

I recall the story of a man who was chatting with the captain of a sailing vessel as they sailed the rocky coast of New England. The man stated, "I bet you know where every rock along this coast line is." The captain replied as only an 'ole salt" could, "Nope, but I know where they ain't." Words of wisdom. Words of a guide who was able to navigate a schooner through dangerous waters with safety.

We all have needed guides in our lives. From our first faltering steps, through our growing years and through our aging. We need those who are able to guide us through troubled waters and bring us to the still waters. Jesus had guided the disciples for about three years. Now he understands that they cannot be left without someone to continue to guide them in the process. The Holy Spirit comes to be such a guide for them and for us.

As I was thinking about the Holy Spirit as a guide I wondered if there was a difference between a guide and a leader. Some say they are basically the same thing, although one had a little different twist, it noted that a guide implies a continuous presence. Someone who is willing to be with us throughout the whole journey. Jesus spoke in John 10 about the Good Shepherd and how the Good Shepherd cared for the sheep. He was one who didn't run off when trouble came and whose sole concern was for the sheep. The Holy Spirit is the one who is with us over the long haul. One who knows the way and the needs that we may have along the way.

Jesus taught that it is the Holy Spirit who will fill the role as guide after he was gone. The Spirit will not only be with the disciples but will be with all who follow after them. The Spirit will lead us into all truth. The Spirit will not lead us in the wrong direction or take the wrong path. The Spirit will not head off on its own direction but will always follow the way Jesus led. The Spirit will not lead us contrary to the path Jesus is on. Thus, the question is still valid, "What would Jesus do?"

Of course, we must be willing to follow the guide. Amazing how often we try to head off by ourselves. We think we know better than the guide. A program on the Animal Planet features the game wardens of Maine, Northwoods Law. A program a few weeks ago had them searching for a woman lost on the Appalachian trail. She had met her husband, had her supplies restocked and headed back out on the trail. However, they discovered she had left her GPS device with the used items in the motel room. A postscript at the end of the program noted that 100 days after the program she still had not been found. The assumption was that she had wandered off the course and had been unable to find her way back. She had nothing to guide her once she left the trail.

Now, thinking only about the Holy Spirit when we think about guides who always know the right way. There are times when we do know a better way than our human guides/mentors. When the old ways are no longer valid. We all are alive today because someone came up with the notion that if surgeons washed their hands before and between surgeries more lives would be saved. It was not that the original guide was wrong, just a better way was discovered. On the human level questions are fine and are needed.

But, when we are following the Spirit we can be assured that the Spirit will only lead us in the right paths. Even through the dark valleys when we are unsure of the steps we are taking we must trust that the Spirit is guiding us in the right way. We must trust the One who is guiding.

Jesus said the Spirit will guide us into "all truth". What is truth? It is interesting that the word is used once in Matthew and in Luke's gospels, twice in Mark and twenty-three (23) times in John. We first find it in John 1:14 where John says that Jesus was "full of grace and truth."

This is the Word that came and lived among us. He came as the true representative of God. Now, the truth has been distorted through the ages. We have often formed God in our own image and what we think God should be. Jesus came to bring to us the truth about God and to present that truth to the world. Jesus says that it is this truth that will set us free (John 8:32). Jesus comes as truth and in him we see God as God really is.

So, what is truth? Simply, God is Love. Eugene Peterson in The Message translates I Peter 4:8, “*Most of all love each other as if your life depended on it. Love makes up for practically anything.*” (or as the NRSV puts it, “*Love covers a multitude of sins.*”) I feel like a broken record, a song that is played over and over and over again. But, I daily wonder if we really believe that God is Love. We seem to be going backwards on that front. I was watching a sports program a few days ago and they were showing the crowds outside the stadium and in the back was someone carrying a sign that read, “God hates...” I am not sure who God hated because they panned away from it quickly; but that seems to be the message many want to bring. You can find signs like this outside most sporting venues and gatherings of large crowds. God is not love - God is hate — certainly not the moving of the Spirit leading us into all truth.

We got a message this past week. It was addressed to FBC/MLT. It has a Seattle postmark and the return address is: Jesus (with a heart). Inside was a card that reads, “Thus saith the Lord GOD, ‘Drink not from another man’s well.’” (Ezra 10:15). Now, I am not sure which of you have been drinking from someone else’s well. I am not really sure what the person is trying to imply — but it does not seem like a message of love. It does not seem like one that the Spirit would send especially since this phrase is not found in Ezra or in any other book of Scripture! Why would the Spirit send to the church a message not even in Scripture?

We want God to love us but we are not so sure about our neighbors. We would prefer God bring judgment on them for their sins as long as God forgives us of ours. The truth is, **God is Love.** It was love that put Jesus on the cross - not how good we were. It was God’s love for the world. A love that was poured out for all people. Jesus’ message was that love must prevail regardless of the cost and he was willing to pay the cost.

The Spirit comes to guide us to all truth. The Spirit comes and empowers us to love as God loved the world and as Jesus loved the world. Any other guide is a mis-leading guide unless it is leading us toward love. God’s Spirit always leads in the path of love.

Simply put, that is the truth.

NIV, New International Bible Society, Zondervan, 1973, 1978, 1985
NRSV, Division of Christian Education, NCC, 1988