

TRUSTING AND KEEPING
John 14:15-21
Preached by Dr. Cahill
Babcock Presbyterian Church
Sunday, April 27, 2008

In just a few weeks we will celebrate Pentecost, the day God finally sent his Holy Spirit to empower the disciples to be the Church. (By the way the word Pentecost comes from the number 50; the Spirit came 50 days after Easter, the day of Christ's resurrection.)

In Acts we read right after the Holy Spirit empowered the disciples, they spilled out of the Upper Room, into the streets of Jerusalem, and boldly proclaimed the crucified Christ to the crowds. According to Luke, 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)

At a time when our culture is becoming more secularized and fewer people are being added to the Church both pastors and lay leaders are longing for the day when the Holy Spirit will once again sweep through entire populations and duplicate that tremendous revival experienced on that first Pentecost Sunday. The question is, how long will we have to wait?

After a lot of reading and conversations I am wondering if the Church is now living in a time of transition. The Protestant Reformation, started by Martin Luther in 1517, saw the establishment of what we call the Protestant denominations, 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. Most prognosticators today 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 times we find ourselves in one of two ways: either we view our current situation as the end of life as we know it and despair or we can be hopeful and excited as we wait to see what God is doing behind the scenes.

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 had yet to experience Easter and Pentecost. Later they would understand, but on that night 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."

Whenever you are in an uncertain time, in your family life, your career, your health, listen for Jesus saying to you, "Do not let your heart be troubled. Trust in God, Trust in me." Especially when you find yourself walking into the valley, be not afraid. The Lord is with you. God will never abandon you or His Church. That's a promise.

But we also have promises to keep. We must be obedient. “If you love me you will keep my commandments.” The key word here is “my,” “my commandments.”

Yes, 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 promises to keep. You obey Christ by obeying your call to discipleship. Jesus wants you to expand your desire to include people you either think are unworthy of your friendship or you ignore entirely. Now you are responsible to love the poor, social outcasts, sinners, even people you don't like. So, Jesus says, “If you love me, prove it.”

You're thinking, “How? That's a tall order keeping Jesus' commandment. I sometimes have a hard time loving myself, how can I possibly prove I love Jesus 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.”

Who is this mysterious Advocate only true believers can know? 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. An Advocate also protects you from adversity and consoles you when you grieve. An Advocate empowers you to be your best when you have nothing left to give. Above all, an Advocate is someone sent to help you when no one else can.

That's what's so amazing about God's love. Whenever he gives you a job to do he shows up to help you complete what must be done. God makes the impossible possible and if you love Jesus and keep his commandments, you can see it happen all the time.

But when Jesus cautioned, “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 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 you congratulate 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. Sometimes the Spirit of Truth makes you see what the world doesn't want you to see, and keeping Jesus' commandments lands you in very 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 hurts. That's when the world, the powers that be, goes on the offensive tooth and nail, to defend itself especially when the status quo of greedy

and hateful behavior and 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 either a mother or father to love and protect them. Not having parents means not having an identity. Orphans have no sense of belonging or security. They feel like they're 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 who will love and keep you from being overcome by evil. You have an identity; you are a child of God and a friend of Christ. You belong to God's family; you have been found and transformed. Therefore you can 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, when we face the unknown let's encourage one another, pray for one another and support one another, trusting God is emerging from what once was and making all things new. All God wants from us in return: To trust in God, love like Jesus, and wait for Pentecost to happen all over again.