

“The Spirit of Truth”

John 14: 15-21

This week, we are continuing to look at part of Jesus' Farewell Speech to his disciples. As we shared last week, the time when Jesus first shared these words with his disciples, it was before... before the Garden of Gethsemane, before the cross, before Easter morning. Now, looking back at these words, we are reading them through the lens of our encounters with the Risen Christ.

I have to tell you, this is one of my favorite texts from Scripture. The promise it holds brings me comfort when I don't know which way to go on my journey of faith. It reminds us that we are not alone. That as people of faith, we are surrounded by Jesus' presence, led by the Spirit of Truth, claimed and named by a God who loves us more than we can ever imagine. Very much like these words did for the disciples all those years ago.

Now, before we go any farther in this sermon, I need to admit that I struggled this week to connect to God's Spirit. I was stuck because I feel like over the last few weeks, I have been repeating myself. Since Easter, I have been saying, in some form or another that as ones who have experienced the Risen Christ, we are called to move beyond our fears, to find comfort in the promises of new life given to us by our God, that as people of faith, we are called to bring healing and

wholeness for all of God's children. And this week is no different. I'm standing in front of you with the same old same old.... "Share God's love; Welcome the Stranger; Do Justice work for and with all of God's creation.

This week, my frustration level reached an all-time high. I began to wonder why do people come back week after week to watch this online worship service, when it is the same old, same old. What more am I supposed to say? Yes, I know that there are 66 books in the Bible and an endless possibilities of sermons, but as someone who is way smarter than me once said, "The Bible can be summed up in just a few words: God loves you and so I do!"

I'll admit I'm preaching to the choir. We've heard it all before. We know what we are supposed to do. And if we are honest with ourselves, as Midway Christian Church, we are doing an okay job of living out our calling to become a people of Welcome. Right here, right now, as a community of faith, we could easily pat ourselves on the back, and think we've done all we need to do. After all, we really do have some amazing things going on around here even during this quarantine...Community Dinners, our care for God's creation through the work of our Green Chalice team, even our willingness to engage in difficult conversations while respecting each other's differences. All in all, I would say things are pretty good around here.

But as I've lived with this text this past week, becoming more and more stuck, wondering what more I could say about loving as God loves, I kept coming back to a very difficult and uncomfortable question. I found myself wondering... "Is this all there is or is something holding us, people who worship, people who have found their place in mission at Midway Christian, is there something holding us back from truly becoming the community of welcome God is calling us to be?"

Or let me say it this way... This week, I realized last week's video from our worship service reached over 600 people, most of whom I don't know, most of whom I will never meet.

As I thought about these nameless, faceless people, I wondered if they knew this community of faith even existed before this virtual church experience. My guess is probably not. For most of these nameless faceless people, Midway Christian Church is just a place they stumbled upon in the vast world of social media. That realization alone gave me a moment of pause. It hit me that if Midway Christian Church ceased to exist, some of these nameless and faceless people would probably not even notice.

Okay, let me stop right there. I'm not trying to depress everyone. But hear me out. As I always say, "There is hope to be found, especially when God's Spirit moves in and among us."

Now, back to my story.... As I thought about these nameless faceless people, the Spirit of Truth started to move. It made me take my own advice, my advice of thinking beyond the four walls of our building and actually seeing the presence of God at work in our midst. So I started to think not about me or us as a church but rather I thought about God's people, people within our community, people within our nation and our world. I wondered about their lives. I wondered how many of them were connected to any community of faith. I wondered about what hardships they may be facing in their lives. I began to wonder about how difficult the next few months may be for some of these families, for some of these children. I wondered about the ones who rely on free and reduced lunches so they won't go hungry, the ones who rely on Backpack Food programs so that their families can make ends meet month after month. I began to wonder about the long lines which we are seeing at various Food Banks around our country as more and more people file for unemployment. The Spirit of Truth began to move in and among my wonderings about the people who are responding to this new online virtual church experience.

As I thought about this new experience, I also began to wonder about the people in our own community... children who are at home all day because their moms and dads have to work with no one around to check in on them, to make sure that they were okay. I wondered about the ones who are older in our

community, the ones whose families live miles away, the ones who may not have someone to check in on them each day. I wondered about the ones in our community who desperately need someone in their lives to let them how loved they truly are. Who is that someone for these people? Could it be someone from our church?

This week, through the stirrings of the Spirit of Truth, I began to see not nameless and faceless people anymore. Rather, I began to imagine real life people in our community, people who now can be brought together by the vision and mission of Midway Christian Church. A connection of community shared because the people of this church take Jesus' mandate seriously, that mandate being... If you love me, show it by doing what I've told you.

Suddenly, the Spirit of Truth opened my eyes. I was able to see God at work in this world. In that moment, I knew why each and every week, I get up here and say the same old, same old. I do this, we do this because as ones who have experienced the love of God in our lives, we know that it is too good to keep to ourselves.

We tell ourselves the story of God's love and grace each week because the more our world is ruled by power and might, the more we know we are called to tell a different story, a story which reminds us, all of us, who we are, a story which

reminds us whose we are. Each and every week, we gather to tell a story of what is possible as ones who continue to strive to bring God's Kingdom into reality for this world. Each and every week, we hear about God's grace. We hear about God's love because the Spirit of Truth is reminding us our work as Jesus' disciples is not finished yet.

This is our starting point for the journey ahead. Looking back at the empty tomb, looking back at the Garden of Gethsemane, looking back at the cross, Jesus wants us to embrace a life changing love as we strive to live out our calling, not keeping it for ourselves, but now empowered to ask the very difficult and uncomfortable questions for the journey ahead, questions such as are we ready to be open to the challenge of sharing God's love and grace with a world that is hurting and broken? are we ready to embrace a world that would rather ignore the promise of comfort and hope than believe that God could actually care? As one who are now empowered by the Spirit of Truth to work for God's justice here on earth, are we ready to make the welcome wide for all of God's people?

I will tell you, that even as I ask these questions, I don't have all the answers. However what I do know is this... I have seen transformation happen because someone from this church offered a kind word, shared a bit of hope with others who were hurting and lost. What I do know is this... as the community of faith of Midway Christian Church, our work is not finished yet. We are still called

to think beyond our walls, called to care for those in our community. We are still called to work together to bring about God's Kingdom here on earth for all of God's people.

So I guess the real question is not what is holding us back but rather how do we continue building upon this mission of Welcome so that this community, so that this nation, so that this world will know about God's abundant grace and love? I don't know about you, but I am excited to see where the journey will lead. Amen.