

Providence Presbyterian Church
Rev. Dr. David Pettit
June 12th, 2022
John 16: 12-15

I'd like to submit a change in sermon title. The new title would be: "When Three Years Isn't Enough." Perhaps a marginal improvement as far as titles go, but I'm thinking about all the things Jesus wishes he had time to say, or all the things that his followers just aren't ready to hear. Yes, he taught them a lot in those three years, modeled a lot. But, it appears Jesus still has things that they need to learn, but there isn't time. And I'm thinking about the things we are not able to hear or respond to sometimes. Have you ever been given good advice that you just weren't in a place to hear or accept? Have you ever looked back and seen differently what someone was trying to say back there? Have you wondered if you might have avoided a mistake or a little heartache if you had been able to listen at the time?

I remember in the year Holly and I got married, we were going through a number of changes. I had left my job in Binghamton, NY that April, and moved into the boiler room of our friends in Saranac Lake. I worked on maintenance staff at the Young Life camp where Holly was the office manager. In the course of that summer, we began making plans to take new Young Life jobs in the Hudson Valley that fall, shortly after our September wedding. I remember my friend, Kevin Cox, who was about 12 or so years my senior. He said to me, "don't do it. Just take a year or two to be married before you make big changes and take on upheaval." I respected Kevin a lot and would desire to take any advice he offered. But this was disruptive advice. We had plans already in the works. I couldn't make the mental or emotional redirection. So, aware that I was not listening to someone that I considered wise, we did not head his advice.

We managed alright as a couple in the years that followed. And we met some influential people that have shaped our persons and our journeys in those next few years. So, it is hard to rewrite history. But I remember reflecting on Kevin's advice in retrospect when we were dealing with many challenges in the first years of our marriage. We moved several times, dealt with financial challenges, family challenges, work challenges, and a lot of uncertainty. And I sometimes wondered, what if I was able to hear Kevin's advice at the time. What would life have looked like?

Well, again, rewriting history is messy business. But my point is that sometimes we are just not in a place to hear certain things, even if important or wise. Do you reflect back on seasons when you were not able to hear certain things? Is there

heartache or mistakes you could have avoided if you were able to hear certain advice? If you could have absorbed certain wisdom or confrontation even?

Jesus had spent three years with the disciples modeling, teaching, processing, giving them hands-on opportunities, trying to tell them of what was to come. And yet, despite all that, when his days with them were coming to a close and he was saying his last things for their benefit, he says this: “I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now.” There is wisdom in there. There is wisdom in there that a parent may occasionally have the restraint to employ - for sometimes you have things to say, but it is not the time. They cannot hear it. I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. It is too much. It is not the time.

In the verses surrounding our brief reading, Jesus seems to be talking about his coming death and resurrection. In verses 16-17, He says “A little while, and you will no longer see me, and again a little while, and you will see me.” And the disciples were confused and talking amongst themselves what Jesus meant, for they did not understand.

And while Jesus is preparing them for his death and resurrection in this section of John’s gospel, he also indicates that this will not all wrap up with the resurrection. In verse seven, he says, “Nevertheless I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.” Last Sunday was Pentecost, the Sunday when we celebrate that after Jesus ascended to Heaven, the Spirit descended upon the crowd of disciples and spoke the good news in each’s language, and each received the Spirit, and the church began to build with numbers and fervency.

“I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now.”¹³ When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come.” There was much to come, much that they could not understand or fathom at the time. So even though Jesus goes on to the father, the learning curve is not done. But he has taught and passed on what he could in the time allotted. And he must go on, but they are not done learning. They are not done being tested and stretched.

It is an interesting insight for us too in this season of Pentecost. Yes, we have been forgiven. You don’t have to keep trying to get God to love you or forgive you. That is sealed. It is true. It is done. And yet, God’s work is not done there. It is not done in us, not done working through us. There is much that we still need to learn.

There is much wisdom, there is much to sacrifice, many hard choices and lessons to come, but it is too much to absorb all at once. “There are many things I still have to say to you, but you cannot bear them now.” You are not in a place to hear them. Not in a place to respond to them. But the Advocate, the Spirit of Truth will lead you to what you need to know when the time comes.

That is the nice thing, that the work isn't over. God's guidance and leading and inspiration isn't over for us. If you missed important things in the three-year training practicum because you just weren't at a place to hear and respond, then you can still learn it. You haven't missed the window. Maybe you couldn't absorb it all at once. Nonetheless, God's work in you and for you continues through the Advocate teaching and leading us.

If that isn't good news, I don't know what is? I mean, who of gets it all the first time around? Who of us is able to be wise on the first go? It usually takes some real blunders to gain the wisdom and grace to learn and to grow and to be humble without it crushing us. Yeah, I don't know who gets it all right off, and if there is someone who did, I will try not to be jealous. The reality is, that for all that Jesus tried to teach and instill in his disciples, they had some real blunders. And unfortunate for them, some of those blunders got written down and replayed over and over for the last two thousand years. May the rest of us avoid that fate!

This all makes me want to speculate a little. Which of the disciples was Jesus looking at when he said these things? Knowing his disciples as he did, what did he see? Perhaps he knew where each would struggle and want to give up, when certain ones would question whether they belonged or were capable, or where others would be too confident and slow to listen and would learn the hard way. But knowing the care Jesus had for them, he seems confident that they are capable, that they will make it, they will learn what they need to, and that the Advocate, the Spirit, would guide them into all truth. There are many things they will have to learn, but it is not the time, for they could not bear it all at once.

It makes me wonder what we have not been able to hear yet, what we would not be able to bear if God laid out the future all at once for us. Yes, it stands to reason that if God did give it all to us at once, that there would be challenges and obstacles that, like the disciples, may make us want to give up. To give up hope. To give up the fight. To give up carrying on Christ's work and mission. To question our place in God's work and God's family, to question whether God still has work for us to do. Yes, it stands to reason that there have been things along the way that we have not been ready to hear or been able to bear.

And this all suggests to me that the journey is not done. The Spirit, our Advocate, is still at work in us to lead us in the path, to continue to instruct us in the things that Christ has wanted to teach us. So, it leads me to this question. What has Christ wanted to say to us that we have not been ready to hear yet?

What is it that the Spirit has to teach us if we were able to hear it? What calling, what wisdom, what lessons, what ministry opportunities lie before us, if the Advocate could help us hear and bear what God wants to do with us and through us?

In this season of Pentecost, as the Spirit descends on each of us, may we not just take it for granted, but rather as an invitation. An invitation for the Spirit of truth to continue to guide us into the truths we have not been ready to hear before. May we continue to grow into our identity as one loved by Christ, as one called by Christ. May we continue to grow, and may we gain the strength and wisdom to bear the things Christ has wanted to say, wanted to teach, wanted to instill, but it wasn't the time. Maybe in this season of Pentecost, it is time. Perhaps it is time to invite the Advocate to guide us, to ask the Spirit, what am I ready to hear now? What am I ready to learn now? What response is it time for me to take, now? What have you been trying to teach me that I have just not been able to hear?

God is with us through the Spirit, the Spirit indwelling us. The Spirit teaching us, and leading us into the truths of Christ, the truths we were not ready to hear then, but maybe.... Maybe now.

And all God's people said...

Amen.

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¹²“I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. ¹³ When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. ¹⁴ He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. ¹⁵ All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.