

May 17, 2020

## John 13:15-21 “Hope Isn’t Wishful Thinking”

We are in a Shift. “Is that the way you’re going to start every sermon now Jesse?” Yes. Because we *are* in a Shift. And I believe that we as God’s people and as Ambassadors for Christ in this world, have a big role to play in this Shift. But we’ve got to re-claim Jesus’ values to do this. Many Christian leaders, including myself, think we’ve lost our way in this matter. We’ve let the kingdoms of the world be in the driver’s seat for too long. The Kingdom of God is at hand, and we need to be ready for our “Jesus to take the wheel” moment to quote Carrie Underwood.

Two weeks ago, we started this series out by saying that we need to re-claim Jesus’ practice of inclusivity. Last week we talked about how we need to not let fear dictate our actions. **What I want to re-claim this week is our need to recognize the work and direction of the Holy Spirit.** This isn’t easy because for the most part, the church doesn’t know what to do with the Holy Spirit. Oh sure we do pastor! We talk about the Holy Spirit all the time. Yeah, but do we really *understand* the Holy Spirit? We’ve got a pretty firm grasp of the work of God the Father. We spend a lot of time studying the work of Jesus the Son. But the Holy Spirit? Clueless. Don’t believe me?

If you all had hymnals, I’d tell you to turn to #50, the doxology that we most often sing after offering is taken. “Praise God from whom all blessings flow! Praise God all creatures here below. Alleluia! Alleluia! Praise God the source of all our gifts. Praise Jesus Christ whose power uplifts.” Now let’s take a break here and take a look at the impact of these words. Remember, we are all about the work of God the Father and Jesus the Christ. And you can feel it in the words of this song: “Praise God … the source of all our gifts.” Amen! Praise God the maker of the heavens and the earth, of all things seen and unseen. Everything that is created is a valuable gift. God … is … great! And Jesus! How about this one? “Praise Jesus Christ whose power uplifts!”

Indeed. We are an Easter people, and we believe that through Christ we have conquered the power and hold of death. Through Jesus we are uplifted into new life! And again I say, “Amen!” But what about the Holy Spirit? Here’s what the song says, “Praise the Spirt, Holy Spirit! Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!” What in the world does that even mean?! It’s like someone who forgets the words of a song or who doesn’t quite know what to say. Like a person who runs into an essay question on a quiz that they don’t know how to answer. “Praise God the source of all our gifts! Praise Jesus Christ whose power uplifts! Praise the Spirit ... ummm ... Holy Spirit? Yay Spirit! Whatever that is?”

Come on! Let’s lay claim to the work of the Holy Spirit! Let’s praise the Spirit for what the Spirit is! Let’s thank God for the Gospel of John who gives us a picture of the Holy Spirit that the other Gospels do not. The Holy Spirit is the *Advocate*! That’s “paraclete” in Greek for those who are a part of our John Tradition Bible Study. It’s a word that’s used in ancient court rooms to mean a counselor, a helper, and a companion. The Holy Spirit unites us and connects us and comforts us in times when we’re feeling disconnected and apart. I don’t know about you, but I think there’s a lot of folks right now who are feeling disconnected and apart. And yet the Spirit keeps us united and connected. How do I know this? Because you are in church this morning. And I might add there are *more* of you in church here in Zoom Land and FaceBook Live Land than there typically is in the sanctuary or the chapel on any given Sunday morning. You could be watching Netflix, you could be doing a puzzle, you could be working in your garden, you could be knitting prayer shawls, you could be out in the shop working on a home improvement project, but you ... are ... here. But not really. I am here. You are there. But we are together. Because the Holy Spirit unites and connects us. And yet, in our doxology, the only thing we can say about the Holy Spirit is that it’s the ... Holy ... Spirit.

The passage Mary read this morning is called the “Farewell Discourse” in my Bible, and it’s only found in John’s Gospel. Jesus was telling his disciples, “Very soon, I’m not going to be physically present with you

anymore, but don't let that get you down. I'm not going to leave you orphaned. I'll ask the Father to give you a gift. And that gift is the Holy Spirit, the advocate, the counselor, the companion. And that Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Truth that the world can't even see, but you will see because that Spirit is going to dwell *inside* you. You do not have to go through this life alone." A timely message for those of us feeling alone right now. Even when we're sheltered in place and feeling disconnected, we are connected. But it's not Zoom or FaceBook Live that connects us. It's much deeper than technology. It is the Spirit that connects us.

When you think about it, what this whole farewell discourse is about is Jesus preparing the disciples for what happens when he's no longer there. He's saying these things knowing he's going to die. He's saying these things to communicate to his disciples that there is no going back to the way things were during the last three years of his earthly ministry. There's no going back to "normal." All the things they'd been through ... all the traveling and healing and teaching and everything that they did together? It is coming to an end. No going back to the way things were. There is only moving forward. There is only living into what this new season is. These are words of encouragement - Even though things seem daunting, scary, frightening ... whatever. The message is: You are not alone. The spirit of God is with you. God will love you.

Maybe I should back up here and say that Jesus' words were not only words of encouragement, but of inspiration. Because think about that word, "inspiration." What's the root word there? Spirit! Inspiration literally means to be infused with the spirit. When I hear the word "inspiration" I associate it with creativity. We say, "Oh, that's an inspired work of art. That's an inspired song. That's an inspired speech." And here we are, like Jesus' disciples, in a situation where there's no going back to the way things were. There's no going back to "normal." That's exactly what the people who lost their homes in the Camp Fire felt. "Normal" became a thing of the past. Then 16 months later, they get hit with another bombshell when COVID-19 came along and they were told to "shelter in place." Some of them are still

struggling to find shelter! And we are *all* feeling this. What is the new “normal?” And yet, the Spirit is among us inspiring us with creativity in order to fulfill our needs. We have a need to love and to be loved. We have a need to belong. We have a need for friendships. We have a need to connect at deeper levels than “find water, find food, find shelter, find clothing and protection.” For the most part, we’re higher up the pyramid than those basic needs.

Consider what the Holy Spirit has inspired us to do. We’ve found ways to connect for worship. We’ve found a way to gather for Bible study and to check in with each other and fill each other in about what’s going on in our lives and express our needs. We’ve found a way to continue to carry out the visible ministry and witness of First Christian Church in our community. People have figured out creative ways to stay connected like celebrating birthdays with “Drive-by Birthday Parades.” People are having parking lot Drive-In movies. They’re playing virtual board games or having game nights via Zoom. In cities where people live in apartments or condos, they’re having musical jam sessions on balconies and fire escapes. This is inspiration.

And even when we are able to start moving about more freely in the world again, we’re going to have to continue practicing that creativity because, again, we’ve got to deal with this new “normal.” I learned something very sad this past week. There was this big teleconference gathering with medical professionals and church leaders who were strategizing about what worship services and other gatherings are going to look like for a while. I learned that the worst thing you can do to spread a virus in a church is corporate singing. Think about it … you’re standing in rows of people, and let’s be real, older people who are more vulnerable to illness … heads up and projecting your voice forward from your core. Early on in this crisis, I read about a big outbreak in a church up in Washington State that was traced to a choir practice where people were observing a reasonable amount of social distancing, but still caught the virus. I thought, “Church without singing?! No way!” Another subject that came up in the conference was how bad pews are for

spreading germs. You're close together and you have to slide in and out of them and touch the back of the pew in front of you to navigate in and out. Don't even get me started on communion.

But I was thinking about what we can do here at FCC to make things safe. Who says we have to meet in the sanctuary? Why not K-Hall? We can place chairs in a way that we can keep a safe distance and not have to touch anyone else's chairs. A friend from St. John's Episcopal Church said, "Hey, those mega-churches in Southern California have had Drive-In churches for years! Why not try that?" See, the possibilities are endless. Want to see something cool? "Communion ready to serve." It's a wafer and juice all packaged up in one neat little individual serving container. Like a lunchable, or one of those old "Cheese and Cracker" snacks. There was an AME church in Lynchburg, Virginia that provided these. I sort of low-key judged them for using them, but now I think that's about the safest way we can do it. I made an executive decision the other day and had Briony order a couple of cases because I want to be ready when we get the okay! These are exciting times. Inspiring times. We get to forge ahead empowered and inspired by the Holy Spirit to make new paths and new opportunities for ministry.

Here's what I need from you. In the coming week, I want you to ask yourself, "How is the Spirit alive in me now? How has God been my companion, my advocate and my counselor through this difficult season in our lives?" Then pray and ask how the Spirit has or can inspire you with ways in which to do ministry in a post-COVID 19 world. Then I want you to let me know. If you're a FaceBook live person, leave a post or a comment on this week's service, or send an e-mail or call me. If you're a Zoom person, come to the Tuesday check-in at 1:00 and share your ideas and vision. Or contact me privately. I'm interested and excited about hearing how you are recognizing and re-claiming the Holy Spirit in your life!