

"Behind the Scenes"

John 16:12-15

April 28, 2013

5th Sunday of Easter

Do you know what a “gaffer” is? What about a “key grip”? And what on earth is a “best boy”? These are people who are responsible for bringing you some of the greatest entertainment and you probably don’t even know who they are. I didn’t either until I started watching the closing credits at movies. In very small print, the names of people were listed who worked in that movie as a gaffer, key grip, and best boy. I don’t know who these people are. Their work is done behind the scenes. The gaffer is the head electrician and works with lighting on the movie. The key grip works with sceneries and camera angles for the movie. The best boy is the right hand man for the key grip and works with staffing for these various jobs. Although not well known outside of the industry, these men do important work. You can have Tom Cruise star in your movie and have Steven Spielberg direct it, but the movie will not be enjoyed by anyone without the behind scenes work of gaffers, key grips, best boys, and others.

For the past month, we have celebrated the great joy of Easter. In some ways, it is like a movie. Jesus Christ is the star of the show. He bore the sin of the world on the cross and sacrificed His life to earn forgiveness for all people. He rose from the dead on Easter to bring a new and eternal life for all people.

God the Father is the director of this production. He chose His Son to be the Messiah – the Christ – the sacrifice for the world’s sin and sent Him to earth as a man to die in order to fulfill this plan. The Father raised Jesus from the dead to show that the Son’s sacrifice had been sufficient and accepted on behalf of the world.

However, if this is where the story ended, we’d still be in trouble. All of the events of Easter would be true, but they would mean nothing to us and be of no benefit to us. Why? It’s

like a story I shared with our confirmation class. Suppose someone put a million dollars in a bank account with your name on it. You'd be rich, right? Sort of.

The money would be there, but if no one told you, it would be of no benefit to you. You would be ignorant of the money there for you. And if someone told you about it but you didn't believe it, it would be nothing to you. You would think it was a foolish story which you would refuse to believe. You would die in poverty even though there was a million dollars there for you.

On Easter, God essentially put a "million bucks" in a spiritual bank account with your name on it: full forgiveness for all of your sins because of the shed blood of Jesus, a new life in Christ, deliverance from all evil and salvation for all eternity in heaven. You are spiritually rich, right? Sort of.

The blessings are there for you, but if no one told you, they would be of no benefit to you. There's no way you could know of these blessings on your own. The Word of God says, of our natural spiritual condition, "You were dead in your transgressions and sins." (Eph. 2:1) Dead men and women know nothing and can find out nothing on their own.

Even if someone told you about, but you didn't believe it, it would be nothing to you. Because of your sinful nature, that is your default position: doubt and disbelief. The Bible is quite clear about this. It says, "The sinful mind is hostile to God." (Rom. 8:7) And "the man without the Spirit does not accept that things that came from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them because they are spiritually discerned." (1 Cor. 2:14)

Fortunately, there is someone working behind the scenes to connect what God the Father has done through Jesus Christ with humanity who needs what Jesus won on the cross and which God the Father guaranteed through the empty tomb. That worker behind the scenes is the Holy Spirit.

Some people might think this is disrespecting or belittling the Holy Spirit, making Him less than the Father and the Son in the Holy Trinity. But that's not true. The Holy Spirit is co-equal with the Father and the Son. But, unlike the Father and the Son, the Holy Spirit does His work behind the scenes. That is by His choice. He does not promote Himself and His power. The idea that He does comes from a movement in the Church which began about a century ago called Pentecostalism. It was popularized in the charismatic movement in the 1960's and 70's.

In our text, Jesus promises to send the Spirit of truth – the Holy Spirit. The work of the Spirit is not to speak of Himself or His own words. Jesus says, “He will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak and declare to you the things that are to come.” The Holy Spirit speaks the words of the Father which lead us who are like wandering travelers out of the Kingdom of Darkness into His marvelous light.

The disciples who heard these very words were not only led into the truth and led to believe that truth, but they were also inspired by that same Holy Spirit to write down that truth in the Holy Scriptures. We, twenty one centuries later, have been led by the Holy Spirit through the Holy Scriptures into the truth and led to believe that truth. We see and believe the truth of our sinfulness by the Law of God in Holy Scriptures. We also see and believe the truth of God's mercy and love by the Gospel – the Good News – of God in Holy Scriptures.

But the Holy Spirit not only guides us into all truth, but He also conveys to us the gifts God has for us by virtue of that truth. The Spirit does not point to Himself and call attention to His own work, but to Jesus and Jesus' work for us. Jesus says in our text that this is the Spirit's job. Jesus says, “[The Holy Spirit] will glorify me for he will take what is mine and declare it to you.”

We expect this to be done in some spectacular and mighty way. But that's not the Holy Spirit's style. He is quietly working behind the scenes to take what belongs to Jesus – forgiveness, faith, spiritual life, and salvation – and give them to us. He does this in such humble and plain ways that these ways are often unnoticed as too meaningless by the world and sometimes rejected as being too weak by some in the Church.

When God desires to bring us into relationship with Him by washing away our sins and creating faith in us, He does not direct us to a spectacular spiritual experience, but to simple and ordinary water. On Pentecost, when Peter powerfully preached the Word of God, the people wanted to know what was next. Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." (Acts 2:38) In water, the Holy Spirit works quietly and unnoticed to forgive sins and make faith.

To maintain that life born in the water of Holy Baptism, the Holy Spirit again works through very ordinary and unexciting means. In summarizing His Gospel, St. John writes, "These things are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." (John 20:31). Through words, written on paper, read aloud, and preached publicly, the Holy Spirit is working behind the scenes to strengthen faith and give life.

To get forgiveness and faith, you do not need powerful and extraordinary signs and wonders. You don't have to see the crucifixion of Christ or personally witness the resurrection of Jesus. If you are looking for strength for your faith and renewal of your life, you don't have to seek some great spiritual experience that gives you a spiritual high.

Simply be where the Holy Spirit is working behind the scenes through simple means to give you those things. Be at the font with ordinary water. Be at the table with ordinary bread and wine. Be before the lectern and the pulpit with ordinary words. There is nothing exciting

here which would attract the attention of the world. There is no spiritual ecstasy which some Christians think is necessary for things to be really true. There is just the Holy Spirit working quietly and unobserved to wash away sin, create faith, renew hope, give life, and assure salvation. Be where He is and where he has promised to work and you will have those things.

A great movie is composed of those whose work is seen by all – the actors, directors, and so on – as well as those whose work takes place behind the scenes and is seen by few – gaffers, key grips, and best boys. Both kinds of people are needed. Without the stars, there is no movie. Without those working behind the scenes, the movie is never seen. The same is true in our salvation. The Father and the Son work in ways that are seen plainly. The Holy Spirit works in ways that are not observable or often overlooked. Without the Father and the Son, there is no salvation. Without the Holy Spirit, the benefits of that salvation will not be received. Thanks be to God for that which is plainly seen. And thanks be to God for that which takes place behind the scenes. Amen.