

Gospel - John 15: 26-17

Day of Pentecost

Sermon 5.23.21

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“When the Spirit of truth comes,” Jesus teaches, “**he will guide you into all truth.**”

Please picture with me the forty days of space between first Easter and the Ascension. Jesus appears in his physical body. He was dead; and now he shows himself still very much alive. He comes. He goes. He teaches. He fellowships over food and drink, bread and wine. He shows his wounds. Sometimes he appears to one, sometimes to three, sometimes to the Twelve, sometimes there are 120, once more than 500.

Their emotions, I would suppose, are all over the place. They are elated. They are full of wonder and doubt and confusion; they hold belief and also unbelief in tension with each other. They are attentive.

I think too about possible sadness and grief and sense of loss as Jesus tells them he is going away for a final time. They had lost him once to death; they were going to be losing him to heaven.

But the Gospel of Luke only reports their joy:

“While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven. And they worshiped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; and they were continually in the temple blessing God.” At least some of their joy, I think, has to do with the fact that they were gathered—all in one space, in company of each other, able to have human contact, able to share friendship and love.

What were they to do now—now that he was gone? He commanded them to wait:

“While staying with them, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father. ‘This,’ he said, ‘is what you have heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now’” (Acts 1:4-5).

It is a tough thing, I think, to be told to wait.

They knew that the promised Holy Spirit would be coming. But they didn’t know when and they didn’t know how. They didn’t know what it would feel like or be like. So what then was there for them to do? They could only just wait, like Jesus has said.

For us it is to wait till the pandemic is over. Wait till we get through Phase III. Wait till we get out of Phase III. Wait till we can get back to normal. Then, we think, our lives will be like they used to be. Then our church will be what it used to be, and maybe even better.

But like I said, waiting is hard. What did the 120 disciples of mixed gender do for all of those ten long days?—and they didn’t know that it was going to be just 10 days either.

In the book of I Samuel the prophet tells King Saul to wait for his arrival before he should commit to any military action.

But Saul grew impatient with waiting, disobeyed the prophet and took action anyway. As a result God removed him from his rulership and handed the monarchy over to a shepherd-boy named David, who belonged to a completely different tribe.

So the disciple could have said to each other, “We don’t want to end up like Saul; let’s wait for as long as it takes.”

But waiting can also feel like being put in a time-out. Waiting can feel like a form of punishment.

Incidentally, did you know that the word penitentiary was handed down to us by the Quakers in Philadelphia? It has to do with having to sit alone in a time-out space (a cell) in order to reflect and think about what you did wrong; it’s a place where you can learn to be penitent or repentant.

So I do wonder if the disciples in the upper room felt somewhat like they were all locked in together in a time-out.

For whatever reason this recalls to mind a particular defensive response practiced by my youngest daughter, Rebecca, when she was a little girl.

Whenever she would get in trouble with her parents, she would close her eyes and imagine she had entirely disappeared. Then she opened eyes and expected the world to have returned to being right and happy again.

Was this waiting period a time where some of Jesus’ followers found opportunity to blink, to reset and make the world right?

At any rate, while they were waiting, they had time on their hands, and it’s possible they discussed among themselves some of the more recent teachings of Jesus—like the Gospel reading for today; like the place where it says, “The Spirit will guide you into all truth.”

What kind of truth was Jesus talking about? I think that one thing he was speaking about was the truth of mission.

The four gospels each ends with its own statement of mission. The book of Acts begins with a statement of mission.

For example in Mark it says for them to “Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation. The one who believes and is baptized will be saved” (16:15-16).

In the book of Acts Jesus strongly promises, “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (1:8).

Under the auspices of the various Bible mission statements we, too, at St. David’s have crafted our own particular mission. We recited it earlier in our Liturgy of Welcome. It expresses our own guided truth, relative to ourselves in our setting or context. It says that ours is to worship God. Ours is to nurture faith in each other. And ours is to be an expression of Christ’s love to the world.

What remains are the intentional, creative and innovative ways in which we practice our ideals in our neighborhood and in the wider community and region.

We have a wonderful history about our church written by Norm Eveleth, but what is missing from its pages is what we are yet to become. Our story is still being written. If you are like me, you have a strong sense of wonder and curiosity about how this will unfold.

What remains to be seen is how we will fill the rooms of this facility with people of all walks and ages with worship and loving activities. What remains to be seen is our impact in Shelton and Mason County for the years to come. What still remains to be seen is a fulfillment of many God-inspired dreams and intentions alive within us since our church was first founded.

It is important for us to be open; it is important to stay curious; it is important to have wonder. It's important to be intentional, keep on track, stay on mission.

It feels like in God's providence we find ourselves in a kind of in-between space like the first disciples. Our church building is open; but we wait for a day when the building can be filled to capacity. We are in a space of both "there" and "not yet."

Like the writer of I John teaches, "Beloved, we are God's child-rem now; what we will be has not yet been revealed" (3:2a).

So we wait. But it is an active kind of waiting.

While the disciples waited, in singled mindedness and one accord they set their intention to do one thing, take one simple step in the direction of their given mission. They chose from among themselves one faithful follower to fill the apostolic vacancy left open by Judas Iscariot. The lot fell to Matthis.

While we wait then we can do at least one positive thing that moves us forward in the right direction. We can set our intention and take a single step, one that makes sense. We can plan; we can prepare.

I have read you this quote before. It is worth repeating. (And that is what preachers do; they repeat.)

The quotation is from W. H. Murray in his book, *The Scottish Himalayan Expedition* (1951):

Until one is committed there is hesitancy, the chance to draw back, always ineffectiveness. Concerning all acts of initiative (and creation), there is one elementary truth, the ignorance of which kills countless ideas and splendid plans: that the moment one definitely commits oneself, then Providence moves too. All sorts of things occur to help one that would never otherwise have occurred. A whole stream of events issues from the decision, raising in one's favour all manner of unforeseen incidents and meetings and material assistance, which no man could have dreamt would have come his way. I have learned a deep respect for one of Goethe's couplets:

*Whatever you can do, or dream you can, begin it.
Boldness has genius, power, and magic in it.*

In these ways we can and should lean into God's Spirit, our guide to truth, and make much of our waiting experience.

The psalmist also instructs us to:

Wait for the LORD;

*be strong, and let your heart take courage;
wait, I say, for the LORD! (27:14).*

May our waiting, may our present in-between space, not be discouraging or long.

May our hearts be merry simply because we can gather again Christian siblings and friends.

May we be energized by making some definite plans for the future of St. David.

May the soon coming of the Holy Spirit to help us be strong.

Amen.