

Trinity Sunday (C)

Jn 16.12-15

In today's gospel lesson, Jesus makes several promises to his disciples. He promises them lives grounded in intimacy. He promises them lives shaped by wisdom and understanding. He promises them lives governed by meaning and purpose. And he promises them lives marked by glory and honor. And he makes those same promises to us. And he does all this in just four verses.

Let's look first at where in today's gospel Jesus makes these promises and what exactly these promises mean. First, he promises them lives grounded in intimacy. He says to the disciples, "The Spirit is coming, and that Spirit will connect you to me. That Spirit will bring with him all the gifts you have received from me, and indeed will give you everything I have given to you in a new and even more powerful way."

Biblical scholars often refer to this section of the gospel of John as the "farewell discourse." That's because this section of John portrays Jesus as saying these things while he shares a meal with his disciples right before he is betrayed and arrested. During this meal, Jesus says things like, "I'm going away. I go to prepare a place for you. In a little while, the world will no longer see me." So it sounds like Jesus is saying "farewell."

But when we look at what *else* Jesus says in this section of the gospel of John, I'm not sure it's really accurate to call this a "farewell discourse." That's because Jesus repeatedly promises his disciples that although in one sense he may be leaving, in another very real sense he's not going anywhere. His relationship with them is going to change, not end.

In fact, if anything his relationship is about to get even *more* intimate and *more* personal than it had been up to that point. "When the Spirit comes," Jesus says, "I will be in you and you will be in me, and because I will be in you and you will be in me, my Father will be in you and you will be in my Father. We will come to you and make our home with you, and your home will be with us."

That doesn't sound like "farewell" to me; that sounds more like a promise of intimacy, a commitment to renewed relationship. Jesus tells his disciples he's going to share with them his very life, and because he receives his life from the Father the life he offers to his disciples is that same life, and that life is the very life of God. The intimacy of the relationship between the Father and the Son is now made available to the world. Jesus makes that promise to his disciples, and he makes that promise to us.

Jesus promises his disciples lives shaped by wisdom and understanding. He says, "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth." Remember that not long before saying this Jesus also told his disciples, "I *am* the truth." So another way of reading the promise he makes to his disciples might be to hear him as saying, "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you to me; he will guide you deeper into my life."

Notice what Jesus doesn't say. He doesn't say to his disciples, "Here's a road map that will show you exactly where to go." He doesn't say, "The Spirit will give you a list of instructions that will cover every conceivable situation and challenge." He doesn't say the Spirit will give them *answers*; rather, he says the Spirit will give them *understanding*.

The difference between answers and understanding is significant. When someone gives us the answers, we don't have to do very much; getting the answer is passive. When someone gives us the answer, we don't really change in any meaningful way; getting the answer means not growing. Getting the answer means having information but not really knowing what to do with it.

Jesus doesn't promise his disciples he'll give them answers; he promises he'll give them understanding. "The Spirit will lead you into all truth." But understanding the truth will require them to be active, not passive. It will require them to change and to grow, to learn what it means to find more and more of their lives in Jesus. The Spirit will lead them deeper into the intimacy of the relationship between the Father and the Son, and as they grow in understanding they will grow in the truth and the life of that relationship. Jesus makes that promise to his disciples, and he makes that promise to us.

Jesus promises his disciples lives governed by meaning and purpose. He says, "The Spirit will declare to you the things that are to come. The Spirit will take what is mine and will declare it to you."

Both of these comments ultimately have to do with God's mission in the world. When Jesus tells his disciples—that is, when he tells *us*—that the Spirit will declare to them the things that are to come, what he's saying is that the Spirit is going to enable the disciples to recognize and to fulfill the work he gives them to do.

Throughout the gospel of John, Jesus consistently describes himself as the one who has been sent by the Father to do the Father's will; the reason nobody understands what he says or what he does is because nobody understands his Father. But *he* understands; he understands who he is, he understands the work his Father has given him to do, and he does it. He knows that the Father has entrusted everything to him, and he knows the purpose of his life is nothing other than to fulfill his Father's will.

And now he gives that mission to his disciples—that is, he gives it to us. "The Spirit will take everything the Father has declared to me and will declare it to you." The meaning of their lives is now to be found in sharing in the work the Father gives to the Son; the purpose of their lives is to share in the work of saving the world. Jesus makes that promise to his disciples, and he makes that promise to us.

Jesus promises his disciples lives that are marked by glory and honor. He says to his disciples, "When the Spirit comes, he will glorify me. Just as I have glorified the Father, so too will the Spirit now glorify me."

At the very beginning of John's gospel, we read that no one has ever seen the glory of God

because no one *can* see the glory of God. “But now,” says John, “the Word has become flesh, and we have seen his glory, full of grace and truth.” The Father’s glory revealed in and through the Son, the Son’s glory revealed in and through the Spirit, the glory of God revealed in and through the disciples, so that the world might know that God so loves the world that he has given his very life to the world so that everyone who trusts in him may share in that life.

Not long after the portion of John’s gospel we heard in our gospel lesson, Jesus prays for his disciples, and he prays specifically that they would receive the glory that he gives to them. He says, “Father, the glory you have given to me I have given to them, so that they may be one as we are one . . . so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.”

Did you catch that? There’s a reason Jesus shares the glory of God with his disciples: so that his disciples may be one, and so that the unity of the disciples will be a sign to the world of the love and the mercy of God. It is God’s good pleasure to share his glory with the world, and those who follow Jesus are the ones in whom that glory is to shine forth. Jesus makes that promise to his disciples, and he makes that promise to us.

Jesus promises his disciples a life grounded in intimacy. He promises his disciples a life shaped by wisdom. He promises them a life governed by meaning and purpose. He promises them a life marked by glory. And he promises all those things so that the lives of his disciples would be grounded in his life—the life he shares with his Father, a life manifest in the Spirit.

In other words, all these promises are connected; each of these things—intimacy, wisdom, meaning, glory, life—they’re all bound up with one another, and the source of all of them is God himself.

Today we observe the feast of Trinity Sunday, and the only thing that observance is really about is our confession as Christians that God is the source of all truth, all goodness, all beauty, and all life . . . and that through Christ and the Spirit, God has chosen to share those things with us so that we might not only *know* truth but might also *practice* truth, so that we might not only *feel* good but might also *be* good, so that we might not only *see* beauty but might also *make* beauty, so that we might not only *receive* life but might also *give* life.

It is the gift of life we have been given, the life of God. And it is the gift of that life we are called to share with the world. Like Jesus himself, we receive everything, and we share everything. Jesus received everything from his Father and gives it to us for our sakes and for the sake of the world. We likewise receive everything from him and offer it to the world so that the world may know that Jesus is the Christ and that through believing they may share in the same life in which we share, the life of God.

Intimacy is not something today’s world knows very much about. Wisdom is something about which today’s world knows almost nothing. People have pretty much given up on meaning and purpose, and instead try to content themselves with security and satisfaction. And because of this, glory is not much in evidence; life—*real* life, eternal life—is not much in evidence.

In today's gospel lesson, Jesus makes a promise to his disciples, and he makes that same promise to us: that when we find our lives in him, then we find ourselves sharing in the work he himself is doing, work that testifies to the wisdom, the holiness, the glory, and the power of God. May we receive all that he offers to us; may our lives glorify his life so that the world may know that Jesus is the Christ, and may share in the same life in which we share, the life of God himself. Amen.

16 June 2019
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