by giving it away in the service of others.

**15:13:** Jesus practiced what He taught. Jesus' brothers and sisters are to practice what He taught and lived.

**15:14–15:** The significance of Jesus' words in these verses is profound. Jesus refers to those who do what He commands as His friends. Abraham, the Old Testament ideal, was a friend of God (Isaiah 41:8). The New Testament ideal is to be a friend of Jesus.

In the world of Jesus' day, those appointed into high office by a king or a Roman emperor became members of an elite group known as "The King's Friends," or "Caesar's Friends"; see John 19:12. The reason Pilate finally succumbed to the desires of the Jewish leaders was that they told him bluntly that if he did not have Jesus crucified, they would see to it that he was removed from office and from membership in the "Caesar's Friends" club. Pilate was an *imperial* procurator appointed into office by the emperor, not a *senatorial* procurator appointed by the Roman senate.

Although Jesus had called His disciples *servants*, what He has revealed to them raises them to the rank of *friends*. Their knowledge of God surpasses and outshines that of any previous Israelite figure.

**15:16–17:** The disciples played no part in achieving this status; *Jesus chose them!* Their response to this manifestation of God's love should be their love toward fellow disciples—and to the world at large.

### **May 13, The Seventh Sunday of Easter: John 17:6–19**

John makes no reference to Jesus praying in the garden after leaving the Upper Room. His final prayer is outlined in John 17 and takes place in the Upper Room. In 17:1–5, Jesus prays for Himself in relation to the events that will soon follow. He then prays for His disciples (17:6–19), and for those to whom they will bear witness (17:20–26). In vv. 9–16 He prays for their protection; in vv. 17–19, for their dedication.

**17:6–8:** Verse 6 contains a reference to the divine name ("I am"). Those who receive Jesus are those already chosen by the Father—another Johannine theme. Whatever Jesus proclaimed to His hearers He first received from His Father. His followers know that Jesus came from His Father and was sent by His Father.

**17:9–10:** Jesus prays on behalf of those whom the Father has given Him—those who in reality belong to His Father. In a very real sense, they are the common property of both the Father and His incarnate Son.

**17:11:** What is to become of the disciples now that Jesus, their Shepherd, is about to leave them?

**17:12:** While on earth, Jesus was able to protect them. Now He asks that their protection will be continued "in Your Name that You have given Me." (See John 18:6–9; Acts 4:12.)

**17:13–14:** The theme of the joy of the disciples and the hatred and opposition of the world surface in this section.

**17:15–16:** There is to be no withdrawal from the struggle with the empire of Satan! Satan wants anything but that the disciples should live to glorify and follow Jesus the Messiah as forgiving Savior and Servant Lord! He wants anything but that Jesus' message should be made known!

**17:17–19:** The disciples are sent into the world to conquer it (*spiritually!*) for Jesus the forgiving, Servant

Messiah. In principle, although Jesus has won the victory, the working out of that victory in time is the work of the disciples—and of those whom their witness draws into God’s Kingdom. Although the members of Jesus’ new people, His new community, remain in the world, they are to walk out-of-step with the ways of the world.

To strengthen the disciples in their work, which is the continuation of His own work, Jesus sanctifies and consecrates Himself so that they might receive the necessary dedication. These verses are a promise of a divine mission for the disciples—a mission that will be given to them on Easter evening after Jesus’ saving, sacrificial mission has been completed.

### **May 20, Pentecost Sunday: John 15:26–27; 16:4b–15**

**Some insights concerning Acts 2:1–21:** The term *Pentecost* is derived from the Greek word for *fifty* (*pentekosia*). In Luke’s scheme of things in Acts, Jesus’ ascension took place 40 days after His celebration of Passover (in the Upper Room with His disciples) and His resurrection. Passover celebrated events associated with the Exodus, the rescue of the Israelites from bondage in Egypt. After leaving Egypt, the Israelites spent 40 years in the wilderness. After completing His rescue event, His exodus, at Calvary and at the empty tomb, Jesus remained with His disciples for 40 days. (In Luke 9:31, Moses and Elijah speak with Jesus about His coming “exodus” which He was about to complete in Jerusalem. Some English translations need a little editing here.) Although the events at Mt. Sinai are said to have taken place “on the third new moon after the Israelites had gone out of the Land of Egypt” (Exodus 19:1), Jewish rabbis taught that the events at Mt. Sinai took place 50 days after the Israelites fled from Egypt— and Pentecost celebrated those events. At Sinai, God took up residence among His people in a spectacular manner (Exodus 19:16–18). According to the events outlined in Acts 2:1–21, the Risen Lord revealed His continuing presence through the Holy Spirit in a similarly spectacular manner. But now the face of God is no longer a mystery. God has revealed His face in the Person of His Son, Jesus the Messiah.

According to rabbinic readings of Exodus through Deuteronomy, God gave the Israelites 613 commandments as well as hundreds of oral traditions. Jesus, however, has given His new people one key commandment—to love and serve one another as He has loved and served them (John 13:12–15, 34–35). Every other commandment that Jesus endorsed during His ministry serves as a commentary on this one central commandment.

**John 15:26–27:** What follows is a repeat of a paragraph included in the Gospel pericope for the Ascension analyzed previously (page 3).

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 to Judah and Jerusalem in 538 BC, they spoke Aramaic, not Hebrew. However, in the synagogues, rabbis had to read and explain the Hebrew scriptures. 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.

The message of 15:26–27 is that Jesus will send His Advocate (the Holy Spirit) to continue His teaching mission and clarify His message. The disciples, who have been with Jesus from the beginning of His ministry, are to testify on Jesus’ behalf.

**16:4b–7:** These verses focus on Jesus’ departure (or transformation of His presence from visible to invisible), the sorrow of the disciples, and where Jesus is going. Again, as in chapter 14, the coming of the Spirit is announced

twice. In chapter 14, the Father gives the Spirit; in chapter 16, it is Jesus who sends the Spirit. This interchange is possible because the Spirit is that of both the Father and the Son. The Spirit proceeds from both.

**16:8–11:** This section focuses on the Paraclete or Advocate aspect of the Spirit and His work. In the trial of universal judgment, the Spirit goes on the offense as a prosecuting attorney. The Spirit's activity affects the three participants in the trial:

- Those who have sinned by *refusing* to believe;
- Jesus; although condemned to death by His opponents and accusers, He will be posthumously vindicated and the justice of His cause will be revealed;
- Satan; although he has seemingly triumphed, he will be shown to have been bringing about a downfall prejudged by God from all eternity.

**16:12–15:** In the second announcement of the Spirit, the emphasis is on the Spirit's teaching mission. The Spirit's teaching will be nothing new but an ongoing interpretation of Jesus' teaching.

### **May 27, Trinity Sunday: John 3:1–17**

In John 2:1–12, we read of Jesus turning water into wine while attending a marriage celebration in Cana of Galilee. Although Jesus' action in doing this involved the miraculous, the message of His action is that He replaces Jewish purification rituals with the joy of the breaking in of the Messianic Age. After all, Jewish rabbis taught that when the Messianic Age broke in, there would be an abundance of wine; see Amos 9:13-14; Jeremiah 31:12.

In John 2:13–25, we read of Jesus going to Jerusalem "when the Passover of the Jews was near" (2:13). During His time there, Jesus attacked the Temple's "sin management system" and its "salvation marketing system."

The next incident in John focuses on Jesus' meeting with Nicodemus; most likely Nicodemus was a member of the Jewish council or Sanhedrin; see 7:50. Embedded in this event is the first of the Johannine discourses. Its contents shift from dialog (3:1–10) to monologue (3:11–15) to reflection by the evangelist (3:16–21). The shift from singular in vv. 1–10 to plural in v. 11 may reflect the early church's controversy with the Jewish leaders and people.

**3:1–3:** Ancient Jewish literature tells us that God showed His approval of a rabbi's teaching by working miracles through him. Because Jesus' miracles mean exactly that to Nicodemus, he comes to Jesus at night (in John, darkness is symbolic of evil and ignorance; note John 13:30) and greets Him as a great teacher. Although the first disciples also recognized Jesus as a great teacher, they eventually progressed beyond that (John 1:38; 1:49; 20:28). In His dialog with Nicodemus, Jesus shows him that He is a "teacher from God" in a way that Nicodemus does not expect; Jesus has actually come from God!

Jews in Jesus' day believed that they belonged to God because they were genetic descendants of Abraham. Jesus pointed out to Nicodemus that to belong to God has to do with another "birth process" — *being born into God's family through God's action*. Belonging to God's family has to do with *divine grace*, not *human genes*.

The whole discourse stresses that what is on the natural level, the level of flesh, cannot of itself reach the *divine level*. And in what follows, and throughout John, the "new birth" is accomplished by God descending from

heaven to the human level and then returning to heaven, drawing His family of grace into eternal fellowship with Him. Hence, throughout his writing, John focuses on God's incarnation in Jesus, and Jesus' redemptive life, death, resurrection, and ascension.

The key word in the discourse is in v. 3: "without being born *anōthen*." The Greek word *anōthen* has the double meaning of "from above" and "again."

**V. 4:** Nicodemus, thinking on a purely *human* level, takes the meaning to be born "again" physically—an impossibility.

**V. 5–6:** In clarifying His message to Nicodemus, Jesus speaks of being born of water and the Spirit. Nicodemus should have understood this, for he knows that the spirit or breath given by God is responsible for natural life, and that in messianic times God would sprinkle water on people and give them a new spirit, i.e., a new form of life; see Genesis 2:7, Job 34:14, Ezekiel 36:25–26. (Naturally, Christian readers have an extended understanding of this passage and see it in the light of Holy Baptism and the Holy Spirit.)

**Vv. 7–8:** When Nicodemus still does not understand, Jesus gives him another example. People believe in the wind without understanding its workings; they must do the same with the Spirit (the same Hebrew word, likewise in Greek) means both "wind" and "spirit."

**Vv. 9–10:** When Nicodemus persists with his questions, Jesus reminds him that he, Nicodemus, is supposed to be the teacher, not the pupil. He has come as a representative of the Jews saying, "We know" (v. 2). (Are the "we" other members of the Jewish Sanhedrin? See John 12:42.) He must now listen as Jesus speaks for the new faith of those who believe in and follow Him.

**V. 11:** Jesus says, "We speak of what we know," but the Jewish leaders whom Nicodemus represents will not accept this witness. However, if Nicodemus really wants to understand, Jesus will explain further.

**V. 12:** If Nicodemus cannot understand the things he should have known ("earthly"), how can he hope to understand when Jesus reaches up to heaven for His explanation?

**Vv. 13–15:** Jesus' explanation involves the cycle of incarnation, death, and resurrection. Again, a two-fold meaning surfaces: the Greek word for "lift up" refers both to being lifted up on a cross and to being lifted up into heaven. It also suggests exaltation. In Jesus' return to His Father in heaven, the cross is the first step in the ladder of the ascension. Only when Jesus is raised up can the Spirit, of which Jesus has spoken to Nicodemus be given (John 7:39).

In **v. 14–15**, John makes reference to Moses' bronze serpent as an example of healing and restoration to wholeness coming through something "raised up" (Numbers 21:9). However, Moses simply mounted a serpent on a pole—a symbol that people were to look up to. Here, John substitutes a verb that implies glorification. Jesus, exalted to glory at His cross and resurrection, represents ultimate healing and restoration to wholeness for all who look up to Him.

**Vv. 16–17:** The dialogue has now become a monologue. (Although Nicodemus possibly slipped off into the night from which he had come, his eyes open later; see 19:38, 42.) The focus is on the significance of Jesus' incarnation. God gave ("gave" implies "gave up to death" or "sacrificed") His only Son to gain this new life for humanity. The mission of Jesus is not about *condemnation*, but *salvation*.

## June 3, The Second Sunday after Pentecost: Mark 2:23-3:6

Most of the pericope notes assigned for use in Lent during the present church year are from John. All passages assigned for use during the rest of the present church year are from Mark and John. What follows is a survey of the Marcan narrative that precedes 4:26-34.

**Mark 1:1:** Good news! The Messianic Age has broken in with Jesus the Messiah!

**Mark 1:2:** Jesus will eventually visit the Temple to observe what is taking place within its walls. Note here the second part of Malachi 3:1. Although Mark quotes the first part of Malachi 3:1, he expects his readers to recall the second part of the verse (3:1b—a practice referred to as *remez*).

**Mark 1:3:** Jesus has come to complete the rescue (*exodus*) of God's people from the powers of Satan, sin, and death—powers embedded in the Roman imperial system.

**Mark 1:4–8:** Many Jews from Judea and Jerusalem come to John the Baptist to be baptized.

**Mark 1:9–11:** When John baptizes Jesus, a heavenly voice declares Jesus to be *Servant* and *King*.

**Mark 1:12–13:** Satan confronts Jesus in the wilderness. The battle between the two continues until Jesus finally conquers Satan in the crucifixion and resurrection events. Through Jesus' ministry, things are being put right in the world of nature (animals do not harm Jesus) and the heavenly realm (the angels minister to Jesus).

**Mark 1:14–15:** Jesus proclaims the Good News, the central truth of His ministry: *The Kingdom of God has broken in with Jesus!*

**Mark 1:16–20:** On the shore of the Sea of Galilee, Jesus chooses four disciples and calls them to follow Him.

**Mark 1:21–28:** Jesus begins His ministry to the *Jewish people* by casting a demon out of a man in a synagogue on a Sabbath. **Note:** He will begin His ministry among the *Gentiles* by casting demons out of a man in the region of the Decapolis (5:1-20).

**Mark 1:29–31:** Jesus heals the mother of Simon Peter on a Sabbath.

**Mark 1:32–34:** When the Sabbath ends, He heals many people of a variety of diseases and casts out many demons.

**Mark 1:35–39:** Jesus prays alone, during the night, and then travels around Galilee preaching in synagogues and casting out demons.

**Mark 1:40–45:** Jesus heals a man afflicted with leprosy and touches this “unclean outcast” prior to healing Him.

**Mark 2:1–12:** Jesus heals a paralyzed man. However, He first declares the man forgiven of his sins—a statement that the “sin forgiveness system” now resides in *Jesus*, not the Jerusalem Temple. The scribes

present accuse Jesus of blasphemy, a charge that the Jerusalem political and religious leaders will eventually hurl at Him (14:63).

**Mark 2:14:** Jesus calls a fifth disciple to follow Him—this time, Levi (possibly Matthew), a despised tax collector who has been collaborating with the Romans.

**Mark 2:15–22:** Jesus eats with those whom the scribes of the Pharisees despise.

**Mark 2:23–3:6:** Jesus breaks two Sabbaths in a row. Jewish leaders taught that if all Jews kept two Sabbaths in a row, the Messiah would come. The Pharisees and Herodians now discuss how they might put Jesus to death!