

Ser20-23 "Jesus says, 'I Still Have Much to Say to You'" 6-7-20 tucc
Matthew 28:16-20 (and other texts quoted in this sermon)

You know, I think it's fairly easy to know what God thinks or says about some things. *"Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so."* *"Let Justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream"* (Amos 5:24). *"He has told you O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?"* (Micah 6:8). *"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called the children of God"* (Matt. 5:9). And from the mouth and pen of Paul in Romans 5, we hear these words: *"suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, a hope that we need more than ever in our lives.*

There's also the word we get from God that we are either not ready to hear or that we don't want to hear, not at least in the way God hopes. To reinforce this idea, be reminded of what Jesus says to the disciples in John's gospel, chapter 16, verses 12-15: *"I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, the Spirit will guide you..."* and then there is the great commandment *"To love God with all our Heart and soul...and to love your neighbor...to love our enemy, to do good, to lend, expecting nothing in return...to turn the other cheek..."* But to know that is one thing; and in all honesty, to do what we hear God calling us to do is another matter. And this can be hard to do.

And now in our text for today from the last five verses of the last chapter of the gospel of Matthew, we have the "great commission." In this Jesus says, *"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."* Jesus is saying a hard thing to the disciples but he is also saying he will be with us in the powerful spirit-filled way he is always with us. We are NOT left alone. But there are subjects on which we have no clear word from God in the Bible, or in the history of the Church. What color carpet did God want us to put in the Sanctuary? Is God in favor of the County's 2020 budget? How can you know which college God wants you to go to this Fall? What style of worship hymns do we sing? When we have no clear word from God from the past, how do we know what God wants now?

And then there are the tough questions we face today: What kind of ministry does God want us to have at Trinity Church? How do we conduct the ministries of the church in Coronavirus times? What does the church have to

say about racism and the continuing crisis of the murder of black men like George Floyd in Minnesota? How does the church become the kind of anti-racist church that Jesus practiced in his earthly ministry? When the nation is in crisis what does the church have to say? When our Black and Brown brothers and sisters are still denied the same rights, opportunities, safety, healthcare and the dignity and respect that we white folks enjoy, what does the church have to say? What do we as Christians say and do?

Others before us have wrestled with the fact that we cannot always see clearly what God wants for certain situations. John in his gospel struggled with this. During his lifetime, Jesus had been physically present with the disciples to guide them from day to day. If you had a question, you could just *"have a little talk with Jesus."* But Jesus had gone to be with God in 33, CE. John was writing about the year 90, CE. Jesus had been gone for almost 60 years. When Jesus was gone, where did John's church turn for help? And now that Jesus has been gone for almost 2,000 years, where do we turn for help?

The question was urgent for John because his church was in trouble. Christians were attacking each other. Bitterness. Tension. Animosity. But how should Christians relate to one another within and without the church in times of great crisis in 2020? Revelation did not end when Jesus went to be with God. And revelation has not ended. "Never place a period where God has placed a comma," in other words...Jesus still has things to say to the church which the church, in the past, was not ready to hear, and which the church may still not be ready to hear. But new circumstances become the Q-tips that clean our ears and prepare us to receive fresh truth. Neither the Bible, nor the history of the church, nor the latest pronouncement from our General Synod of the UCC is necessarily the last word. To rephrase a famous quote, "There is yet more light to break forth." Jesus may want to enlarge the church's understanding of God, or the Christian message and mission. Indeed, I believe he is trying to do that today.

So how did Jesus communicate with John's church? In chapter 16, Verse 13 we read: **"When the Spirit of truth comes, the Spirit will guide you into all the truth"**. When Jesus is gone, the Holy Spirit will speak with the church and will reveal the truth to the church. The Spirit will not speak on its own but will speak whatever the Spirit hears from Jesus who is now in the very presence of God. Not a bad source for determining the next steps we take.

Picture it this way: You have a big decision to make in your life; your family has a big decision to make; the Church faces a big decision, and so, we pray and we wait and anticipate that the Holy Spirit will guide us...send a fax from Jesus; or maybe an email or even a phone call in the night.

Indeed, how does the message get through? How does the message come into focus on the church's screen? The early church had an office called "prophet" for this, e.g., Micah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, etc. Oh, how we need a prophetic voice in these days.

But, how do we interpret what the prophet has to say? This is called interpretation. The church is to serve as a community of interpretation, a community that sorts out (through honest and respectful dialogue) what it believes to be God's purposes in the world, in our world, in our lives. We can easily assume that differences of interpretation will be a part of the church's life, and that the church will have to work them out.

Now, what are the criteria for our interpretation? On what does the church base its decisions? Let me suggest there are at least these two criteria: **First, does the message confess and honor the gospel of Jesus Christ?** Are your decisions and actions 'Gospel-based'? **Second, is the message a message of love?** The Holy Spirit leads people to confess Christ and to love one another in the same way that Jesus loves the world. Jesus gave himself for the world. Jesus reveals light, truth, freedom, abundant life. You can identify a message from the Holy Spirit when you hear those themes.

On many subjects, I am confident that God does not have a singular, driving will. I imagine God wants the sanctuary to be aesthetically pleasing so that we can truly worship God. But I would be surprised if God insists on green or teal or mauve. God wants our young people to grow intellectually, but I don't think God cares which college you go to, really.

But some issues are more charged. What criteria can we use then? The Methodists may just have an advantage on the rest of us. They speak of four sources of knowledge of God: The Bible, Tradition, Experience, and Reason. When these four agree then the church can be confident it hears the voice of the Holy Spirit. Indeed, we need to look again at the Bible and tradition to see if we have missed something that could cause us to hear the word of God afresh. We also need to stop and pray and listen and experience the presence and power of the spirit. To open ourselves, our hearts to the Spirit's voice of presence and reason rather the voice of false prophets. Even so, the United Methodist Church in the US and around the world, is struggling with whether it will be a church that offers the radical welcome of the gospel to all people, including those of the LGBTQ community.

As we seek to be the disciples of Jesus Christ—the disciples who make disciples in all the world--Jesus still has many things to say to us. I wish that we could always understand his messages with the clarity that is needed. But not to worry, "Jesus Loves You..." God's love for me, for you, for the world

transcends our interpretation of any fax or email we might receive from God. If we misinterpret, we can count on God's forgiveness. And we can count on God to keep working with us to help us receive as much of a message as we can bear (as much as we are capable of receiving). God is utterly inexhaustibility. God will never give up on us. And God will continue guiding us toward truth. Amen.