

CHANNELING JESUS

Day of Pentecost – Cycle B: John 15:26-27; 16:4b-15

This sermon was preached on the occasion of Chris, Sandy, and Carly's Confirmation, May 27, 2012.

Every once in a while, I come across a piece of writing that is so jam-packed with ideas, I have to think about every sentence, and sometimes examine even the phrases within the sentence to determine how they relate to one another in order to understand the intended meaning. I have heard the style referred to as “dense,” and have found from experience that this literature does not make for good bedtime reading if I’m reading for comprehension. On the other hand, sleep comes easily with this kind of literature: it’s usually lights out after about two pages.

This morning’s Gospel is a good example of dense writing, and the irony of our having to plough through a reading such as this on a Sunday that celebrates the clarity and excellence of the Spirit’s proclamation of God’s word does not escape me. We need the gift of the Holy Spirit merely to make sense of this passage!

The context is Jesus’ farewell to his disciples. The gospel-writer, John, has us listen in, so to speak, because like Jesus’ first disciples, we are among those left behind to continue the ministry he began. Because we know how his story ends, we may not feel the sense of abandonment Jesus anticipates his first disciples experiencing, but after his ascension, the final chapter in Jesus’ story, it really is left up to Jesus’ disciples, past and present, to carry on. We who have been “disciples,” i.e. “learners,” are now “apostles,” i.e. those who are “sent out” to bear (as our baptismal liturgy puts it) “God’s creative and redeeming word to all the world.” A tall order, to say the least! Jesus recognizes how daunting such a task is for his followers, and so teaches us through this morning’s talk with the disciples that the Holy Spirit is and will be our gift from God to help our ministry in Jesus’ name. It will help us to channel Jesus when Jesus is no longer humanly present in the world.

What is interesting – and this is from some of those dense parts of this morning’s reading – is that Jesus describes the coordinates of his ministry in this passage. He tells the disciples, and us by extension, that because of his full and complete proclamation of the truth of God’s unbounded love for people, *sin* loses power in the world, and *righteousness*, a huge preoccupation of religious people, past and present, is not as dependent on being good and doing good as much as it is on *faith*. Later, Saint Paul would write that we are *saved* [from sin’s power and the related requirement to be righteous] by *grace* [which Paul sees clearly as the life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ] through *faith* [our acceptance that Jesus of Nazareth was and is God’s good news in a world that is otherwise ambiguous and random]. We are *saved* [from sin] *by grace* [Jesus] *through faith* [in Jesus]. This is precisely, Jesus tells us in this morning’s Gospel, what it means to be a Christian. And Saint Paul, for all of his elaboration of Jesus’ original message, gets this part right. Faith in Jesus Christ and his proclamation of God’s unbounded love is what distinguishes Christians in the world. And when we sing at the end of worship this morning, We Are Called, we are singing about God’s call to us *specifically* in Jesus.

I love it when we can have Confirmation Sunday on Pentecost – for a number of reasons, not the least of which is the Holy Spirit’s connection to the Sacrament of Holy Baptism; and on Confirmation Sunday, our confirmands affirm their baptism. The Confirmation Rite is called Affirmation of Baptism. But beyond the theological component, I love that Pentecost is the occasion when Jesus’ message actually got out to people. Luke’s reference in the Book of Acts to so many people of different nations and languages understanding the disciples becomes a metaphor for the mission of Jesus’ disciples of all times and places. It is not so much about *language barriers* as it is about *receiving and understanding* God’s word in Jesus; and then valuing this word so much that we want others to receive and understand it too.

Our call as confirmands and as those who are baptized as Jesus’ sisters and brothers is to take our place in the apostolic succession, if you will; to take for ourselves Jesus’ promise that the Spirit of truth will guide us and speak for us; that we will channel Jesus, in other words, with our lives, using our faith, and serving the world.

On Friday night, our congregation gave you Craig and Marc Kielburger’s recent book *Living Me to We*. When we actually live me-to-we, we not only embody the gospel, we translate it in such a way that it

loosens the grasp greed and selfishness and self-centeredness have on our world. In a few minutes you, Chris, Sandy, and Carly, will renounce all of the forces that draw us and others away from the goodness that is God. What this book seeks to show us is how to make our theology practical and contextual; how to embody the gospel with all that we have and are, our whole life long; how to channel Jesus.

And the good news of Pentecost, is that God, in the grace and power of the Holy Spirit, will help us do it.

Amen.