

Proverbs 8:1-11

Psalm 8

Romans 5:1-5

John 16:12-15

Sermon for June 12, 2022

## **THE FINAL WORD**

By Rev. Dr. Don Algeo

Summary: “he will guide you into all truth”

In our reading from Romans this morning, we find Paul employing some of the important ideas found in what he sometimes calls *his* Gospel, that is, in his interpretation of the meaning of Christ's life, death and resurrection. “justification by faith,” “standing in God's grace,” “having peace with God,” - these are the building blocks of the understanding which, thanks to Paul, most Christians have brought to their relationship with Christ through all of Christian history. But why should we believe Paul?

I was once having a conversation about how to read and study the Bible with a minister. Specifically we were talking about the degree of deference we should offer to the views of St. Paul that we find in his New Testament letters. This minister's position was that Paul's views were interesting and historically important, but certainly not definitive.

During the course of our conversation he said something that has stuck with me ever since. He said, “Paul was a smart guy, I'm a smart guy.” What really struck me about that – aside from its self-deception, since he really wasn't all that bright – was its underlying assumption. Its underlying assumption was that intellect, brain power, was the key factor in understanding Christ, as if Christ were like a difficult differential equation, so that only exceptionally intelligent folks could make sense of Him.

But of course, that is exactly what Paul himself denies. In Galatians (1:11-12) Paul writes:

“I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel I preached is not of human origin. I did not receive it of any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ.”

Paul was certainly intelligent but he wanted to make absolutely clear that his Gospel was not a product of his intellect, but rather that it was a revelation provided to him by the grace of God.

In our passage from the Gospel of John this morning, I would argue that we find Jesus himself providing assurance that the writings of His immediate disciples should be regarded as both authoritative and complete, as regards to the essential questions of who Christ is and what He accomplished through His life, death and resurrection. Let me explain.

The passage is taken from chapter 16 of the gospel of John. That chapter is part of a larger section of the Gospel that is commonly referred to as the Upper Room Discourse, because at least a good part of it takes place in what is presumed to be the second story of a house in Jerusalem.

As John presents the discourse, it takes place after the religious and civil authorities of Israel had once and for all rejected Christ's offer of himself as the long promised Messiah.

What we have in the Upper Room Discourse is therefore John's memory of the final teaching Christ provided to his disciples, after his message had been rejected by the world. To me, that's the important point to keep in mind, for at least two reasons. First, it is teaching that Christ is speaking specifically to His followers, not to the rest of the world. Christ certainly has a great deal to say to the world that does not yet believe in Him, but you will not find it in the Upper Room Discourse. This discourse is for His own.

And second, what He is teaching them here is offered to them as comfort and consolation, since He will very shortly be leaving them. He is telling them what they may expect and where they may look for help when He is no longer with them in flesh and blood.

The greatest of the promises our Lord makes to these disciples is the promise of the Holy Spirit, a promise which, for them, came to fruition in the tremendous and mysterious Pentecostal experience we celebrated last week.

In the Upper Room Discourse, Jesus talks about the promise of the Spirit several times, and each time he tells his disciples something new about what they may expect. At first, he simply assures them that the spirit will be with them and dwell within them (14:15); then he lets them know that the spirit will help them bring to remembrance what Christ did and said (14:26); he says the spirit will enable them to bear witness about Christ(15:26); and finally, in the verses immediately preceding our passage for this mornings, he teaches that the spirit will convict or convince the world of sin and righteousness and judgment.

Which brings us to our passage, in which Christ as it were completes the picture he's been painting. The Spirit, he tells them, will be their guide to truth, and not just to truth, importantly, but to all the truth.

Notice first the kindness and conscientiousness with which our Lord speaks to his disciples, in preparing them for the great gift they are about to be promised. "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now," he says.

The word translated 'to bear' does not mean to suffer or endure, it means to carry. What is coming soon is the crucifixion, the burial, the dreadful loss followed by the impossible resurrection and the unfathomable ascension. Jesus is telling them that nothing in their lives so far has prepared them for what they will have to process, for the new and fundamentally different lives they will have to lead.

And yet they are not to despair, because the promise immediately follows: "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth."

He will guide you. He will not force you, he will not lecture you, he will not hammer it into your head. He will guide you, lead you, take you step by step as you are able and willing to receive.

And let me note as an aside what a great application there is here for us all. When you hire a guide to lead you to the top of a mountain, the first thing a conscientious guide will do is size you up, because there are different ways to get to the top of the mountain, and the guide wants to choose the way that's best for you, perhaps the way that will get you the most exercise, perhaps the way that will give you the best views, perhaps the way that will get you there fastest.

That's what Christ is telling us about how the Spirit within us works. Maybe you're troubled by some difficult or obscure verse in the bible, maybe something has happened in your life that just doesn't make sense. Don't worry. We have it on Christ's own assurance that in the Spirit's time, as long as we remain open and

trusting to the Spirit's instruction, that the veil will someday be lifted from that verse, and that our lives will again make sense.

But to return to our passage, what I want to emphasize is Christ's assurance to his disciples that the spirit will lead them into "all" truth. All truth. What does that mean? Obviously not that the Spirit will teach them trigonometry or how to crochet. No. What Christ is promising them, I believe, is that these disciples – his intimate followers, plus that strange man from Tarsus who will soon be miraculously added to their number on the road to Damascus – that these disciples will be led into all truth concerning the matters which they are not yet able to support: the fundamental truths about Christ himself.

In other words, as I read our passage, Christ's promise is that this first generation of His followers will be tasked and enabled by the Spirit of truth to record for all subsequent generations the truth about the events of Christ's life and ministry, and their meaning. We will learn once and for all that Jesus Christ is the only begotten Son of God, that his death was sacrificial and accomplished the forgiveness of our sins and the eternal salvation of all who believe in him, We will learn once and for all the cost God is willing to pay to draw His children back to Himself. And we learn why. We learn that God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. We learn that Christ lives and reigns, now and forever, as the Son of Man as well as the Son of God, as our Lord as well as our Savior. We learn that God is also our Father, and that we will spend eternity coming to know Him better and better.

These are the truths the disciples, guided by the Spirit after the special blessing they received on Pentecost, these are the truths the disciples themselves were led to, and which they recorded for us. And these, I believe, are all the truth about Christ, at least all the fundamental truths God deemed it needful and important for us to know.

Christ died for the forgiveness of sin. He didn't die to provide a model of self-sacrifice for others to follow. He died for the forgiveness of sin. How do I know? Because Paul says so, and Christ Himself promised that the Spirit of truth would lead his disciples into all truth about Christ.

But then, what about the rest of us? What does that leave for the Holy Spirit of truth to provide for the rest of us?

To me the answer is straightforward. Our responsibility isn't to discover that fundamental truths about who Christ is and what He accomplished. That has already been revealed and made available to us.

Our responsibility is to make application of those truths to the vast complexity of our own lives, and our own lives lived in whatever circumstances in which we find ourselves. Christ died for the forgiveness of my sins. That is the wheel. I do not need to reinvent it. What I do need to do is to apply that truth to my own life.

How is that done? And that brings us back to our passage from Romans, where Paul I believe provides us with an excellent example of how that is done.

Remember how it begins? “Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

We have been justified by faith. That is the fundamental thing. That is the revealed truth about what Christ's death on the cross accomplished for us. And that in turn has gained us peace with God. We can relax in God's presence. We can trust in God's unlimited and unqualified love for us. That is another fundamental thing. That is another revealed truth about what Christ's death on the cross accomplished for us. But now, how do we apply that to our lives?

Some of you listening to me now have experienced real tragedy. Most of us have experienced the loss of those we love, we've experienced the normal ravages of time, we're familiar with the sense of failure and missed opportunity. *All* of us are acquainted with *these* things, and the longer we live, the more familiar they become.

But some of you listening to me now have gone through terrible experiences outside those that all flesh is heir to, or you have experienced the losses and disappointments we all go through, but you have experienced them so sharply and so deeply that they are, for you, truly the equivalent of tragedies.

Why are tragedies of this sort different for the Christian than they are for others? Paul tells us why. Elsewhere Paul has told us that God makes all things work together for the good of His beloved children. He tells us in our reading for today that we *know* we are justified by faith, and we *know* we have peace with God. We *know*, that is to say, that we are God's beloved children. And therefore we *know*, in our heart of hearts as well as in our brains...we *know* that even present tragedy feeds into future hope, “...and hope,” as Paul puts it, “and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the

Holy Spirit who has been given to us.” Or as Christ himself tells us at the end of chapter 16 of John's Gospel, “In this world you will have tragedy. But fear not, I have overcome the world.”

And so, heavenly Father, let our prayer this morning be that the fundamental and eternal truths about our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ remain ever alive and active in our hearts and minds. We thank you for the tremendous gift of grace which You bestowed through your Spirit on those first followers of Christ, that they might communicate to all future generations the essential truths of the Gospel, the good news about your Son. We thank You and give You praise that these Gospel truths are not just cold intellectual recognitions, but that they are the truths we need to find our way through this fallen world, to give us certainty in times of confusion, courage in the face of our enemies, and hope in place of despair. Amen.