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Sermon Introduction

I have chosen “Focus on Preaching” for this final project. My audience is Neighborhood Church in Rockville, MD, where I serve full time and preach once a month. Our congregation of around 125 people is ethnically and culturally diverse, with first generation immigrants from around 15 countries. This includes many people for whom English is not their first language. I try to keep cultural and linguistic differences in mind when preaching. Our people are all along the spectrum of spiritual backgrounds and theological training. We have people who are spiritual seekers who have not yet placed their faith in Jesus, all the way to people with seminary degrees. They have grown up with other religious traditions, no religious traditions, Christian traditions of the Christian and Missionary Alliance flavor (our denomination), and Christian traditions of other flavors. In light of COVID-19, our worship services have been livestream only for the last 21 weeks, and we are not meeting in person. Since we are streaming to open platforms (Facebook and YouTube), we really have no idea who else is watching, so it is all the more important to avoid “insider language” and to define terms, etc. The sermon portion of our service is geared toward adults and teens, although children may be listening in (children also have their own sermon within the same service).

I chose John 16:5-15 for a couple of reasons. First, I was always confused by and misunderstood John 16:8, and Klink’s commentary enlightened me in a really meaningful way. Second, I find that in the Church, or at least in our local church,

we allude to the Holy Spirit but do very little teaching on Him, or practically what it means to “walk the Spirit,” or “stay in step with the Spirit.” I acknowledge that as one of the preachers at our church, I am partly responsible for that gap. I usually am assigned a text or topic when I preach, but I have some liberty for my next preaching date, September 6, 2020 and I plan to use the following, or a variation of it. The outcome that I am hoping for through this sermon is for people to recognize and cooperate with the work of the Holy Spirit. Specifically, I want our people to welcome the Spirit’s conviction, and welcome the Spirit’s guidance.

Sermon Manuscript: “Welcome the Holy Spirit”

Introduction

Good morning, Neighborhood Church. My name is Jen Ashby, and I’m on the staff here. I don’t know about you, but this whole COVID-19 thing has really cramped my style when it comes to hospitality. I love to welcome people into my home – creating the kind of physical space I hope my guests will find comfortable, preparing foods I hope they will enjoy, meeting them at the door with an embrace, and a “I’m so glad you’re here! Come in, relax, and stay a while.” And then settling in for an uninterrupted talk about whatever they want to talk about. I’m often changed and affected by those times together. I’m left with a challenge, or an insight. During COVID-19, I’ve found some creative ways to host people on the patio, socially distanced, and sometimes they bring their own snack, or even their own chair if that’s what makes them comfortable. We wear masks if that what makes them comfortable. And I’m grateful for the connections, but I’m really missing the practice of just throwing open the door and staying, “Come on in!” in a completely unhindered, no barriers way. In our text for today, John 16:3-15, Jesus is in His final conversations with His disciples before He is arrested, tried, and

crucified. And one of the things Jesus is telling His disciples is that after He goes away, someone else is coming, the Holy Spirit, and they are to welcome Him into their lives, welcome His work, and let His presence and work have its effect in their lives, effects like a challenge, or an insight. First...

Welcome the Spirit's Conviction

Let's begin with Jesus' words in John 16:5-11,

"Now I am going to him who sent me, yet none of you asks me, 'Where are you going?' Because I have said these things, you are filled with grief. But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. When he comes, **he will convict** the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment: in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me; in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; and in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned." (bold/ italics mine)

So, Jesus is going away, and sending "the Counselor." Based on what I've said so far, you know that is "the Holy Spirit," a member of the Holy Trinity, which is made up of God the Father, God the Son (Jesus), and God the Holy Spirit, but let's look more closely. The Greek phrase here is "the Paraclete." "Unless I go away, the Paraclete will not come to you." Commentator Edward Klink says that this phrase is difficult to translate and define. It *can* mean "counselor," as it is translated here in the New International Version, but it can also be translated comforter, advocate, helper, and the list goes on. Klink's view is that choosing only *one* of those English words as the translation oversimplifies the role and function of the Holy Spirit. He is and does all those things and more. And in these verses, Jesus is talking about the

Spirit's role in *conviction*: "When he comes, **he will convict** the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment." (bold/ italics mine) Jesus is speaking of the Spirit's role in the *world*. Jesus identifies people as either in the world, or in Him. The role of the Spirit with people in the world is to convict them of sin. This seems pretty straightforward: people must be brought to an awareness of their own sin before they realize that they need a savior, and turn to Jesus for that need. But the next part confused me for a long time. The Spirit convicts in terms of sin and righteousness and judgment. I understood that sin is bad. I thought that righteousness was good, and God had something to do with judgment. I understood why the Spirit would convict in regard to sin, but why would the Spirit convict in regard to righteousness and judgment? Klink shows us that this is that this is the *world's* sin, the *world's* righteousness (which is no righteousness at all), and the *world's* judgment (which is not a right judgment).

People who are in the world and not in Jesus can be so sure that they are right, so full of their own righteousness... but it's not a real righteousness. It's not the righteousness of God. And people who are in the world and not in Jesus make their own judgments all the time... but those are not the true, just, and merciful judgments of God. Jesus went away, and sent the Paraclete to minister to those in the world by convicting them of their sin - showing them their guilt; convicting them of their own righteousness - showing them that it's not righteousness at all; and convicting them of their own judgment - which is not true judgment. The conviction of the Spirit is a gift to the people *in* the world, because conviction can lead to confession, repentance, and new life *in* Jesus.

I don't know about you, but even though I am *in* Jesus, I still need this convicting work of the Spirit in my own life. I still sin. I still get overly confident in

my own righteousness. I am still quick to judge, and my judgments are not always the true, just, and merciful judgments of God. The good news is that while the Spirit does this work of conviction with those who are in the world, He continues this work of conviction with those who are in Jesus. We *have been* saved, we are no longer in the world, we are in Jesus. We are also *still being* saved, our transformation is ongoing. The conviction of the Spirit is also a gift to those in Jesus, because it leads to greater transformation in Jesus. So welcome the conviction of the Spirit. If you are not yet in Jesus, welcome the conviction that shows you your need for a Savior, and say that first “yes” to Jesus. If you already in Jesus, welcome the conviction that leads to confession, repentance, and more transformation in Jesus. Throw open the door of your life, welcome in the person and the work of the Spirit. Welcome the Spirit’s conviction.

Welcome the Spirit’s Guidance

Let’s continue in John 16:12-15,

“I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, **he will guide** you into all **truth**. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. **He will bring glory** to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you. All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you.” (bold/ italics mine)

Jesus makes a shift here from talking about the Spirit’s ministry primarily to people in the world, to the Spirit’s ministry to “you,” the disciples, the followers with whom He was talking. At this point in Jesus’s life, He has spent about three years with these disciples, and He has taught them quite a lot. But now He says there is

much more to say, but they can't absorb any more right now. Like a sponge that is already completely full of water, any more water put on that sponge would just be a waste of water. The sponge can't take any more in. And that was the disciples at that point: they could take in any more of what Jesus had to teach them. But in the goodness of Jesus, in the kindness of Jesus, He has provided for this limitation of the disciples, and this limitation of ours. And that provision is the Holy Spirit, who comes and guides believers into all truth, in the time and the way that we can absorb.

The guidance of the Spirit is like this (in other words, this is how you can recognize it): it is truth that complements, that fits with, the rest of the truth that the Father and Son have spoken. When you think you are hearing, sensing the guidance of the Holy Spirit, ask yourself, and perhaps another trusted Christian friend, "Does this line up with the truth of Scripture? Based on what we know about Jesus from Scripture, does this sound like something Jesus would say?" And the guidance of the Spirit is like this (in other words, this is another way that you can recognize it): it is truth that glorifies Jesus. When you think you are hearing, sensing the guidance of the Holy Spirit, ask yourself, and perhaps another trusted Christian friend, "Does this honor Jesus? Does this give credit to Jesus? Does this sound like something that would be said or done if His Lordship was being followed?"

Earlier this morning, I was praying and journaling. Recently I've thought that perhaps part of my assignment from God is to help bring change in our denomination in some particular ways. But I was wondering if that thought was just me, or if that was the Holy Spirit giving me some guidance. I do think that these changes fit with the truth of Scripture. I do think that these changes would glorify Jesus, and would point people to Him. I do have mature believers in my life who

have told me that they believe God has positioned me to be an influence in these areas. But I really want to be sure that I'm functioning out of the Spirit's guidance, and not my own thinking. So I wrote in my journal, "Lord, if this is of you, I'm asking you to confirm this to me somehow." I closed my journal. I opened my laptop.

There was an email waiting for me from a leader in the denomination, asking me to speak to other leaders in the denomination. When I put all of this together, I believe this is the Spirit's guidance.

The Spirit's guidance is a gift. His guidance is far superior to anyone else's guidance, even our own. Sometimes the Spirit does guide us through other people, but I'm saying when it's really the *Spirit's* guidance, that is so, so precious. The Spirit's conviction is a gift because it leads to a more transformed life in Jesus, and the Spirit's guidance is a gift because it leads to a more transformed life in Jesus. I would love for more of our conversations around Neighborhood Church to be around how we sense the Spirit may be guiding us, and how we are testing and discerning whether that's from Him. I believe He wants to guide us not only as individuals, but as a community. Let's throw open the doors of our lives, welcome in the person and the work of the Spirit. Welcome the Spirit's guidance.

Conclusion

When I say yes to inviting people over and welcoming them into my home, it means I've said no to some other things. I've made space in my calendar to for the preparations, the time itself, and the cleanup. I've invested energy into that rather than other things. In some cases, I've invested money in food or whatever rather than into other things. Even if people show up unexpectedly, I'm making a decision on the spot about putting other things down to be present with my guests. The same is true in terms of welcoming the Holy Spirit. It takes some time to sit (or

walk or drive or whatever) with Him. It takes some time for your soul to settle and the conversation with Him to unfold. Even if He shows up unexpectedly, not because you invited Him, but because He's just dropping in, you have a choice in that moment to put other things down and be present with Him. I'm reminded of a scene from another Gospel when it was Jesus who dropped by. Luke 10:38-42, "As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said... (And Jesus said,) 'Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.'" The Spirit wants to drop by, again and again. Let's open our home to Him, open our lives to Him, sit at His feet, and welcome His conviction and guidance.

Let's pray: God, thank you for the gift of Your Spirit, and for all the ways He is at work in our lives to convict, to guide, to counsel, to comfort, to advocate. Help us, God to recognize the presence of Your Spirit, to make space for Your Spirit, to discern what you are saying and doing by Your Spirit, and to cooperate with the work of Your Spirit in our lives. May we not be passive, but actively making ourselves available and open to Your Spirit. May our conversations be rich with discussion about what Your Spirit is doing. Amen.

Works Cited

Klink, Edward, *Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*. Zondervan 2016