John 14:25-26;16:12-15 Mid-Week Lent #5 3/14/18

Being lost is very stressful for most people. I have my stories of getting lost, and I am sure you have some good stories about being lost, too.

There are different ways of getting lost. On a Sunday afternoon drive in the countryside, with warmth, sunshine, and the green grass of spring embracing you, you can almost hope to get lost.

But let’s change a few of the parameters. Instead of beautiful weather, it is terrible weather, and it is night, and you are in a city you have never visited before, in a part of town you would never choose to go to, but you are lost. You just heard a gun shot a block or two away, and you have a flat tire and no jack and worse yet, no cell coverage, almost out of gas, meanwhile, your niece, also a stranger to this town waits for you at the airport. Now that is lost. You can feel the stress cranking away at you.

It was happening to Jesus’ followers. Jesus had eaten a meal with his disciples and now he was doing what they loved best – he was teaching them. They loved it when he taught. This is why they gave up everything to follow him. But this evening’s teaching session wasn’t so great. There was an ominous thudding in the room. Jesus kept beating the drum of departure. He just couldn’t leave the subject alone. He would talk about it, move on to something else, and then after a couple minutes come back and remind them—again—that he was leaving them. *“One of you is going to betray me… Where I am going, you cannot follow now… In a little while you will see me no more…”*

The disciples were beginning to feel lost. Like kids the night before dad goes on a trip, or maybe a deployment, they ask questions, *“Where are you going… Why can’t I follow you… How can we know the way?”* You can hear the panic of lostness.

In our reading Jesus hints at it again, ***“All this I have spoken while still with you.”*** *“While still with us? Where are you going? Why are you leaving?”*

What happens when a loved one leaves, permanently? It hurts! It hurts! And what about when that loved one is not only a loved one, but also one on whom you lean for your life. I don’t know for sure, but this might just be the worst thing about the best marriages. You have seen some funerals—though none would ever dare say it—which were almost a relief. And you have seen some where it is like two people died, even though there is only one casket. That’s what Jesus’ disciples were feeling.

Jesus was their teacher. Jesus was more. He was their friend. He had the answers for their questions and big questions too—not like *Jeopardy* or *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire* questions. He gave meaning to their lives. He bound them together, almost like a tribe. Being with Jesus was like… no, not *like*, being with Jesus *was* a religious experience. Every day of it.

Now he would suddenly be taken from them in a most jolting way. And even though after the jolt of his crucifixion he would rise from his grave, he would be with them a few weeks. Then he would leave them forever!

How could they go on?

Jesus told his disciples that there would be a change, a big change. He would soon leave, but he, in his own words, *“would not leave [them] as orphans.”* (14:18) He wanted them to remember that: *“I will not leave you as orphans!”*

***“The Counselor, the Holy Spirit…”*** If you are used to the older translations of this verse, you remember it said, “The Comforter” or “The Helper.” All of those are good translations of a word we don’t quite have in Enghlish. ***“The Counselor,*** *the Comforter, the Helper,* ***the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.”*** Jesus is telling his disciples, “I have taught you much. If you are worried that when I leave you, you will have no one to continue teaching you, don’t worry. The Holy Spirit will continue to teach you. If you are worried that you are going to forget some of the important things I have taught you over the past three years, don’t worry. The Holy Spirit will remind you.”

Going forward, Jesus wanted them and us to know and to remember that while he is physically separated from us, the Holy Spirit is with us. That while they could no longer sit at Jesus’ feet to learn, the Holy Spirit would continue to teach and guide them. But here is the other part that he makes pretty clear: While the Holy Spirit would, in many respects take his place, the Holy Spirit is not a replacement for Jesus.

Let me explain that.

The Holy Spirit was not a new Jesus. When Jesus would send the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit would ***“remind [the disciples] of everything [Jesus] had said.”*** The Holy Spirit does not have a different message from Jesus’ but the same message. He would remind them of what Jesus had taught.

In fact, the Holy Spirit goes further than merely reminding them of what Jesus had said. Jesus said, ***“He will bring glory to me.”*** The Holy Spirit’s chief role is to maintain a continuity of faith. He is there to glorify Jesus. He is not primarily there to bring attention to himself. The Holy Spirit and Jesus are not rivals vying for the attention of believers. The Holy Spirit does not bang around in the kitchen, hitting pots and pans, or beating his own drum. The Holy Spirit almost silently holds up a posterboard saying, “Look over there. Look at Jesus!”

This same Holy Spirit continues to testify to Jesus. Geographically, the world seems to be shrinking with technological and transportation advances. Spiritually it is getting bigger, and ever easier to get lost in. We are assaulted by ever more and more tempting temptations. We sometimes really aren’t sure what God would have us do. So we seek God’s guidance, but there are more lieing voices out there than ever before. Like the disciples, remember that the Holy Spirit continues as Jesus’ gift to us, to teach and guide, to remind and glorify Christ. Through the Word this Holy Spirit creates faith in us of which the most important article is that Jesus is our Savior.

The chief way that the Holy Spirit does this is through this Bible. It repeatedly tells us that it was created when *“men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit”* (2 Peter 1:21). This is the Holy Spirit’s testimony among us to this day. That is why the word of God is called the sword of the Spirit (Ephesians 6:17).

The Holy Spirit not only guides us through the Word of God, but he also lives in our hearts. The Word tells us that our bodies are his temples. He guides and directs even in our hearts. (But here we must always go back to his word to be sure that we are not self-deceived.)

The Holy Spirit also teaches us how to pray. There is that mysterious Bible passage which says, *“We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express.”* (Romans 8:26). The Holy Spirit guides our prayers to heaven. This is the one Jesus promised.

With all the blessings of the Spirit comes an important reminder. When the Spirit leads us, whether through the word, or through the Spirit’s leading, or even through a fellow Christian speaking the word of God and we say in our hearts, “Yes, that is right.” When the Spirit speaks it is important for us to follow. God’s Word is not optional, and the Holy Spirit’s leading is not advisory. When we buck against the Holy Spirit’s leading, we sin. We rebel against God himself. Then it is time to heed the Spirit’s leading and remember the most glorious thing the Spirit has taught us: Jesus is the all-sufficient sacrifice for sin.

Jesus went to heaven, but he has not left us as orphans.

In truth, the disciples needed encouragement in a special way. They would soon be wrenched away from Jesus’ physical presence in a way which we will never fully appreciate. But Jesus has not left us as orphans either. We have never physically seen Jesus have yet believed. (John 20:29) Jesus has sent us a Counselor, a Comforter, a Helper who lives with and in God’s people, teaching, guiding, reminding and glorifying Christ. Remember that! Jesus wanted you to. Amen.