

“Helped Along the Way”

Holy Trinity Sunday

John 16:12-15

May 30, 2010

Four score and seven years ago, our fathers brought forth upon this continent a new nation: conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

Now we are engaged in a great civil war. . .testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated. . . can long endure. We are met on a great battlefield of that war.

We have come to dedicate a portion of that field as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.

But, in a larger sense, we cannot dedicate. . .we cannot consecrate. . . we cannot hallow this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember, what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here.

It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work that they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us. . .that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion. . . that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain. . . that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom. . . and that government of the people. . .by the people. . .for the people. . . shall not perish from the earth.

Abraham Lincoln – November 19, 1863

There never has been a time in world history when war has not been fought, blood has not been spilt, and lives have not been sacrificed. The face of our world is marked with the graves of those who have given their last measure of devotion. It would be something if we could say that every battle, every war, each life was fought and sacrificed for the principle of justice and freedom, of a principle larger than personal desire or greed. It would be nice but we cannot. We all know of wars begun out of the passion for power, desire for conquest, and the need for ethnic cleansing and genocide. We, as a human race have at times lost our way. This is equally true for institutions that are political, religious institutions, the people of Israel, and even the Body of Christ. Each have at times used their identity as an excuse to promote injustice, harbor hatred, and seek to reward the few at the expense of many.

Not only has there been political ambition but also the gospel of Jesus Christ has been misused. Attempting to defend the Gospel, especially against falsehoods and lies, commonly referred to as heresy, we have weakened the gospel by replacing its message with one that accommodates the world. Popular views, trends, uniformed opinions all seem to find their way into the language of the church. It can be a challenge to resist such things, especially when they sound reasonable, when they favor our point of view, or when they simply address the circumstances of our lives.

Assuming we know better, we pursue options contrary to God’s will, and often find ourselves way off track. We need help. We can use guidance. It would be great to have someone or something to keep us on track. And thanks to God, we do!

As Jesus continues his farewell speech to his disciples, he promised the Advocate, the Holy Spirit. He pointed out that he must leave in order for the Advocate to come. Jesus' disciples are to trust the Advocate, the Holy Spirit. □□

This is perhaps one of the most important passages in affirming the Trinity—that the witness of Jesus is a true witness to the power and to the will of the Father. The witness of the Advocate that comes after Jesus will speak the same truth.

What seems to me both provocative and liberating is Jesus' promise to the eleven that there are still many things, not just a few, but many things, which he has to say, but that they are simply not able to bear at this time. There is a definite sense that speaking, even of the deepest truths, depends on circumstance, the spirit of one's hearers, and purpose for which the Word is spoken. John makes this clear in Jesus' speech in chapter 16. □

John declares that Jesus has said these things to you to keep you from stumbling. He cites the growing intensity of opposition to Jesus and the kind of harassment or peril to which his followers will be subjected. To help in such difficult times he told them these things.

Jesus also reminds the disciples that he did not say these things in the beginning because he was with them. But the times have changed. Jesus has declared that he must part from his followers and in their sadness he has added new words of a promised Advocate who will attend them.

Jesus declares that he does not have enough time to say all that he would like to say, and they do not have the ability to hear it. Again, the promise of a future with the reliable witness of the Advocate is declared to them.

This is good news for the disciples. Even though they do not fully understand Jesus, further reflection for them, as well as for us, leads to encouragement in tough times, times of sadness, and times of confusion. □□

The future is open. It does however require discernment, listening, watching for, and trusting that God will continue to be revealed through the Spirit of Truth. We, along with the eleven, can trust that Jesus has shown us that God is still at work for our illumination and gives us strength to persist. We dare to humbly acknowledge that there may still be truths that we are not able to bear, but that God accompanies us along the way. □□

We may not understand. But God's sending of the Spirit of Truth is not dependent on our understanding. The Spirit will not be taken away from us, even in the times when we are least able to trust, understand, or persevere. For Father, Son, and Spirit of Truth witness to one truth, all of which we cannot see, but all of which we dare to trust is God at work for us, revealing righteousness here and preparing a place suitable for each and all of us in the fullness of God's reign.

As we remember those who gave their last full measure of devotion, and as we are reminded of our propensity for war, we have a triune God, who created us, saved us, and continues to guide us as individuals and as a community of faith.

AMEN