

“Divine Truth”

**Pastor Dave Carlson
First Presbyterian Church
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Old Testament Lesson – Proverbs 8:1, 22-31 New Testament Lesson – John 16:12-15

There is knowledge and then there's knowledge – book knowledge and shoe-leather knowledge; that is, knowledge we can gain only by living life faithfully and traveling the path God has placed before us.

That's what the 1950s U.S. presidential candidate Adlai Stevenson was pointing at when he wrote, “What a man knows at (age) 50 that he did not know at (age) 20 is, for the most part, incommunicable.” Meaning we can't put it into words and expect it to stick.

“All the observations about life which can be communicated handily” writes Stevenson, “are as well known to a man at 20 who has been attentive as to a man at 50. He has been told them all, he has read them all, but he has not lived them all.

What he knows at 50 that he did not know at 20 is not the knowledge of formulas or ... (whatever), but of people, places, actions – a knowledge not gained by words but by touch, sight, sound, victories, failures, sleeplessness, devotion, love – the human experiences and emotions of this earth and oneself and other people; and perhaps, too, a little faith and a little reverence for things you cannot see.” True knowledge involves having “... a little faith and a little reverence for things we cannot see” – that's what Jesus is pointing to when he says in the Gospel According to John, “I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now, (cannot see them now). When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth.”

Wow, guided into all the truth! That's a pretty big promise, particularly when it comes with the assertion that there are things to be known that we just can't yet bear to know, truths about life and death and everything in between and everything before it and beyond it that we're just not ready, willing or able to know.

Given all the things we don't know, all the things we refuse to know, and all the things we just plain can't yet know, I wonder, do you feel guided into all the truth, guided by the Spirit to truly know all things, as promised by Jesus? I sure don't.

And yet, here's Jesus promising just that, that the Holy Spirit – which he has sent and which we have received – Jesus promises that the

Spirit will in fact guide us into all the truth, guide us to know all things. How is that possible?!? Guided to know all things.

It's possible precisely because we don't know all things. Because we don't and can't know all things, the Spirit must guide us to the truth gradually, rather than just give us the truth all at once.

As Jesus says, "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now." In other words, God's revelation comes to us as we are able to receive it, over time, and not all at once.

Our ability to receive all that God would have us know and believe is in direct relationship with and proportional to our level of spiritual growth.

Spiritual growth is a matter of going through life's events and growing from the experience. While we would all rather show up fully formed and possessing all the answers, that's just not how God made us.

No, under God's divine plan, the Holy Spirit continually grows us and shapes us, if we are open to it. That's how God designed us – for continual growth. And in the process of our continual, ongoing, never-ending spiritual growth, we move closer and closer to the truth, the truth that God reveals to us through the Spirit – a truth that's too often hidden from view in this complex, funny little world we've managed to create for ourselves.

A pastor phoned the home of some recent church visitors and a voice answered with a whisper, saying, "Hello."

"Who is this?" asked the pastor.

"Jimmy."

"How old are you, Jimmy?"

"Four."

"Jimmy, may I please speak to your mom?"

"She's busy."

"Then may I speak to your dad?"

"He's busy."

"Are there any other adults at your home?"

"The police."

"Then let me speak to one of the police officers."

"They're busy."

"Who else is there?"

"Firemen."

"Well, put one of the firemen on the phone."

"They're busy."

"Jimmy, what are they all busy doing?"

"They're looking for me."

The truth God reveals to us can be a lot like Jimmy – it's hiding right in front of us in plain sight, and we're just not seeing it.

And yet pursuing divine truth – that which God is continually revealing to us – is the job of each and every one of us, Christian or not.

Divine truth has been given to each and every one of us, Christian or not. And each and every one of us – Christian or not – has access to divine truth, in what Jesus Christ conveys to us through the Spirit.

So, how do we come to know and believe the truth God reveals to us amid all the other "truths" this world throws at us? How do we know what's true and what's not true amid all the conflicting beliefs and practices we encounter – questions of sexual orientation; differing views on wealth and poverty, liberal and conservative; the doctrine of just war, as in war that is somehow justified (think Hitler and WWII; but what about civilian massacres in Syria, today; war, or no war; US-led forces or a multinational Coalition?) It is Memorial Day weekend, after all, and we know our fallen heroes did not die in vain or for some unjust cause. But how do we know?

What about the question of being spiritual but not religious – that's huge! Some people thinking they can practice their own sense of spirituality in private and this will serve them just as well as being a part of a faith community like ours.

True, or not so true? How do we know what's true? We know "truth" if we know Jesus and listen to the Holy Spirit. Jesus says of the Holy Spirit, "He will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears..." This is how we know what's true and what's not – because divine truth as given by the Spirit always points to Christ. The Spirit speaks whatever it hears from God. It does not speak on its own behalf.

The Spirit "will glorify me," says Jesus, "because he will take what is mine (what is Jesus') and declare it to you, (to us.)" This means that, if what the Holy Spirit is saying to you is in conflict with the teachings of Jesus, it is not the Holy Spirit speaking. It's some other spirit – like the spirit of deception, or fear, or greed, or hate, or violence, or whatever – whatever it is that leads us astray, whatever it is about your life that you're thinking about right now, whatever it is that you suspect just might not be leading you in the right direction.

Think about it. Is there something or someone who is leading you astray? Maybe it's a long-held belief or practice of yours that has never really led anywhere good. Whatever it is, let us at least be honest enough with ourselves to acknowledge that it's a false spirit, a spirit contrary to God.

And then pray to God, that the Spirit of Jesus Christ would come to you and lead you back toward a divine truth, a truth that comes straight from God. You could do that now. Pray, saying, "Lord, free me from this thought, attitude, or action. I know it's not from you. Lead me to replace it with that which does come from you, the thoughts, attitudes and actions displayed by Jesus and made know to me by the Holy Spirit. Amen.

This is how we can come to know divine truth, by praying that God would reveal it, to us – to you, to me. That's how we can come to know what's true and what's not. Because truth is something that comes from God and leads us back to God.

As Christians – as human beings, we are each placed on a path of continual spiritual growth. And the more open we are to discovering the truth of God, as revealed by Jesus Christ, through his gift of the Holy Spirit, the more blessings we receive from God; and the more of a blessing we become for others, on behalf of God.

So let's not accept or settle for our version of the truth, or the world's version of the truth. But let us test these truths along side Jesus' teachings, and what they say about divine truth.

And if you need help to do that in an area of your life, come see me; we'll search for the truth together.

PASTORAL PRAYER

Creator God, Christ, Holy Spirit, you form one communion as three persons. You create promise in our souls for new life. You redeem us by forgiving our sin and making us new. You sustain us in times of trial and call us forth as instruments of your peace. For these good gifts, we are thankful.

May we know that, as three persons in one purpose, you provide all that we could ever need or want. With your blessing, you help us attain new heights of faith, understanding and connection with others.

May we know you through communion with you as Three-in-One, even in our limited knowledge and less-than-whole-hearted faith and confidence.

We ask your comfort for all who grieve: those who mourn the loss of a loved one, whether recent or in years past that seem like yesterday.

May we find hope in the promise of the resurrection as we remember our loved ones, and honor our fallen heroes in all forms of uniformed service.

We pray for the victims of the Oklahoma tornado and for families that have lost loved ones there.

We also ask your healing and grace for those who are recovering from surgery or illness, and those who are exhausted and worn down.

For it was when we were most in need that you came to us, teaching us, healing us, saving us, and sending to us the Holy Spirit, that we might come together in faith and service, even as we now join together in prayer, using the words that you taught us, saying:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts,
as we forgive our debtors;

and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever.
Amen.