

Sermon

Pentecost Sunday, May 23, 2021

The poor disciples – they're having a really hard time letting Jesus go. He has been the glue that has kept them together. He called them and has been their supporter, encourager, teacher, their cook and consoler; he has loved them through their bumbling attempts to share the truth that God's love. How do the disciples carry on with the kindness, healing, caring, forgiving, the everything that was Jesus? How will they find their way in the chaotic and dangerous world. What are we to do now? How can you leave us AGAIN? How are we going to survive?

Do we know chaos and fear? Are we very alone sometimes? Something akin to what the disciples were feeling? I think all of our answers would be "yes". In last week's sermon Pastor Hergy named many of the crises we live with today. Everything around us from households to community, country and globe, the very earth itself feels destabilized in a myriad of ways, tilting precipitously toward disaster. Where is the dependable, the safe, the supporting, traditional, the known..... Do we yearn for a more dependable time, a time that felt safer, a time when change didn't seem to be daily? Yes, I think we do.

Today, Pentecost, fifty days from Easter, fifty days of Christ risen, hallelujah! Jesus is with us! Fifty days of celebrating the hope and new life in Jesus, the Christ! This resurrected Christ has been front and centre, so

to speak. Now, in John's gospel Jesus is going away, to God from where he came, that is not consoling to the disciples. But says Jesus to them you will not be alone. The Spirit, or Paraclete which is Greek for Advocate, Guide, Counselor and Companion will be with them, will be their constant companion as they go forth into the community witnessing to the Truth, the Way of Jesus; "Love one another as I have loved you." (John 15:13). You have one another and the Spirit. In other words, Jesus says, you've got this my friends, I've got you covered! This Spirit though is like a shifting and wily wind. Listen, be attentive. It may not come from the direction or go where you think it should!

Jesus, in this text, emphasizes the roles of both Spirit and disciple as witnesses to testify about Jesus and make Jesus' message available anew in the world. But the Spirit and Jesus...and God, the Father are one. Specifically John wants to guard against any effort to detach the Spirit from Jesus.

What emerges is not a simple solution but a way of holding the tension between tradition and Spirit. When we think of tradition, we think of stability and continuity, we yearn for that. When we think of the Spirit, we remember that "the wind [Spirit] blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes" ([John 3:8](#)).

John recognizes and preserves the inevitable tension between continuity and innovation in any human community.

John's Jesus specifies that the Spirit "will guide you into all the truth." He also specifies that the Spirit "will take what is mine and declare it to you." From John's perspective, neither side is expendable. The Spirit will indeed

bring forth things that are new to us. Otherwise, there is no point in the phrase “guide you into.” At the same time, these new things will also prove to be very old things, for they are nothing more nor less than “what is mine.” They belonged to the Word of God before the creation, and they belong to the Incarnate word, Jesus—because they all cohere with God’s loving purpose toward the world.

In the very beginning God sent a wind or spirit across the chaos of dark waters – and creation was brought into being. In his baptism Jesus experienced the coming of the Spirit and embarked on his ministry and mission. Jesus tells his disciples you have one another and the Spirit, you know the Truth – you will be okay, I’ll be with you through this Spirit sent by God. The Spirit had gone before, since the beginning, was with the prophets, was present with Jesus and his followers in a time and place and the Spirit goes with us and beyond. We have each other and the Spirit. The Spirit is wily like the wind though. Is that why we are puzzled? We keep expecting it to show up in a way we like? Where is God in this chaos? Wind, it may be strong or gentle, blistering hot, freezing cold, quietly warming or cooling. The Spirit of God is among us, of that we can be sure.

Last Monday morning I was sitting in my chair looking out the front window toward the mountains and the sun was rising, lighting up the jumble of clouds across Howe Sound. It was beautiful and I was grateful. I had just finished reading the book Be Kind, Be Calm, Be Safe by Dr. Bonnie Henry and Lynn Henry, Dr. Henry’s sister and Publishing Director at Knopf

Canada. Here's what it's about – from the inside flap of the jacket; “Be Kind, Be Calm, Be Safe combines Lynn’s observations and knowledge of Bonnie’s personal and professional background with Bonnie’s recollections of how and why decisions were made to tell in a vivid way the dramatic tale of the four weeks (at the beginning of the pandemic) that changed all our lives.”

“(The book) is about communication leadership, and public trust; about the balance between politics and policy; and, at heart, about what and who we value, as individuals and a society.”

What struck me though was the humanity and compassion that is core to Dr. Henry. While very intelligent and knowledgeable in her field of public health including firsthand experience with SARS, N1H1 and the Ebola virus, she always recognizes that she’s taking care of people and helping them take care of themselves and each other.

In the epilogue Lynn Henry writes about her sister’s most famous catchphrase, be kind, be calm, be safe. Lynn was speaking with a journalist from The New York Times, who said, “I understand calm. I get safe. What surprises me is kind. Where does ‘kind’ come from? How did your sister come up with the idea of saying that?”

I quote Lynn from the book; “It had all started-unsurprisingly to me in hindsight, knowing Bonnie’s identification with, and concern over, the suffering of children and teenagers during the pandemic – with a question posed by a young reporter during a Vancouver town hall for school-aged children in early March. This boy told my sister that he’d witnessed some people mocking others who were wearing masks. Although he didn’t say

so, it was teasing that, in his community at that particular time, likely had a racial edge. What should he do? He'd asked.

Bonnie had acknowledged how difficult it must be to see and endure such acts. 'When people are afraid,' she explained in her most reassuring tone, 'when they're anxious, they don't know what to do with these emotions. So sometimes they lash out at others who they perceive as different, and they blame these other people. But the best thing to do is the opposite of that. Especially now. What we can do is try not to judge each other. We all need to be kind.'"

"...when Bonnie uttered the word 'kind' she meant something far removed from, for example the pop-culture talk-show conceit of showering strangers with unexpected largesse or self-promoting 'niceness.' I also knew that for her, any act of kindness was the opposite of random or whimsical. It wasn't sudden or fleeting but deliberate, consistent over time, a way of seeing and acknowledging the fellow human in front of you. In fact, *being* kind wasn't so much an act as a rather demanding practice."

And finally, I'd like to share from the end of her book; in a conversation with her sister who had returned to her home in Toronto, Bonnie saying to Lynn; "I believe we need hope, too' she said. 'For me, "be kind" fosters emotional well-being and gives people a sense of belonging; "be calm" is about mental well-being and gives meaning; and "be safe" is about physical well-being and gives us a sense of purpose.'

She paused, and I could hear her move to the fridge and pour a glass of something. Then her voice, measured and sure in my ear. 'But there's something else. The only thing that will get us through: something that

looks further ahead than being kind and calm and safe, further than the emotional, mental and physical. Something that looks beyond the now, and everything we're required to keep doing in this time. You can call it hope. Or faith. Whatever you name it, it has to do with the spirit. I wanted some words to say, Yes this is hard, and yes it's a long road – but it isn't forever. This time, too, will pass. That's why I came up with a fourth line to add sometimes—for the sake of hope. Be kind, be calm, be safe. And: It's *not* forever....but it is for now.”

For me the story from Dr. Bonnie Henry and her sister Lynn exemplifies the work of the Spirit among us today. I think if Jesus and Bonnie Henry were standing side by side and he heard her say to the people before her “Be kind, be calm, be safe – It's not forever...but it is for now.” Jesus would nod his head and say, “That's good Bonnie, I like it, very good. Thank you.”

Listen for the stories of kindness, healing, of hope, of new possibilities. Look around you and see kindnesses and caring in the people in our community, our country, our world. The challenges, changes, threats are with us and are strong, yes, but stronger still is the Spirit sent by God. We are not alone; we have one another and the Spirit. We, Jesus' disciples at Living Faith are freed to go and be disciples to our community, our world.

What we know is that the way things were before pandemic have passed away, traditions are changing (see our own church experience) how we do things in our lives are very different in so many ways. The Spirit, though is

our guide, our advocate and constant companion as we go through this time into the future, whatever that will look like.

When we are grounded in the Spirit, we can keep changing and being transformed. The prophets of old knew it; from the prophet Micah, “What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” Jesus taught and mentored to his disciples how to be in their time, they knew it, we know it too in our time, “Love one another as I have loved you.” He says to his anxious disciples, and to us; “You’ve got this my friends. You have one another and the Spirit, I am with you in the Spirit, you are not alone.”

Listen – listen, listen for the wind, feel the breeze on your face, look around; see the trees bending in your gardens and forests, see the wind tossed waves breaking on the shoreline. As surely as we hear, feel and see the effect of this wind, the very air that sustains us and blows so freely around us....likewise is the Spirit of God! Come Holy Spirit!

Amen

