

### **The Sermon: God Is with Us**

Jesus says in John 14:15-16, as translated by Peterson: “If you love me, show it by doing what I’ve told you. I will talk to the Father. He will provide you another Friend so that you will always have someone with you. This Friend is the Spirit of Truth.”

I am so grateful for this promise of Jesus. God IS with us. Christ was crucified, died and was resurrected for you and me. Jesus was rejected by his world, but through his mystical presence and redeeming love we have become Easter people.

COVID 19 strikes fear. It has killed some we loved. It has caused us to socially separate ourselves. This separation has become a true test and trial of our faith. The longer it continues, the harder it may become to accept our current reality with grace. “If you love me, you will keep my commandments.” To Jesus those commandments are loving God and loving our neighbor. The Spirit is present with us. Listen carefully. You will hear the spirit say, “You are loved, accepted and forgiven. You belong to me.” I ask you – be in silence and in that silence listen for the voice of the Spirit.

Listen again to Jesus in John 14:18-19. “I will not leave you orphaned. I’m coming back. In just a little while the world will no longer see me, but you’re going to see me because I am alive and you’re about to come alive.” Because of the Spirit, even in quarantine we are close in spirit, in mutual care and in prayer. I frequently experience being close while physically apart in my relationship with my spouse Im. She often travels to far parts of the world, but we remain close in our loving relationship. This has taught me that it is possible to be humanly close while physically far apart. This is what we are all learning in these times: To be close in our relationships though physically apart.

As Christians, the Spirit within each of us allows for a closeness otherwise out of reach.

It unites us. It blesses us. Blessed assurance Jesus is mine. O what a foretaste of glory divine! Heir of salvation, purchase of God, Born of his Spirit, washed in his blood. This is my story, this is my song, Praising my Savior all the day long, This is my story, this is my song, Praising my Savior all the day long.”

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We are invited in these difficult times to focus with greater intentionality on our life in the spirit with God. Siblings in Christ, I commend you to seek spiritual depth in these challenging times.

God knows you better than you know yourself.

Again listen to Jesus (v. 20). “At that moment you will know absolutely that I’m in my Father, and you’re in me, and I’m in you.” It is this – the Spirit sent by God – that unities us as Christians. It is not anything we do that unites us. It is not believing the same things that unites us. It is the presence of God that Jesus promised that makes us one in Christ.

In other words, Christian unity is not a thing we create but a gift of God to us as the spirit dwells within us.

Serving among you beautiful people in Wisconsin I am ever more convinced that unity is God’s purpose even when we have strong disagreements as to where we believe God is leading us. I continue searching in these days for where we are being led by God.

In some ways COVID 19 has made the search more difficult, in other ways it has opened us to see new possibilities. I am imagining that United Methodists in Wisconsin will be led to live and practice the gospel on every day and in every place, not just Sundays in buildings reserved for that purpose. I am imagining that we be led to become eco-friendly caring for God’s earth as God has asked us to do. I am imagining that we will become a people who understand that our individual welfare is inseparable from the welfare of the world. I am imagining that we will be led to review critically how we live, what we consume, and what we claim “to own” in a world that belongs - not us - but to God.

There are many things to discern is learning how God is leading us, but of one thing I am sure: As followers of Jesus, God is not leading us to go off in separate ways because we sometime disagree. What God has brought together no human shall tear apart.

We are One in The Spirit, We are One in The Lord. We are One in The Spirit, We are One in The Lord. And we pray that all unity may one day be restored. And they'll know we are Christians by our love, By our Love, Yes they'll know we are Christians by our love. They'll know we are Christians by our love. Amen.

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