

“Spiritual Guidance”
Acts 2:1-21; Romans 8:22-27;
John 15:26-27, 16:4b-15

May 20, 2018 – Pentecost Sunday
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How do you respond when somebody says, “May I help you with that?”

I think my first response is, “That’s fine. I’ve got it.”

Maybe it’s something about the way I grew up, the expectations I have about who I am and what I should do. Not to bother somebody else with helping me. I should be able to do it all on my own. It’s something that begins when we are young. I have an image of a two-year-old saying, “I can do it myself!” Even when we recognize that they need help doing it themselves, we try to help them in ways that encourage. Yet, there’s that sense of wanting to do it myself, not having anybody else have to do it for me.

There’s a story that I read this week about a man who was driving down a street in Philadelphia. He was on a city street with two lanes in each direction. He was going along at medium speed, but there was a delivery truck stopped in the right hand lane up ahead, and there were two cars ahead of him. The car in the left-hand lane sped up so that the car in the right-hand lane couldn’t get around the truck and had to stop. A little later he recognized that he was at a stop sign with the car that had sped up stopped next to him. The other guy’s window was down, so he rolled down his window and said, “I wondered why you did that.” They got into a conversation and the other guy said, “It’s my lane. It belongs to me when I’m in it and I don’t want anybody else in it.”

That was an interesting response. There’s something about that attitude that I can relate to—it’s my lane. It is said by some that rugged individualism is like the thumbprint of who we are. It’s in our identity. That story gives an interesting perspective on that idea of individualism. As we are going down our lanes in life, should nobody ever cross into our lane? Should we have it all clear, all to ourselves? Is it always going to be that way? *Can* it be that way?

There are some folks that I’ve mentioned before, Brené Brown and John Caccioppo, who have studied the sense of disconnection and loneliness that comes with our individualism. They remind us that those disconnections and that loneliness causes real problems. It causes problems with who we are and can even cause physical problems in our lives. As we find ourselves wanting to be in a lane by ourselves, we might recognize that it’s not always smooth sailing in our own lane.

I love those great pictures of people climbing rocks and doing what seems impossible. But that’s just one snapshot of somebody taken at the right moment. Probably they have climbed hundreds of times and many times have lost their grip and were kept from falling by a rope. You don’t often see pictures of climbers falling, but I think life is a lot more like that than it is of all those great pictures of successful climbs. We have all had those great moments, but I’ll tell you what—I think life is a lot more full

of falls than it is of those great moments. Those moments of falling teach us. We can learn from them. One of the things I learn is that I'd better have a rope. I can't do it all on my own. I need help.

It's interesting in the scripture today, Jesus says, "I couldn't tell you everything because you weren't ready for it." Is there some limitation we have? Jesus is inviting us to recognize that as much as we want to have our own lane, as much as we might think we know where this lane is going, as much as we think we might know about the world, there are moments where we aren't ready for everything he has to teach us.

Paul, in Romans, suggests the Spirit is there for our weakness. He doesn't say, "for those people who are weak." He just assumes we're human. Didn't someone say that to err is human? We all have our weaknesses. We all will fail at things. We all will struggle with life. We all know some brokenness. So it's not that there won't be any of that, it's that in that moment we have one who comes to us, who is able to show us and give us guidance and move us in a different direction.

Jesus begins to talk about how he's going away and "I haven't been able to tell you everything because you weren't ready" because we have our limitations. He talks about this one that's coming—an Advocate—this one who will show us the way. Paul talks about it as the one who will guide us into truth. Jesus talks about it as the spirit of truth.

Let's go back for a second and think about that struggle we have with the idea that somebody might come and guide us. I ran across a cartoon of two people walking down the street and one of them says, "My desire to be well-informed is currently at odds with my desire to remain sane." What I'm getting at is that we all have perspectives. We all come at life thinking we know how this life goes along. Then we run into scripture that says we have a weakness. Or scripture invites us to recognize that there might be something else. Or we hit places in life, rough patches. We thought we had it figured out and all of a sudden life doesn't go quite the way we thought it was supposed to go. I hit those moments where I think "I know this," and suddenly I'm wrong and I can see it. How do I deal with that? That's something called cognitive dissonance. For most of us when we hit those moments, they are painful. We don't like them. We don't like a life that doesn't fit together. We struggle with seeing two different ways. We can choose to try to make things fit, whether they do or not, because it's uncomfortable when they don't. It's hard.

So that whole conversation about Jesus sending an Advocate, a Comforter, one who will guide us—I think there's a lot of hope in that because there's a hope that it will lead us through that dissonance. I don't think it's a matter of trying to paper it over and trying to say there aren't differences. It's learning to let go of thinking I know it all (which I continue to work on), and working through the pain. It's recognizing that if we trust, we can get through it and find our way to something new.

That's why I think it's very interesting that when the spirit comes on Pentecost, there's this description of fire over their heads. Fire is something that is always moving. If you ever sit and watch a campfire, it's always moving. It's constantly changing.

I don't know how many of you heard the sermon yesterday at the Royal Wedding, but Dr. Rev. Curry was talking about how much fire changed human beings and that we still use fire. We got here today because of fire (in our cars). We have lights because of fire. Fire is something that has this transformative, changing nature to it and so when we think about the Spirit coming, it's going to change things. He gives this quote from Isaiah about seeing visions and dreaming dreams, and even after that, the world gets hard, but through it we come because the Spirit will lead us and will guide us into all truth.

It think that's an incredible statement but I want to unpack it because I'm afraid if we just leave it at truth we will miss something. My image of truth is always a set of facts. It's interesting to me that the word for truth—*alethia* in Greek—means the opposite of illusion. It doesn't mean that we will have this knowledge, necessarily, but that we will recognize the truth. We will recognize what's real.

It feels to me that Jesus is inviting us to recognize that as we open our hearts and lives to the work of the Holy Spirit, life will come into focus. I think without the guidance that God gives us in the Holy Spirit, life is blurry. There might be bright flashes here and there. There might be moments that look clearer than others. But oftentimes those can take us off in directions that are not helpful. For me it's a continual remembering and opening to the work of the Holy Spirit, allowing the Spirit to give focus, to give guidance.

It is as we allow the Spirit to change our perspective, to work us through the dissonance that we feel, we begin to understand and to live out what it means to love God with our heart, mind, soul, and strength, and to love our neighbor as ourselves. It helps us begin to see the world the way it should be rather than the way it is. A world where kids can go to high school without worrying about being killed. A world where we can trust one another even when we disagree. A world where we look to each other's best interests rather than just our own. A world where it's not just my own lane, but a world where it's our lanes and we work together to make it all work. The Spirit helps us see, gives us new eyes, new hearts, new ways. God's ways. Good ways. Amen.