

## **Bearing Many Things**

### **John 16:12-15**

“I still have many things to say to you,  
but you cannot bear them now.

When the Spirit of truth comes,  
it will guide you into all the truth;  
for it will not speak on its own,  
but will speak whatever it hears,  
and will declare to you the things that are to come.

The Spirit will glorify me,  
because it will take what is mine and declare it to you.

All that the Father has is mine.

For this reason I said that the Spirit will take what is mine  
and declare it to you.

## **Bearing Many Things**

John 16:12-15

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Rev. Michael P. Catanzaro

### **I.**

This morning I am trying to be somewhat cautious with the sermon. This is for two reasons. First, when I initially began pondering the possible meaning behind today's text from the 16th chapter of John's Gospel I found myself trying to move us in one particular interpretive direction. At a point, though, I came to realize I had it all wrong; shockingly so, at that. While I think we are now on the *correct* track, the experience left me a little wary about making any hard and fast claims as they concern the Holy Spirit, what with it being so ethereal and all.

Second, I am a week away from some much needed vacation and I do not want to create a mess for myself, or for all of you, by running my mouth a little too much. Having said this, tedium is my greatest fear. If today's sermon causes some controversy, well at least it will be an interesting ride. So, let's take the ride, shall we?

### **II.**

Last Sunday was Pentecost which celebrates the occasion when the Holy Spirit was made known to the church and given as a gift to the world. Today, following right on its heels, is Trinity Sunday. As I say every year on this day, the notion of the Trinity is a human construct. The word "trinity" is nowhere to be found within the scriptural canon. The concept of the Trinity is a best guess at expressing our understanding that the One God (before whom we should place no other gods) has been revealed to us in three distinct ways, or "offices": as God the Father who created and is creating the world, as Christ the Redeemer and Savior of that world and, now, as the Holy Spirit. The Greek word used for Spirit is "paraclete"; which translates as "one who is called to come alongside" or "called in to help." The Holy Spirit is variously known as "Helper," "Sustainer," "Advocate," "Comforter," and "Counselor."

### **III.**

It has never been much of a stretch for those in any age to look to the natural world in awe, marveling at its beauty and complexity so as to conclude that herein lies the work of Divine hands. The notion of God as Creator of the cosmos is one which simply makes sense to us. Theologically, this is termed “General Revelation.”

Equally as evident, however, is that there is trouble afoot in the Creation. Something which was made so perfect has been knocked out of kilter. Call it “Sin” for the lack of a better word. Sin is a process of disharmonization which alienates and estranges us from our Creator and each other. Displeased with such a result, God sends the Son to the world that we might be saved from ourselves.

This comes at a cost, however, as atonement must be made; with the Cross being the means of redemption. Enter Jesus the Christ, one we understand to be both fully human *and* fully divine, who serves as the perfect & final salvific sacrifice. Theologically, this is termed “Special Revelation.”

### **IV.**

Again, Christ as Savior is a concept we are able to understand owing to the historical record and various scriptural accounts. Whether one chooses to embrace it, however, is another matter all together.

Which brings us, finally, to the matter at hand: the (Holy) Spirit. Here is where things start to get a little tricky. While there might be ample evidence for such a Spirit at work in our world, it is witnessed and experienced anecdotally on an individual and occasional basis as opposed to collectively experienced (as in General Revelation) or might be commonly believed (as in Special Revelation).

At its best, the Spirit is a conundrum; but one which is exquisitely beautiful in its mystical manifestations as well as an immensely powerful tool to the church and those on the faith journey. The task becomes how to invite and facilitate those manifestations, and figure out how to wield such a tool in our lives together? Suffice to say, when it comes to the Spirit there is no obvious guide to follow; nothing like the Decalogue or Beatitudes. Which helps to explain why it is so underutilized.

## V.

Now for the error of my ways. When I initially read today's passage, particularly the first verse, "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now," it seemed to me Jesus might be encouraging the listeners to take one step at a time and not get too far in front of their skies. These words are being spoken to the Disciples during the last supper. So, it made sense to me that Jesus was preparing them to focus on what was already upon them: his imminent arrest, crucifixion, death and, especially, ensuing resurrection.

All of which was not only about to rock their world, but to stretch their understanding of that world in *staggering* fashion. What was to come afterward, the many things Jesus *might* have said to them but didn't because he did not feel they could bear them, could wait. Which, at the time, was probably a fair and accurate assessment of the situation. In other words, do not worry about tomorrow, each day has enough trouble of its own. Which, I am sure, made a lot of sense at the time.

## VI.

It is at this point, though, that I made my mistake. Owing to the chronology of events, what was happening to the Disciples at that particular moment verses what would come later, I incorrectly assumed that the *greater* challenge would be the recognition and acceptance of God's salvific plan for the Creation through Christ's sacrifice on the cross, *rather than* the full elaboration of that plan and its implementation through the guidance of the Spirit who would be sent to come alongside us and walk with us on the journey of faith through this world and the days of our life.

Turns out, while not necessarily a piece of cake to wrap one's mind around the resurrection, it is a fairly straightforward proposition. Having faith *in* something, though, is far easier than *applying* that faith to one's thoughts, decisions, and actions. Both in discerning *what* to do with our faith and in figuring out *how* to do whatever we eventually decide needs to be done. Are you with me so far?

## **VII.**

In other words, the life of faith requires us to bear many things, and to do so pretty much every day of one's life. It is not only a matter of believing *in* something, it is the process of *making* real that belief. All of which sounds fairly complicated when said in such a way. It is not, however. In fact, it is stunning simple, if not obvious.

No one knows this with more clarity and certainty than each of you. You folks right here in these pews and watching online or reading at home are on the very front line of the fight to figure out faith. Not faith in a *broad* sense, but faith that is specific to *your* particular life. What makes such a task even possible is the Spirit which comforts, sustains, and counsels us while helping and advocating for us.

So we have this going for us, which is great news, indeed. Unfortunately, the Spirit does not come with operating instructions. We need to figure it out as we go. Mostly through trial and error, and we aren't always going to succeed.

## **VIII.**

It is by virtue of my profession that I have the blessing of bearing witness to this discernment process in the lives of pretty much every single one of you, though you may not necessarily understand it these terms. With every decision we make, action we take, word we utter, and thought we muster we are endeavoring to discern the Spirit's gentle hand so as to live our lives in accord with our beliefs that we might move in time and rhythm with the Spirit as partners in a mystical dance.

This is fairly easy to see in many of you. Especially in the lives of parents raising young children and adult children caring for aging parents. For these folks, the dance card is pretty full. For others, it may be fairly nuanced and more a function of cumulative effect rather than momentary urgency; with the stakes being commensurately higher. Beyond the individual circumstances which arise out of the time in our lives, every one of us struggles in a majority of moments to live with authenticity before God, and to thine own self be true.

## **IX.**

Now for the potential controversy and ensuing possibility of a mess. Rather than lift up examples of *individuals* doing the mystical dance with the Spirit, I would like to end with a real-world and current experience of a *corporate* nature. As a congregation, as a church, we must also dance and shake our bones in keeping with the mystical movement of the cosmos which God is creating and Christ is redeeming. To get at this, I would like to end today by speaking about our church's stewardship of the Park as it relates to the national political climate.

While our ownership of the Park is clear and unequivocal in much the same way as the Decalogue and Beatitudes, how we honor such a role, both as privilege and responsibility, is an ever-evolving process for us as a congregation in much the same way as is the discernment of the Spirit. ( Not to mention a matter of some dispute for certain segments within the community.). There is no rule book for religiously owned, private property intended for the use and enjoyment of the *entire* community.

## **X.**

Therefore, we have had to write the rules for ourselves as, I suspect, each generation of this congregation has been required to do. Which, I do not mind telling you, is a real pain in the...neck. However, as the saying goes, "no pain no gain." I think there is great value in having us, as a congregation, revisit and reimagine our relationship to the Park from time to time, and as circumstances warrant. Which would seem to be the case at this particular moment in history, though it is Father's Day and the middle of June and our attention should rightly be elsewhere.

To begin, let me land the plane for you: all is well. There is no real controversy or conflict. However, certain of the week's events have prompted me to re-articulate where I believe we stand with the Spirit as it regards the Park. I recently had a phone conversation with an organizer of the Canton iteration of the "No Kings" protest which took place yesterday in numerous cities and towns all across the country including here on Main St. which fronts the Park.

## **XI.**

While it is no state secret as the identity of this person, it really is beside the point. However, I am going to concede gender as you are all insightful enough to deduce this for yourselves. If one is effective in their work, collaborative rather than combative, takes a comprehensive approach, listens well and speaks only enough, and is sensitive to other points of view, chances are this person is a woman. Personally, I have great respect for this person so when she called to give me a heads-up about the protest, I responded right away.

Due to the cordial and cooperative relationship we have fostered and enjoy with the Village Police and Mayor, I have been aware for several weeks now that this protest would be taking place. As was the case with the Mayor and Police Chief, she wanted to assure me that the intent of the organizers is to be on the sidewalks bordering the Park and not in the park itself. Which is appreciated, and for which I thanked her.

## **XII.**

This led us to a larger and longer discussion about the Park, our stewardship of the Park and, to a lesser degree, the national political climate. I shared, that at least in my estimation, what is at issue right now in our nation is respect. Respect for the Constitution, the Rule of Law, the separation of powers, the Bill of Rights, citizenship, the integrity of our borders, moral conviction, ethical behavior, tradition, convention, decency, the respect for objective reality that is researched, determined, and reported on and, of course, respect for our fellow citizens however different they may be from us.

Respect, though, is a fragile thing which wilts easily with fickleness. One cannot pick and choose to respect only what one favors, and disrespect what another favors. Doing so results in a mad dash to categorize ourselves into a relentless division of ever shrinking camps we are quick to label as "Us" or "Them." More and more in this nation we are respecting less and less of what was once held dear by so many; lovingly so.

### **XIII.**

Where this all leads, again in my estimation, is to a lack of respect for anything that we do not understand, agree with, or favor. When we, as a nation, cannot agree on a common respect for *anything*, we eventually begin to see a loss of respect for *everything*; including ourselves, regardless of if we recognize and believe this to be true. The challenge before our nation and our community, as it has *always* been, is to find and foster those things, people, places, and ideals, we hold in a common and mutual respect.

We do not have to necessarily agree with any of these things, or even like them all that much, but we do need to respect them. Mostly because if we want people to respect how *we* see and understand the world, we first need to respect how *others* see and understand this very same world. If, seemingly, there is no policy, no politics, no party or no person we can all agree to respect, then perhaps we need to begin small by choosing to respect something as simple and benign as a Park. At least for starters.

### **XIV.**

For the past 25 years this church and, admittedly its pastor in particular, has endeavored to keep politics *out* of the Park. The last thing our community needs is yet another place where we shout at each other. Instead, what we have always needed, though now more than ever, is a place which is set apart from the mundane, a sacred space if you will. A sanctuary away from the cares and woes of the world where once can find rest and renewal rather than wrangling and agenda wielding. A place *everyone* in the community can feel welcome as neighbors and friends rather than be made to pick a side.

This is the thinking behind our church's stewardship of the Park, one which is *spiritual* in nature but not magical. Magical thinking is taking a black sharpie to a map and pretending it revises a hurricane's path. Magical thinking is defunding the police with the assumption everyone will get along and everything will be just fine. *Spiritual* thinking asks that we bear many things even when what we choose to bear is not particularly popular or understood.

## **XV.**

Just as it is the case with each of us as individuals, so it is true with all of us as a congregation. Every decision we make, action we take, prayer we utter, and thought we muster as a *church* needs to be the result of this body endeavoring to discern the Spirit's gentle hand so that the ways in which we, in turn, touch this world are in accord with our beliefs as we move in time and rhythm with the Spirit as partners in a mystical dance.

I share these things with you today because I am not immune to the sense shared by many that we as a nation are creeping every closer toward some form of apocalyptic resolve. While it may feel that there will come a point where everyone will need to pick a side, let me just say that this church, and our changing congregation over span of a quarter century, is real world proof that there is a better way: respect one another, care for one another, live with authenticity before God, and to our own selves let us always be true.

## **XVI.**

To be clear, I am not calling us to somehow hold ourselves above the fray. Far from it. Instead, I am asking us to consider how we, as the church, can allow the Spirit to guide us in all truth in the midst of the things which are to come as our nation continues to be disharmonized more and more each day.

I actually wrote the ending of this sermon sitting on the front porch of the manse during the "No Kings" protest (by design). It was an impressive and peaceful turnout. They were loud and boisterous with horns honking and voices chanting. Do I think it changed anyone's mind? No. Do I think it made a difference? To them, certainly. However, the fact that it did not spill over into the Park did give me some small measure of hope. Not because they respected the church's stewardship of the park (though there is that) but, moreover, because perhaps ours was the loudest voice that did not have to be heard that day. One that whispered, "The Spirit has come alongside us. Let the dance begin." Amen.