

I AM WITH YOU– Sunday May 19th 2013.

“and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” – Matthew 28:20b

Beloved in the Lord,

If you are a Christian then you are never alone. Do you get that? If you have accepted Jesus into your heart as your personal Saviour then you are a child of God, and you are never alone.

The last recorded words of Jesus in Matthews Gospel are today’s text: ***“and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”*** Having said these words, Jesus was taken up to Heaven to be seated at the right hand of the Father. This somehow doesn’t seem to make a lot of sense. Jesus said I am with you always and then a few seconds later departed from them to be seated in Heaven. To understand this we need to read Jesus words from John’s Gospel:

“I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever;¹⁷ *that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you.*

¹⁸ “I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. ¹⁹ After a little while the world will no longer see Me, but you will see Me; because I live, you will live also.” (John 14:16-19)

But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you. “(John 16:7)

You see, Jesus is with us through The Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit was poured out on the Day of Pentecost, when 120 believers were gathered together in fellowship and prayer. There was a sound as of a mighty rushing wind, tongues of fire, and those who received the Holy Spirit began to speak in foreign languages they had never learned. They began to proclaim the mighty works of God. That day three thousand people repented of their sins and were baptised, and so the Christian Church was born.

From that day onward The Holy Spirit is here in this world. He dwells in the hearts of believers. He is everywhere where God’s Word is. The father of our Church, Martin Luther always stressed that the Holy Spirit works in, through and under the Word of God. Never in conflict with God’s Word.

So, through The Holy Spirit Jesus is truly with us, all of the time. Knowing that the Father was sending the Holy Spirit Jesus was able to promise: ***“lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”***

I would like to emphasise the word always. Underline it! Many people make a huge mistake in thinking that life can be divided into the spiritual and the physical. They have “Holy moments” but not a Holy life. When Jesus abides in our heart we are sanctified or set apart

and our whole life is to be holy, not just moments when we pray or worship God. Many people think in terms of Holy moments or holy hours. Once the Amen is said, the blessing is given, they walk out back to “normal life.” This is a wrong view of God. God is not a TV that we turn on and off. He doesn’t leave at the end of the service. He is with you when you are in Church, as you walk down the street, go to work, lie in your bed, sit on the beach or whatever you are doing.

This is spelt out for us by David in Psalm 139.

O Lord, You have searched me and known *me*.

²You know when I sit down and when I rise up;
You understand my thought from afar.

³You scrutinize my path and my lying down,
And are intimately acquainted with all my ways.

⁴Even before there is a word on my tongue,
Behold, O Lord, You know it all.

⁵You have enclosed me behind and before,
And laid Your hand upon me.

⁶*Such* knowledge is too wonderful for me;
It is *too* high, I cannot attain to it.

⁷Where can I go from Your Spirit?
Or where can I flee from Your presence?

⁸If I ascend to heaven, You are there;
If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, You are there.

⁹If I take the wings of the dawn,
If I dwell in the remotest part of the sea,

¹⁰Even there Your hand will lead me,
And Your right hand will lay hold of me.

¹¹If I say, “Surely the darkness will overwhelm me,
And the light around me will be night,”

¹²Even the darkness is not dark to You,
And the night is as bright as the day.

Darkness and light are alike *to You*. (Psalm 139:1-12)

Do you see? There is nowhere you can go where God isn’t present. You cannot find yourself in a place that He cannot reach, or where He is not.

I like verse 9 and 10: ⁹If I take the wings of the dawn,
If I dwell in the remotest part of the sea,

¹⁰Even there Your hand will lead me,
And Your right hand will lay hold of me.

Allow this truth to penetrate your heart. God is with you. He is with you everywhere, all the time. Nothing happens without His knowledge and ultimately His permission. If you can grasp this truth you can be completely free.

The Holy Spirit is our friend. He is our helper, our Comforter, our advocate. He is working to keep us in Jesus, to build up our faith and to ensure that our witness is true.

Never ever forget that we have a formidable enemy, - Satan. He works tirelessly to wreck our faith. He does all he can to trip us up and to draw us away from God. He is always tempting, whispering lies into our ears. He tries to cause us to doubt, to cause us to fear. He oppresses us at every chance. As I said he is formidable, but Jesus Christ is more powerful than him.

We read in 1 John 4:4: "You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world."

He who is in us (if we are Christians) is God the Holy Spirit, and he who is in the world is the devil. He who is in us is greater, more powerful than the devil in the world. This means that we need never fear. A word that occurs many times when God speaks is "Fear not" – "Do not be afraid." Jesus said: "Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me." (John 14:1)

If we comprehend the truth that Jesus is with us always, living in our hearts, then we should not make room for fear. We can be confident at all times, knowing that we are never alone.

This is where we must act in faith, and believe on His word. We cannot go by our feelings, because our feelings can deceive us.

Whether you feel Christ's presence or not, doesn't change the fact that He is present. He has promised it. There will be times when you feel His presence and those times are glorious, wonderful, but there will be times when you feel nothing, but the fact remains that He is there.

You must operate on His word and not on your feelings. Jesus said: "***lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.***"

Whether you feel it or not, it is true.

The Christian Church has gone through many difficulties and persecutions in its history, but it has stood until now and will stand till Jesus comes because Jesus said:

"I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it." (Matthew 16:18)

Jesus said that He is building His Church, and the gates of Hades cannot prevail against it. Sometimes it doesn't feel that way, sometimes it doesn't look that way, but Jesus said it and

that settles it. He doesn't change either His mind or His Word. We can be sure, that the Church born on the Day of Pentecost will stand until Jesus comes again.

Jesus said: "I am with you." I mentioned that The Holy Spirit works in and through and under God's Word. In order for us to be strong in our faith, we need to be strong in God's Word. There are so many promises, that can strengthen our faith. When we read God's Word, The Holy Spirit sinks them into our hearts and uses them to build our faith. Our understanding grows and with that so too our faith.

The early Church was strong, because it was strong in God's Word. Today many Churches are weak, because they are not rooted and fed and nurtured in God's Word. As we celebrate the Churches birthday let us make a commitment to be strong in God's Word. Let us be a congregation that knows what God says, believes it, and obeys Him. May we be a witness to the world, that Jesus truly lives and that He is amongst us, living in us. Where Jesus is, where the Holy Spirit abides, there the fruit of the Spirit is evident:

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control;". (Galatians 5:22-23.)

Amen.

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All Bible quotations taken from New American Standard Bible.