

TRUSTING AND KEEPING
John 14:15-21
Preached by Dr. Cahill
Babcock Presbyterian Church
Sunday, May 25, 2014

In just a few weeks we celebrate Pentecost, the day God finally sent his Holy Spirit to empower the disciples to be the Body of Christ, to continue what Jesus started by being his presence in the world.

In Acts we read right after the Holy Spirit visited the disciples, they spilled out from the Upper Room and into the streets of Jerusalem, to boldly proclaimed the Gospel of Christ, and as a result on that day three thousand people were converted to Christ and baptized.

Luke continued, “Awe and wonder came upon everyone, because many signs and wonders were being done by the apostles... Day by day...they spent much time together in the temple...praising God and having the good will of the people.” (Acts 2:43; 46-47)

You already know as our culture is becoming more secularized fewer people are being added to the Church so we long for the day when the Holy Spirit will again sweep through entire populations and duplicate that revival experienced on that first Day of Pentecost. The question is, how long will we have to wait?

I’ve mentioned this several times before, many prognosticators are wondering if the Church is entering in a time of transition as momentous as the Great Reformation five hundred years ago. The Protestant Reformation, started by Martin Luther in 1517, saw the establishment of what we call the Protestant denominations which includes the Presbyterians, Lutherans and Baptists to name a few. It’s interesting to point out the rise of these denominations corresponded with what historians call the Age of Reason or the Modern Era. These same prognosticators agree the Modern Era is over and the Post Modern Era is dawning. Is it possible denominationalism, as we’ve known it for the past 500 years is dying with the Modern Era causing denominationalism in general and Presbyterianism in particular to go the way of the horse and buggy?

If this is true, you can look at the coming changes in one of two ways: either we view our current situation as the end of life as we know it with despair or we can be hopeful and excited as we wait to see what God is doing behind the scenes to birth something brand new.

Look at it this way. Maybe we’re now at the place the disciples found themselves when they were together with Jesus that last time in the Upper Room. In chapters 13 through 17 John records Jesus’ final instructions before his crucifixion. Much of what Jesus said to the disciples probably didn’t make much sense because they hadn’t yet experienced Easter and Pentecost. Later they would understand, but on that night in the

Upper Room the longer Jesus spoke the more confused and fearful they became. Jesus saw it in their faces. That's why he said, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, trust also in me."

In any uncertain time, in your family life, your career, your health, that's when the Holy Spirit encourages you to listen to Jesus saying to you, "Do not let your heart be troubled. Trust in God, Trust in me." Especially when you find yourself walking deeper into the valley, don't be afraid. The Lord is with you. God will never abandon you. That's a promise.

But we also have promises to keep especially our promise to be obedient. "If you love me you will keep my commandments." The key word here is "my."

The Ten Commandments are still operative, but didn't Jesus sum up all the commandments into one simple package? "...love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength; then love others as you love yourself."

"If you love me you will keep my commandments." When you commit to Jesus you have a promise to keep. You obey Christ by obeying your thirst and hunger for God. When God created us we were created to be thirsty and hungry for God so only God can satisfy our hunger and quench our thirst. And Jesus came to tell us we can only overcome our desire to only satisfy ourselves by being Christ-like. That happens when you allow Christ to live in you so he can live through you. When you are in Christ you know you are responsible to love the poor, social outcasts, sinners, even people you don't like. So, Jesus is basically saying, "If you love me, prove it by the way you respond to me through the people around you."

You're thinking, "Keeping Jesus' commandment to love God, my neighbor and myself, that's a tall order. I sometimes have a hard time loving myself, how can I possibly love if my love is imperfect and conditional?"

Jesus doesn't leave us hanging. He makes us another promise. "I shall ask the Father and he shall give you another Advocate to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of Truth whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him because he abides in you and he will be among you."

This mysterious Advocate is Jesus' coequal partner, the Holy Spirit.

The Greek word John uses for Advocate has several meanings. Advocate can refer to a defense attorney who pleads your case in a courtroom. It can also mean a Comforter, a kind and gentle presence who gives you wisdom and courage in crisis situations and also empowers you to face adversity as well as consoling you when you grieve. The Advocate helps you to be your best when you have nothing left to give. Above all, the Advocate is someone who will help you when no one else can.

That's what's so amazing about God's love. Whenever God gives us a job to do God shows up to help us complete what must be done. God makes the impossible possible because you're allowing yourself to enter into the mystery of the presence of the living God.

But then Jesus went on to identify this Advocate. "This is the Spirit of Truth, whom the world cannot receive because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him because he abides with you and he will be among you."

Your first reaction to this new information may be, "Great. I'm privileged. I'm on the inside of something that's huge. I'm one of the few on the 'need to know' list. That makes me special!"

But before congratulating yourself for being one of the chosen few consider the implications. Sometimes when you love Jesus and keep his commandments you'll find yourself on a collision course with the world which operates under a totally different set of rules. That's because the Spirit of Truth helps you see what the world doesn't want you to see, and as a result keeping Jesus' commandments can land you in hot water.

Notice Jesus called the Holy Spirit "the Spirit of Truth." The Greek word John used for truth is "reality." The Spirit helps you see beyond the lies and distortions that cover up the sins of the world. The Spirit then sets you free to tell the truth. And as you know, the Truth that sets you free sometimes hurts because the world goes on the offensive defending itself tooth and nail from being deconstructed especially when greedy and hateful special interests can only exist on the backs of its victims. Sometimes it's not fun being a Christian. It can be dangerous.

That's why Jesus makes another promise. "I will not leave you orphaned." Orphans have it rough, not having parents to love and protect them. Not having parents means not having an identity. Orphans have no sense of belonging or security. They feel lost and floating.

"I will not leave you orphaned." This is a promise you can bet your life on. You have a Father in heaven and a brother in Jesus and an advocate in the Holy Spirit who loves and keeps you from being overcome by evil. You have an identity; again, you are a child of God, a friend of Christ and a ward of the Holy Spirit. You belong to God's family because you have been found and are being transformed. That's what empowers you to stand up to anything the world throws at you because God lives in you and stands with you.

I began the sermon wondering if the Church in America is going through a time of radical transition. The world is changing. We're not in Kansas anymore. At the same time each one of us experiences our own personal times of transition, uncertain, scary times that leave us wanting to know how it's all going to turn out.

Two things to remember to keep your spirits up and hopeful:

- 1) “Let not your hearts be troubled, you believe in God, believe also in me.”
- 2) “If you love me, keep my commandments.”

As a congregation and as individuals, sooner than later you and I will face the challenge to keep our promise to obey your hunger and thirst for Christ and his Kingdom by taking a stand for what’s right and good even though in the short run it will cost you something but in the long run you’ll gain everything that matters and by that I mean your self-respect and ultimately your eternal soul.

All the more reason for us to encourage one another, pray for one another and support one another, trusting God is emerging from what once was and making all things new. So trust in God, love like Jesus, and wait for Pentecost to happen all over again.