

“Speaking Truth”

Trinity Sunday: 22 May 2016

FUMC of Arlington, Texas

Preaching Text: John 16:12-15

Hear the day’s lesson:

12 “I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. 13 When 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. 14 He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. 15 All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you” (John 16:12-15).

How would you like it if the preacher began a sermon by saying the equivalent of what Jesus does when he addresses the disciples? Do you remember Jesus saying: “I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now.” In other words, “I want to tell you some things that are crucial to faith, but you are not able to understand such complicated notions that are over your head.” Most of us would say, to just about anyone except Jesus: “Oh yeah—well same to you!”

At the same time we should not fool ourselves—there is plenty about Jesus, the Bible, and theology that make us scratch our heads and wonder what in the world is going on. How can these things be? Could Jesus be right after all?

Today is Trinity Sunday. It is for this reason that this strange text from John’s Gospel is placed in our worship guide today. Our lesson is taken from a long section in John that is called the “Farwell Discourse.” Jesus’ his “farewell discourse” begins at John 13:31 and runs through 17:26. In the ancient world it was a customary literary practice to give a hero a chance to make a sort of good-bye speech to his or her followers.

For example, the book of Deuteronomy is Moses’ farewell speech to the Jews who must now go on into the Promised Land without him. Another example of a farewell speech would Paul’s speech to the Ephesian elders at Miletus in Acts 20. What many of these speeches—both biblical

and secular texts—have in common is that the hero predicts what may arise in the future. The predicted events may be perhaps evil portents or perhaps they include God’s care for the people. Consequently our lesson today is a mere four verses in the midst of more than four chapters of John’s Gospel. If it seems ripped from its context you may be correct—for it is!

We have this lesson because it is Trinity Sunday. According to our Presbyterian friends: “On Trinity Sunday we proclaim the mystery of our faith in the triune God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, One-in-Three and Three-in-One. The celebration of Trinity Sunday began among Western Christians in the 10th century and developed slowly until it was formally established on the Sunday after Pentecost by Pope John XXII (1316-1334).”

Therefore, it is nonetheless still perplexing when we read Jesus’ statement: “I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now.” We want to know then what are they? Tell us. Don’t leave us hanging. Inquiring minds want to know. Don’t you think we can take it.

Jesus told us that we are to be merciful, to be pure in heart, and to be peacemakers. Jesus also said “be not anxious.” Jesus also dipped back into the Hebrew Bible and reminded us that we are to love God and to love our neighbor. Jesus also told us some pretty difficult things as well such as, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me” (Mark 8:34). Who could forget the difficulty in the call to take up our cross daily? This is undeniably a hard saying. Jesus it seems told us quite a bit.

In this succinct segment from Jesus’ farewell speech/sermon Jesus does not tell us what the many things are, only that we are not going to be told. But then again . . . perhaps in the future we will be told. The Spirit of truth will tell us and guide us in all the things we need to know. And it is here in our text, out of context, that John offers us a portrait of the Trinity in its three persons. Jesus expresses himself, and speaks of the Spirit’s actions, and of the Father. Here is the conveniently located Trinity in our lesson today.

Do you need a difficult, challenging, thought-provoking doctrine of faith. The doctrine of

the Holy Trinity fills the bill. It is about as much heady doctrine as most Methodists can take. As Catherine Mowry LaCugna explains her book, *God For Us*, the Trinity is “ultimately a practical doctrine with radical consequences for Christian life . . . [it] is the specifically Christian way of speaking about God, [and] what it means to participate in the life of God through Jesus Christ in the Spirit” (San Francisco: Harper, 1991, no page cited).

Sometimes people ask me: “How do we to know God?” I suppose the best answer is that we know God because we have been introduced to Jesus. When Jesus prays part of “the High Priestly” prayer he prays: “you, Father, are in me and I am in you . . . so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them” (John 17:21, 23). This is what Jesus taught—“The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the Father who dwells in me does his works” (John 14:10). When Jesus speaks Jesus speaks the words of the Father, and the Spirit. The Parakeet “will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears” (John 16:13) from Jesus. The Father speaks to Jesus, who speaks to the Spirit, who will “guide you into all the truth” (John 16:13).

However confusing all of this is what is true and why we speak of the doctrine of the Holy Trinity is simply because we want to understand the relationship of the triune or three-fold God. This doctrine is all about relationship and indwelling of the three in one and one in three God we worship and adore. It is how God self-communicates to us and with us. The Trinity is our way of life made possible by God.

This has been a harrowing sermon—the material is difficult. So I want to end with some elementary illustrations that folks have used over the years to try to explain the Trinity. Often these stories appear in children’s messages.

“The doctrine of the Trinity is like an egg: three parts, one thing.” Ever heard that? How about this, “The doctrine of the Trinity is like a three leaf clover: three leaves, one clover.” Or how about THIS, “The doctrine of the Trinity is like water: three forms (ice, steam/gas, liquid) one substance.” But the greatest I ever heard was by a student in one of my classes. He said that



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he thought that the Trinity was like 3-in-1 shampoo: three activities, one substance.” You make the call. Amen!

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