

Spirited Words

John 15:26-27, 16:4b-15
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First Presbyterian Church
Pastor Dave Carlson

There's an old theory that says if you left a hundred monkeys in front of a hundred computers for a hundred years, eventually they'd manage to type out a Shakespearean sonnet.

A newer theory adds that if you put a million monkeys in front of a million computers for a million years, you'd eventually get the Internet. That theory seems about right, based on the amount of words and images uploaded every day, much of it looking like it was generated by monkeys.

What was not generated by monkeys, what we can count on to be highly accurate and useful information is scripture. The New Testament was written by the apostles and those authorized to write on their behalf. And all of it was inspired by the Holy Spirit.

As Jesus says in today's lesson from John, "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. 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...."

What this means is that, when the Spirit spoke to the apostles, what he revealed to them was what would become the New Testament, the chronicle of the life and teachings of Jesus.

The Bible is all that we know about Jesus. And yet, there is of course much more that we would like to know. For instance, what did Jesus look like? We don't know; there are no imagines of Jesus from that time; they don't exist.

What did Jesus do between age 12 when his parents took him to Jerusalem for the Passover and age 30 when he began his earthly ministry? We don't know; that part of his life is not mentioned, anywhere.

What would Jesus say to us today? If you met with Jesus today, would he approve of your life? Would he heal an ailment, inspire you to be a better person, teach you to spread peace and love within your family, your community, our nation, maybe even across the globe?

Wow, that would be something, wouldn't it? And yet, it was not in God's plan that you or I or anybody we know gets to meet Jesus face to face this side of the cross, at least not thus far.

And still, which would you prefer – getting to know Jesus through the Bible, or getting to know him face to face? Selfishly, one might prefer to meet Jesus face to face, to get the full

experience of Jesus. But if you think about it for even a second, we are so much better off having the Bible.

This is why Jesus says, "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. And when he comes, he will prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment."

Now, clearly right then and there, Jesus could have taken care of the sin that creeps into our hearts, given us and all people lives of righteousness, and worked out God's judgment. But that was not God's plan.

God's plan is that we work those things out, based on our love of God and neighbor, which Jesus says are the two greatest commandments.

God didn't want this planet populated by people forced to love God and neighbor, but rather by people who freely choose to resist the temptation of sin, live a life of righteousness, and trust in God's divine judgment, all of it based on our genuine desire to love God and neighbor as we should. That's where true peace comes from.

There was once a group of military leaders who, in their desire for world peace, commissioned the building of a supercomputer that could solve any military problem.

When the machine was finished, the top brass were invited to a demonstration. The computer tech asked the generals to come up with a difficult tactical problem. They describe a hypothetical battlefield scenario and then asked the computer the pivotal question: Attack or retreat?

The enormous supercomputer hummed away for over an hour and then printed out its one-word answer: "Yes."

The generals looked at one another, baffled by this Zen-like answer. Finally one of them submitted a follow-up question: "Yes, what?" Instantly, the computer responded: "Yes, Sir."

Smart machine; stupid people. We don't need a supercomputer to tell us how to achieve world peace. We just need Jesus, and people willing to know and love him more, willing to coming alongside one another in the spirit of the Love Commandment, a commandment on which rests the prospect of peace, peace in our families, in our communities, and across the globe

Coming alongside one another to discern what Jesus asks of us and how to attain it – that is our calling as followers of the Lord.

As Jesus says, "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you (guide us) into all the truth ..., and he will declare to you the things that are to come."

What new things might arise for you if you were to listen to Jesus, speaking through the Holy Spirit, through scripture and prayer?

When Jesus says, "I still have many things to say to you..." what things do you imagine he would say, to you, if he were here, today, in bodily form?

Through your faithful discernment of right and wrong, good and evil; through your reading and studying of scripture; through praying and listening to God, Jesus is just waiting to speak to you, today. What would he say, that would make you a better person? Think about that for a moment, right now?

Look, what we know about Jesus is enough for us to do better as people, as families, as communities and as nations. We just have to choose to do it – choose to listen rather than criticize, make peace and not war, value life over personal wealth and power, care for your neighbor as you care for yourself, and love all people despite their differences.

Today we celebrate the birthday of the church, we celebrate Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit descended upon the earliest disciples, giving them everything they needed to be faithful followers of Christ.

And through their faithfulness, in sharing with us the life and teachings of Jesus, down through the centuries, we have everything we need to be faithful followers of Christ.

So let us go forth from this place in the spirit of boldness, truth and perseverance, to live out the gospel of Jesus Christ in such a way that others will come to know and love Jesus, and in that know and love God, and in that, know and love their neighbor, as themselves. Amen.

PASTORAL PRAYER

God of creation, you formed us out of your incredible love and breathed life into us. By your Spirit, breathe new life and faith into our daily living. Lead us to life eternal, by the mighty love of Jesus Christ. O God, show us the power of reconciling love. On Pentecost, you filled your disciples with strength, vision, and confidence.

Do so again, here and now. Bring upon us in this time of celebration a new sense of your life-giving Spirit. And hear us as we pray for those who have yet to feel and know your Spirit, for those who know you but feel challenged by financial worries, job insecurity, troubled hearts, and illness and disease.

And for all of us, O God, keep us steady and fill us anew with the power and promise of your Holy Spirit, sent to use on that first Pentecost by your son, our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ, who taught us to pray together, saying:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.