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Bethany Presbyterian Church

John 16:12-15

June 15, 2025 – Father’s Day

***John 16:12-15***

***12“I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now******. 13When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. 14He will glorify me because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. 15All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.***

***When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. 2And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. 3Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. 4All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.***

Trinity Sunday is about the three aspects of God, and their relationship to one another. It’s odd to name a whole Sunday with the name of a concept that is not actually in the Bible. The three aspects of God are in the Bible, but the theological implications and the meaning of the three together and as one, has been argued for centuries. In its current state, when we in the Church talk about the Trinity, we are saying that we believe God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit are the same. We can *distinguish* between the three, but we don’t *separate* the three. People are often drawn to an emphasis on one or the other though. For some, the Spirit is the most important of the three persons, because it is the name for God that feels the most relevant and present to them. For others, God is the most important because although the three persons of the Trinity are never ranked, it just feels like “God” is the highest, or the most important, or the name all others point to. And then for others, Jesus is their most comfortable name for God because Jesus was the real person, just like us, who we can most relate to, and is the reason for the faith tradition we are a part of.

Personally, at the moment, I am most comfortable using the word and name “God.” But when I went on a personal private retreat at the Mercy Center in Burlingame, I had a little practice focusing on Jesus. One option on such a retreat, is to meet with someone for Spiritual Direction once each day. Often I was asked, “Did you ask Jesus?” Not, “Did you pray about it?” or “Have you asked God?” but “Did you ask Jesus?” I found that a little awkward, and would spend my days walking or sitting, on occasion trying to sit and pretend that Jesus was sitting there next to me. It felt like I was dishonoring Jesus by playing make believe, because clearly, there was not a real person sitting next to me.

At the Mercy Center in Burlingame, the sparse private room one gets if they’re there for a private retreat, is just perfect. A small but sufficient bed, a chair and a small desk, a small closet, maybe a small sitting chair, and a small sink. The key word is small. One night, after I brushed my teeth in the small sink, probably with a small toothbrush, and got into the small bed and put my head on the small pillow, I considered praying to Jesus. “Oh that’s ridiculous!” I thought, as I shifted myself over to make room on the edge of the bed – just in case!

Last week we celebrated the arrival of the Holy Spirit with a narrative from the Book of Acts, describing the events themselves. This week, our narrative is taken from the Gospel of John which comes in a completely different setting. Here we get a description of the function of the Holy Spirit, which this gospel writer sometimes called the Advocate, and a much shorter description of the events themselves. With today’s text we have to back up just a bit, in order to remember more about how the Spirit is to function, and for whom.

Last week the narrative from Acts emphasized individual languages being spoken and understood by individuals, each in their own language. Today we are reminded that the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth, has been sent for the whole community. The setting for the text for today is the upper room, where the disciples were staying and having what would be Jesus’ last meal. During their time that night, Jesus told them many things. In what was called Jesus’ Farewell Discourse, the gospel of John gives us four full chapters of Jesus’ discussion with his disciples that night. When Jesus says, “I still have many things to say to you,” I imagine him pausing during this discourse thinking, “There is just so much to say! Which things are the most important? How will they understand all of this?” finally landing on “but you cannot bear them now.” When this night is over Jesus will have been arrested. How much of this will the disciples really remember or be able to take in?

“Throughout John, Jesus has been repeatedly telling the disciples of this departure and of the coming of the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, to be with them. While the fullness of the story of Jesus has not yet been realized, the disciples are consistently being told that the one they love is leaving. This text is not the first time they have heard this, yet each time has its own nuance and is Jesus’ attempt to prepare them for what is to come.”1 I love one commentator’s explanation of the Holy Spirit’s work: “The Spirit in John’s accounts is a wisdom, a guide, and a protector and defender who will journey with those Jesus has to leave behind.”1

If I were one of the disciples in that room, I would be devastated to hear once again that Jesus would be leaving us. Have you ever had someone with an important function in your life, leave? Maybe a long time doctor is retiring? Maybe a therapist who is leaving? Maybe a favorite mentor? Maybe they tried to comfort you by saying, “Even though it won’t be me, it will be great for you.” Well, when I’m in that position, I think, “No it won’t [be great]! It won’t be you!” Jesus addresses this anxiety preemptively when he says, “***13When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. 14He will glorify me because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. 15All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.”***

This replacement, this advocate, will not make up new teachings on its own. The Spirit will speak whatever it hears, from Jesus, who has everything God has. The Spirit will glorify Jesus by taking what Jesus has and telling us. And what Jesus has is everything that God has. This is the divinity of it all. The spirit coming after Jesus is gone is not like one human replacing another human. This is God sending the Son who sends the Spirit. The Spirit reminds the disciples, and reminds us that we are community beyond Jesus.

I imagine it is almost easier for you and I to understand the Spirit than it was for the apostles. They had to live through the astounding grief of losing their friend and leader, while also being privileged to live through the astounding resurrection. How they made sense of everything must have been a huge learning curve! What must it have felt like to feel the Spirit in the 1st century? It took about 70 years for anyone to even write the earliest gospel. You and I didn’t know Jesus personally so didn’t experience his death as a person the way we have experienced the death of others whom we love. We have only had to imagine it, the horrors diminished ever so slightly by over 2000 years of writing and study handed to those of us who live on this side of Easter.

As the church calendar now moves to what has been called “Ordinary” time, we recognize that the life of Christ, his death and resurrection, his ascension and gift of the Holy Spirit give to us a life that is anything *but* ordinary. Welcome to Extraordinary time!

Let us pray,

1<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/the-holy-trinity-3/commentary-on-john-1612-15-6>, Chelsea Brooke Yarborough

2 <https://cepreaching.org/commentary/2019-06-10/john-1612-15-2/>

Scott Hoeze

3 <https://cepreaching.org/commentary/2025-06-09/john-1612-15-4/>

Chelsey Harmon