### “All the Truth” Steve Finlan for The First Church, June 12, 2022

**Proverbs 8:1, 4, 22–30**

1Does not wisdom call, and does not understanding raise her voice? 4 “To you, O people, I call, and my cry is to all that live.

22 “The Lord created me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of long ago. 23 Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth. 24 When there were no depths I was brought forth, when there were no springs abounding with water. 25 Before the mountains had been shaped, before the hills, I was brought forth— 26 when he had not yet made earth and fields, or the world’s first bits of soil. 27 When he established the heavens, I was there, when he drew a circle on the face of the deep, 28 when he made firm the skies above, when he established the fountains of the deep, 29 when he assigned to the sea its limit, so that the waters might not transgress his command, when he marked out the foundations of the earth, 30then I was beside him, like a master worker; and I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always.”

**John 16:12–15**

12 “I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. 13When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. 14He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. 15All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.”

We start with an intriguing passage about the role of Wisdom as God’s helper at the time of creation itself. Wisdom was like a master worker with God when the earth and the waters were given their boundaries. This Old Testament passage reminds us of what the New Testament says about Jesus’ role as a co-creator: “All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being” (John 1:3). That’s from John, then from Colossians, we have “in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him” (Col 1:16). The role that Proverbs has Wisdom playing, the New Testament has Jesus playing. The difference is that we don’t know if Proverbs is speaking of Wisdom as an aspect of God, or as an actual, separate persona. But we know Jesus is a separate persona, and so his role in creation is literal not metaphorical. It may be that Proverbs is speaking about the Spirit’s role, while the New Testament speaks of the Son’s role in creation, and that both are legitimate reports about creation.

Most important for us in today’s Gospel passage, I think, is the statement “When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth” (16:13). The Jesus spirit becomes a guide to you in all your living, all your discerning, all your decision-making. When it says “he will guide you,” the word for “guide” is ὁδηγέω *hodēgeō*, to lead along a road. The Spirit of Truth can lead us along the road of life. Usually we will not hear the Spirit’s voice in clear English. Rather, the guidance is like a whispering to our hearts; a feeling of spiritual attraction, possibly an “aha!” response to some idea. The Spirit’s guidance is very personal and different for each one of us.

This Spirit was certainly the guide for the apostles. They were empowered by the Spirit to go forth and preach, and Peter gained three thousand converts after his first post-Spirit sermon. And the apostles were enabled to remember Jesus’ words. “The Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you” (14:26).

Some Christians have taken this instruction very literally, and have decided that they don’t need any church liturgy, that is, church ritual, or hierarchy, since each believer has the Spirit of Truth within. Unfortunately, such groups tend to get persecuted, as happened to the Dukhobors in 18th to 20th century Russia. They decided that having the spirit within meant they no longer needed any ritual, liturgy, or priests, or to have any affiliation with the Orthodox Church. Further, they took Jesus’ instructions on nonviolence seriously and would not serve in the military. They were known for their *a capella* songs and their love of simplicity.

They were persecuted under the Czars and then the Soviets. Many emigrated to Canada. In the early 20th century some Canadian Dukhobors became extremists and started committing arson against schools, railway bridges, and the properties of more moderate Dukhobors. This ended in the 1950s. This becomes a lesson about the dangers of isolation and of hostility to society. But the original instinct of the Dukhobors was quite sincere and constructive. About 70,000 people descended from the Dukhobors still survive in Russia, Georgia, and Canada today.

What about us? Can we get all our guidance from the Spirit without becoming extremist? I think so. The Spirit can teach us everything; it can help us remember words of Scripture, and it can guide us into all truth, if we are committed to it. Are we required, then, to reject all hierarchy? Probably not. Even the Dukhobors recognized that it was okay to have leadership, just not the arrogance of status. Are we required to reject all liturgy, as the Dukhobors did? I don’t think so. The Dukhobors were far from an ideal group, but I do think they proceeded from a sound instinct. If we have the Spirit within, we don’t need external forms or external religious bosses to tell us what to think or how to worship. But we still need community, cooperation, and ethics. We need also tolerance and acceptance of other views. One feature of spiritual progress is that we can see that those of other viewpoints can be seeing a different part of the big picture of God than *we* see.

How does the Spirit work within us? One member of our congregation writes, “God has many things to say to us—believe in Jesus for it comes through him. Believe in the ten commandments.” This person sees the Spirit as related to the process of our instruction in the Bible. We learn not only from spiritual intuition but from having our minds instructed.

Another member writes: “The Spirit of Truth is within all of us believers. We experience this inwardly every day and in every situation. The Spirit guides us through what we are unable to *see* or *understand* fully in our own thoughts and experience. So if we are *quiet* and open our hearts and minds, we will be guided. We are never alone. The Spirit lives in us.” Indeed. The Spirit helps us when things exceed our understanding. Being quiet and receptive enables the Spirit to operate within our minds.

Sometimes our experiences are painful. Another member writes about “living and questioning the passing of our loved ones. For all the deaths we have experienced, we question ‘why?’ Maybe when we pass away we’ll know the ‘truth’ from the Father.” This person is looking for *meaning*. There may not be a satisfactory answer to the questions “why?” or “why now?” For human beings, loss comes with the territory. Nevertheless, there was meaning in those people’s lives, and that meaning will resume when they wake up in the next life. The meaning will be unfolded in the continuation of life in a new sphere. We have shared moments of meaning in our fond memories of them, and in our anticipation of seeing them again. One important component of meaning is believing that nothing good is lost.

In whatever ways they practiced the Golden Rule, our dear departed helped to keep the divine love circulating. We are admonished to do this, to love one another in the way that Jesus loves us (John 13:34; 15:12). We have spiritual help. None of us is really alone. Jesus and his Spirit can help us in living this life. They would help guide us in getting a spiritual center, finding meaning and value in our lives, and then learning to rely on their guidance as we go through this life. The Spirit would lead us into all truth, wherever it may lead us.

We might not be prominent heroes. We may not be reporters on the frontlines of dangerous events in the world. We may not be soldiers in conflict zones. We may not be Secret Service agents protecting our elected leaders. But we have our own heroic tasks. We have our own daily challenges, times when we have to call upon our patience, our faith, or our powers of forgiveness as we lead our lives. There are friends and relatives whom we endeavor to encourage, who seem to feel that they are overwhelmed by life. Our compassion makes a difference in their lives. We are lead to live for the truth in small or big ways in our lives. So, allow yourself to do small or great things with great kindness, guided by Spirit, by Truth, and by Love.