

“The Spirit of Truth”

John 14: 15-24

This week, we are taking a look at part of Jesus' Farewell Speech to his disciples. At 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 God's Spirit. I was stuck because I feel like over the last few weeks, I have been repeating myself. Since Easter, we have been focusing on this now what question for us as disciples of Jesus. We know that we are disciples who have been called to go out into the world and share God's grace with all of God's children. I was feeling stuck this week because it hit me that I have

been saying the same thing over and over again. Since Easter, each and every week, 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 move beyond our four walls and go out in the world, bringing 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 wondering, why people come back week after week, when it is the same old, same old. What more was 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, we as Midway Christian Church 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...Community Dinners, Food for the Soul, 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...On Tuesday night, the backyard of the church was overrun with cub scouts and families, celebrating the end of their Scouting year. There were over 20 young boys running and playing in the church's playground. That number doesn't include all the siblings who tagged along that night. Honestly, I think there was close to 30 children running and playing in the church yard on Tuesday night, surrounded by their families, surrounded by their Scout leaders, celebrating all that they had done and achieved this year.

As I looked at their faces, I wondered if they knew this church even existed. Sure, they arrived on Tuesday nights to meet in the fellowship hall basement but did this group of families, of children know that this community of faith, this community that prays for them, that supports them financially, that welcomes them

in, did they know we even existed as a real, living part of the Body of Christ here on Earth? My guess is probably not. For most of them, Midway Christian Church is just a place where Cub Scouts is held each week. That realization alone gave me a moment of pause. It hit me that if Midway Christian Church ceased to exist, these families probably would not even notice. Instead, more than likely, they would be confused or worried over the inconvenience that now they would have to find a new place to gather for their Cub Scout meetings

Okay, let me stop right there. I'm not trying to depress everyone and yes, I know I am not making a very good case for Stewardship Sunday. But wait 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 looked at all these young children, looked around at these families, 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. I wondered about their lives. I wondered how many of them were connected to a 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 a few of these families, for a few of these children. Sure, I know that on the surface, it looked like

all these children want for nothing and for many of them that is probably true. But I wondered about the others...the others who rely on free and reduced lunch so they won't go hungry, the others who rely on the Backpack Food program so that their families can make ends meet month after month. The Spirit of Truth began to move in and among the group that night. And I began to wonder about the others...the other children who would be 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 others, hoping that they had someone, someone in their lives who would let them how loved they really are. Who was that someone for these people? Could it be someone from our church?

As my mind thought about these others in our community, I saw a mom's face. She was standing in the middle of this large crowd with her two sons. Fortunately, through my connection with the troop and through Mary Sayre, I knew a little bit about this mom's background. I know that she is a single mom, trying to make it on her own. I also noticed that her head was covered with a scarf, having lost her hair during the rounds of chemo she has been undergoing to fight breast cancer. I saw this woman, trying to be brave for her two sons, never letting them see her hurt, her pain as she has gone through this journey. And I thought to myself how tired she must be, tired of the treatments, tired of not being able to

taste anything, tired of trying to hold it together. I thought to myself, how alone she must be.

And boy was I wrong! I realized that I was only seeing part of her picture. That in fact, when I looked a little more closely, her face told a completely different story. Her face was filled with joy. Her face was filled with light. Her face was filled with love. This woman's face told a story of a person who knew she was surrounded by family and friends walking with her on this journey. Her face told the story of a woman who knew she was loved, who knew she had found support among these families, among this group of young boys connected through Cub Scout Troop 41. That night through the stirrings of the Spirit of Truth, I saw a woman whose face told a different story, a woman who knew she was not alone but rather supported and loved by a bunch of people, people who were once strangers but now had been brought together by a vision and mission of Midway Christian Church. A connection was made for this woman, for her sons, for these families all 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, we know we are called to tell a different story, a story that reminds us, all of us, who we are, 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.

As ones who have encountered the Risen Christ in our lives, we have a clear directive about how we are called to live and act as Jesus' disciples. Jesus tells his disciples, Jesus tells us "If you love me, show it by doing what I've told you". No ifs ands or buts. We know what we are supposed to do. There are no gray areas. We have been given Jesus' teachings to guide us and to lead us. We have been given Jesus' example of servant leadership to shape us and to direct us. We have been given the gift of God's grace and God's love to lead our actions and our deeds. There is nothing more we need to add. There is nothing more that we have to say. Our faith, our calling can be summed up in this beautifully composed verse, "If you love me, show it by doing what I've told you."

The Spirit of Truth is moving in and among us each and every day, calling us to open our eyes, showing us that this world, this world that is hurting and broken, showing us that this world needs a new story. We all need to be reminded that the greatest power in our world is not found through greed or might but rather, the greatest of these is love.

This is a different narrative from what the world is telling. God's story of love and grace is not one based on darkness and death. It is not one that is based on power and might. No, our story, our timeless, never changing story is based on the realization that we serve a God who is slow to anger, who is steadfast from generation to generation, and who loves us more than we could ever imagine.

As ones who have experienced this love in our lives, who have been transformed by this love, we are called to tell a different story....Because you see, this world does not understand this type of love. It is not a mushy romantic kind of love. It is not a love that anticipates rewards or expects something in return.

No, this love is grounds us as people of faith. It opens our eyes to the possibilities of new life. It is a love that transforms us into people of grace. Jesus showed this love each and every time he welcomed the stranger, each and every time, he worked for justice for all of God's people. Jesus showed this love every

time he broke bread with us and embraced us as his own. And now, looking back, we see that this love is too great of a gift to keep it just to ourselves.

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 this 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 that 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 that as the community of faith of Midway Christian Church, our work is not finished yet. We are still called to go out beyond these walls, called to go out into our community. We are still called to work together to bring about God's Kingdom here on earth for all of God's people. What I do know is that we have a story to tell, a story that reminds us who we are,

a story that reminds us whose we are, a story that has the power to change the narrative of this broken and hurting world.

So I guess the real question we should be asking ourselves is what is holding us back from living out this amazing life giving story as the people God created and calls us to be? I don't know about you, but I am excited to see where the journey will lead.

Pledge cards...