

3.5.23 Sermon

Two Things Can Be True | John 17:25-33

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

jesus, disciples, god, life, loves, world, peace, father, scripture, discourse, truth, morning, true, means, bad, reality, leaving, connected, pressed, part

SPEAKERS

Rev. Terri Moss Witmyer

Rev. Terri Moss Whitmyer

It's a joy and a delight to be with you this morning. It's been a while for me, in this context, at least. So, I am happy to be standing here! This morning, I want us to reflect on a Scripture passage together and ask God what reality, treasure, and truth He wants to reveal to us through this text? Let each of us ask God individually for guidance.

Let us begin with a prayer. Lord, we are grateful for how you bring us together and walk with us in our lives. We thank you for this gathering, whether in person or online, and for how you will speak to us collectively and individually. May we be open to your truth and receive your guidance this morning. In Jesus' name, amen.

Today, we will read a section from the book of John known as the end of the discourse. This discourse began in chapter 15 where Jesus tells his disciples what will happen in the future. In verse 18, Jesus talks about how the world will hate the disciples just as it hates him. Let's take a moment to look back at what has been said in this discourse, as we will be focusing on its ending today.

Firstly, Jesus tells his disciples to expect people not to understand them because the world hates him, and therefore they will hate the disciples. This is because people do not understand Jesus or the Father. If they do not understand Jesus, they will not understand his disciples either. This is a common human tendency to hate things we do not understand.

However, Jesus also assures them that the Holy Spirit will come to be their encourager and show them the truth. The Greek word for truth means reality, as in what is real and true. Therefore, the Holy Spirit will guide them to the reality of their situation.

Jesus then tells his disciples that he will be leaving and going back to the Father. He is preparing them for his departure and letting them know what to expect. The disciples do not fully understand, so Jesus reiterates that things will be difficult, but there will be joy after the hardship. He is foreshadowing his death, but also providing hope for the future.

As we reflect on this discourse, we see that Jesus was preparing his disciples for the challenges they would face after he was gone. He knew they would be hated, misunderstood, and face difficulties, but he also provided them with hope and the promise of the Holy Spirit. We can learn from this today as we face our own challenges and struggles. Just as Jesus encouraged his disciples to hold onto hope, we too can find hope in him and the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Just before our reading for this morning, Jesus mentioned that we will learn to ask for what we need directly from the Father. This truth will be revealed by the Spirit. You can talk directly to the Father, and my understanding is that Jesus is saying that He is always with us and is always a part of us. The Triune God, consisting of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, is always present with us. Therefore, we can always talk to Them and ask for what we need.

I love this section of Scripture because Jesus refers to God the Father, Himself, and the Holy Spirit in the same breath. It's a very Trinitarian part of the Bible where all three members of the Godhead are being spoken of simultaneously. During our past few Sunday meetings, my fellow elders and preachers taught from this discourse. What stuck with me is how James pointed out that there will be haters, and Jesus taught us how to deal with this reality. Sandra made me laugh by showing how confused the disciples must have been with what Jesus was saying. Matt drew from the community to find beautiful truths in the Scripture. Kevin emphasized that God is always with us through the Spirit, and we are never alone, even during our most challenging times. Sophia reminded us of the pattern of death and resurrection that we see in nature and that Jesus walked through. She also emphasized that although we look forward to resurrection, the pain and grief of death are genuine, and it doesn't help to shrug it off or ignore it.

Now let's move on to the end of the discourse. I love the word discourse, so please forgive me for using it repeatedly. I'm going to share what stands out to me as I read through the Scripture bit by bit. Our text for this morning is John 16, starting at verse 25, and we'll go all the way to verse 33. In verse 25, Jesus says, "Though I have been speaking figuratively, a time is coming when I will no longer use this kind of language but will tell you plainly about my father. In that day, you will ask in my name, and I am not saying that I will ask the Father on your behalf. No, the Father himself loves you because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God. I came from the Father and entered the world. Now I'm leaving the world and going back to the Father."

What stands out to me in this passage is the line "The Father himself loves you." I love that Jesus said that, emphasizing the direct relationship with God the Father. This is what Jesus promised the disciples, and as believers, we can include ourselves in that group. Jesus is also saying to us that we can talk directly to the Father, just like He did. Sometimes, we look at other people we admire and think they're closer to God than we are. We may think that if they pray for us or ask the Father on our behalf, it will be more effective. But Jesus is saying the opposite. He's saying that we can ask God directly because God loves us.

The disciples saw Jesus communing with the Father during their time together. Jesus was being one with the Father, being in a close, honest relationship with Him. The disciples probably thought that if they needed something, they would ask Jesus, and Jesus would ask God on their behalf. Jesus is wiping that idea away and saying, "No, you ask God, because God loves you." It's crazy to think that we sometimes look at others around us and assume that they are closer to God than we are. However, God is everywhere and in every one of us. Therefore, we are all the same distance from God, which is nothing.

So, take a breath and let that sink in. The Father loves you, and you can ask Him for what you need because you're right there with Him. God is always close, and you can talk to Him directly. That's the beautiful truth that Jesus is revealing in this passage.

I love that Jesus makes sure the disciples know something important before he leaves, right before catastrophe occurs. Let's move on to verse 29. The disciples say, "Now you are speaking clearly and without figures of speech. Now we can see that you know all things and that you do not even need to have anyone ask you questions. This makes us believe that you are from God." It's funny how the disciples had been struggling to understand Jesus all along, but suddenly they get it. We probably don't fully understand either.

But something triggered the disciples to believe. It's possible that this statement of belief from the disciples in scripture was connected to a liturgy used by the church led by the writer of this gospel decades in the future. Scholars posit many possibilities about who wrote the gospel, but for our purposes, let's focus on the fact that the disciples understood enough to believe.

For us, there may be different points in our lives where we understand enough to believe and trust, and I think that even though the disciples knew that, they were still freaked out. Jesus was saying he was leaving and being pretty clear that he was going to die. The disciples were unsure and said, "No, no, no." However, the disciples felt secure enough to trust and say, "Okay, I believe," which bounces off of Jesus telling them that the Father loves them. It's not just about following Jesus, but being with God, in the same way that Jesus is with God.

In verse 31, Jesus replied, "Do you now believe?" and said, "The time is coming, and in fact has come, when you will be scattered each to your own home. You will leave me all alone. Yet I'm not alone for my father is with me." This seems a little harsh right after the disciples said they believed, but as the story unfolds in Scripture, it's what happens.

Jesus says, "I have told you these things so that in me you may have peace. In this world, you will have trouble. But take heart, I have overcome the world." A paradox is creeping in, and it reminds me of something I call "two things can be true." Life is rarely, if ever, just one thing. There are always multiple things going on, and the good and the bad are always mixed together. Jesus knew that, and it's what he's teaching the

disciples. We will always encounter good and bad circumstances, but the underlying truth is that the divine encourager is always trying to show us that we are never alone. Even in the darkest, deepest caverns of our lives, we are never alone.

There's not some place in life where we're going to arrive where only good things are happening. Life is always a mixture of good and bad stuff. Maybe it would help us not to be so quick to label events in our lives as good or bad. Maybe the things that happen just are, and what do we do as we experience life? We cling to the truth that we are never alone, just like Jesus is doing in this story as he stands on the precipice of his very darkest moment. He says, "Yet I am never alone." He says, "I have told you these things. What things? Bad stuff is going to happen, but you'll never be alone as you go through it." So, he told us these things so that in him, we may have peace.

I looked at the Greek word here that's translated to peace for us into English, and it's *eirini*. It means a state of national tranquility, absence of war, peace between individuals, harmony, accord, safety, prosperity, and felicity. It's the same word that's used when Jesus says, "My peace I give you." It's a fancy word for love. But here's the catch, you know that basically, it's like, okay, that's what peace means to us. Here's the nugget that I discovered that I didn't know before. Probably this word I heard or *eignet* probably come was from the root word *iron row*, which means to join. So, think about that, to join.

In Jesus, we might have peace despite all the confusion and tumult that we go through in life, despite the good and the bad, because we are joined with him. Peace is a joining. It's a fitting together, and it's a lack of, of conflict, it's an ability to fit together. So, because we are connected with all of God, the parent who is always caring for us, the Spirit who is always showing us what's real. And Jesus, who is always in our corner, defending and helping and loving us, we are never alone. We're joined with them. And that's the peace that Jesus wants us to have.

So, he says, "I've told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In Me, you may have peace, you may have this joining." And then he says, "In this world, you will have trouble." Right? Check yes, got it. Correct, Jesus. The word trouble. It's a very fun to say Greek word that gets translated trouble is "thlipsis."

Say it with me.. thlipsis, you gotta say it again. Thlipsis. I love it so much, I could say it like 10 times, but I will not do that to you. Thlipsis means a pressing a pressure. That's like the literal meaning of thlipsis. And it literally means being squeezed, being pressed, pressed. Metaphorically, it means difficulty, affliction, trouble. But just think of that picture being pressed, squeezed pressured. I think we all know what that's like.

In this world, you'll have that. Jesus says. But take heart, have courage, strength in your heart with this truth. Jesus has victory over it all. It's a strange victory. I'm sure the disciples would agree to win by losing. As we look forward to how the story unfolds, but that's the way of Christ.

The win is found not in getting away from the bad stuff of life. The win is not being free of painful circumstances. The win is not getting away from this pressing, that we all experience as we go through life. It's found instead in the through line of this reality, I am not alone. Ever, I am joined with all of who God is. And I am joined also with my fellow people, the fellow people of this earth, the fellow creations, everywhere that we see the trees that grow the flowers, the animals, all of creation I believe.

This is the through line of reality that Jesus is saying in me you may have this peace you're all connected with God with everybody you'll have trouble yes but take heart take heart I have overcome the world. And you know I just want to say the world it's like maybe sometimes we can get off track and think that Jesus is saying like the world as in the Universe or like the earth that's what like that. That's bad, right.

But I think that there are two meanings. Maybe there's the world that is off track and isn't in line with the peace, of being connected to God. And I think that that's the result of us, as humans in like history, refusing to acknowledge that connection, or refusing to live from that place of connection with God.

I feel like I'm taking a little detour, but then there's the world that is God's creation that God made and said, "This is good." Right? So, there's crossover and overlap. But I don't want us to always see the world as like, I don't know, this scary, bad, sinful stuff, right? There's the part that doesn't connect with God and receive that peace, which results in harmony and accord. And there's some of that in all of us, where we resist God's peace in the connection there.

But then there are some parts of us where we don't, and we long and we crave for that connection, right? And so even within us, there's this mixture, there's the good and the bad, even within our own selves. And in our lives that we experience, and in society, families, and communities, in nations in the world. There's this crazy mixture that we don't always understand. And yet Jesus is saying, "Look, you're gonna be pressed, that's life. But in me, you may have peace. So, connect, join, join up, join with God who is a connection, right? That's why we look at God as a triune God because there's a relationship there.

I think that if this was true for Jesus as he faced all that would come in his next couple of days, then this is also the truth that we must hold on to. This is how we will make it through all that life brings us, my friends. This is how we will find the way of peace through everything. We are united with God. The Father is with you. Jesus is on your side. The spirit is helping you find what's true and real.