

Sermon Notes – May 25, 2025
The Holy Gospel of St. John 14: 23-29
Peace Lutheran Church
“God's Plan Surpasses Human Understanding”

Today's reading portrays God as one who guides us amid ambiguity, comforts our fearful hearts, and restores us with a word.

The Acts reading features Paul and his companions at an impasse regarding God's guidance. Paul receives a vision not without ambiguity, to which he and his companions conclude that “God had called us” (16: 10) to Macedonia. Ironically, although the vision features a man, the first Macedonian receptive to their message is a woman. Acts uses the distinctive language “worshiper of God” (or God-fearer, v. 14) to identify a Gentile who reveres Israel's God. The place of prayer suggests some Jewish and early Christian gatherings took place outdoors. Lydia shows more agency in the story than is often appreciated (“She urges us...She prevailed upon us,” v. 15). That she becomes a host to Paul and his companions is no small thing: in doing so, she becomes matriarch to the first church Paul established in what would become Europe.

The reading from Revelation depicts eternal life with God within a city lacking entrance barriers, whose glory and light are God and the Lamb. The absence of anything (and anyone) unclean or accursed indicates complete purity, intended to inspire and encourage ancient audiences - not threaten or condemn them. The river and tree of life imagery borrow heavily from Ezekiel 47, suggesting the fulfillment of biblical prophecy. Throughout the Old Testament, mortals cannot see God's face and live (Exodus 33: 20). At the end of all things, that impossibility becomes reality.

The reading from John 14 summarizes a great deal of Jesus' farewell discourse (13: 31-17: 26). Jesus depicts love as action (versus feeling), and more specifically it is the act of heeding His word. He emphasizes the coming of the Holy Spirit - the “Advocate” (Helper, Counselor, *Parakletos*) whose central task in John's gospel is to remind people of Jesus' teaching. Though He will depart, Jesus gives his followers a peace greater than the world can offer compare 20: 19, 26). This peace comforts and quells the fears of troubled, fearful hearts.

Like several other healings in John, the interaction in chapter 5 with a man who has paralysis, takes place in the shadow of a Jewish festival, suggesting Jesus' restorative power outshines that of mainstream religious rituals. Thirty-eight years is about the average lifespan of a peasant in Jesus' day, underscoring the miraculous nature of this healing. The man's verbal response suggests he

hears accusation and judgment in Jesus' initial question, most likely influenced by decades of moral and ethical judgments passed by others upon the man's condition. Most importantly, Jesus requires neither a good answer nor an explicit request from the man to heal. In the briefest words, Jesus makes the man "whole" (*hygies*). The language suggests the event's restoration is not merely physical, but also social, religious, and spiritual.