

**10**

May

## The Story Abides

Stories That Matter

SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER, YEAR A

The Spirit abides in us, preserving and weaving our shared story as the body of Christ. Worship this week celebrates testimony, memory, and the ongoing narrative of God's love in our community.

### REFERENCES

Ezekiel 34:1-7

Psalms 115:1-11, 18b

1 Peter 3:13-22

John 14:15-21

### COLORS

White

The Farewell Discourse is an amazing document. We have taken these words as instructional, and indeed they are. Like a professor attempting to prepare students for the upcoming final exam, Jesus wants to make sure his followers have everything they need for what comes next. And we are grateful for that. We have lived through these words for the centuries that have followed. We have learned about how to be the church, how to be disciples, how to see all the people and invite them into a deeper relationship with the Christ we have come to know. There is so much to learn from these powerful words. Perhaps the mirror to Matthew's Sermon on the Mount, the Farewell Discourse in John's Gospel gives us a picture of the church at its best. It is a vision to live into—a practice that is simple on the surface but takes a lifetime to perfect.

Let me not diminish that informational or instructional function of these verses. But there is also something more intimate going on here. There is a binding, a gathering up that happens as Jesus

shares his heart and his future with those who have been following him. He is offering a legacy, a continuation in and through those disciples. He is putting all his theological eggs in their basket. All of his missional hopes now reside in these somewhat inept followers. And he wants to make sure how okay he is with that.

Not just okay. This is the plan. This is the next step on the world-changing effort, this kin-dom-building transformation. And here's the difficult part: he will be with them. It's difficult to comprehend, that is. Yeah, it's the next chapter when he talks about abiding, but he plants the seed here. "On that day you will know that I am in my father and you in me and I in you" (*John 14:20 NRSV*). "That day"? That day where they see him, but the world does not. That day where they understand life a little bit better. *That day*. On that day, they will know that the story abides, because it abides in them. They are the story. They live the story. They are the witnesses that this was more than just a dream. They are proof that hope is possible; that there is something beyond our vision. The story abides in them.

That's the gift that he offers them in this instructional, intimate moment—a promise of presence, his presence, the story's presence, the Spirit's presence. Ah, the Spirit. That is how we hold on to something beyond our grasp. That is how we make sense of the story, the experience, the relationship with this one we call Lord. The Spirit gives us utterance, we say. But how does this work? How does this Spirit abide and become the means by which we become the story, the gospel on the hoof, as it were?

There is a lot that we don't know about the Spirit, no question about that. The Spirit blows where it will and all of that. But if we listen carefully to what Jesus tells us here, there is a lot we do know or can believe in, anyway. We need to extend the reading a few verses, though. You are hereby given permission to extend the lectionary gospel reading for this week. Take thou authority!

First of all, we can know or believe that access to or awareness of the Spirit is a function of faith. It involves a relationship with Jesus Christ. "The world," John quotes, "cannot receive" the Spirit. The world doesn't know the Spirit, not because they aren't worthy, but simply because they don't have this relationship of love that opens the door to the experience of the Spirit. Oh, it is possible to have an experience of God without a relationship with Jesus the Christ. But to know and be known by the Spirit takes something deeper, an act of will, an offering of self to the Lordship of Christ. "I will not leave you orphaned" says Jesus. I will not leave you Fatherless, out of touch with the Father. There is a connection, a link to the Father that once came from the person of Jesus and now comes through the Spirit.

The function of the Spirit, according to Jesus in verse 26, is to teach and to remind. This Advocate (which is the Greek word “*paraklete*” and is sometimes translated Helper, or Comforter, or Counselor) is the abiding presence that connects to our sense of who we are. We are reminded of what we already know. We are reminded of the teachings that we learned as children but may have forgotten or chose to set aside for a time. It is the Spirit that comes and whispers in our ears to remind us that we are better than we sometimes behave. It is the Spirit that comes to remind us even in the darkest of nights that we are not alone. It is the Spirit that reminds us that we are loved – especially in those moments when we feel most unlovable.

It is not just what we already know that is recalled by the prompting of the Spirit. We are pushed further; we are asked to climb higher. The Spirit also teaches, calling us to new levels of understanding and experience. The Spirit works with our spirits to claim deeper truths and new applications. We are stretched beyond our childhood faith as we grow and learn and live into the realm of the Spirit. We have much to learn under the tutelage of the Spirit, and much of it is learned by doing. When we tell the story, even the part of the story that abides in us, that intersects with our lives, then we learn more about what it means to be alive, to abide in him and know he abides in us. We grow into the story we tell. And in us and in the community of which we are a part, the story abides.

*Rev. Dr. Derek Weber, Director of Preaching Ministries, served churches in Indiana, Arkansas, and the British Methodist Church. His PhD in preaching and media is from the University of Edinburgh. He has taught preaching in seminary and conference settings for more than twenty years.*

//

**Notice at collection**

**Your Privacy Choices**

