

Does God Live in You?
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Presbyterian Church in Sudbury

John 14.15-27 (NRSV)

“If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.

“I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them.” Judas (not Iscariot) said to him, “Lord, how is it that you will reveal yourself to us, and not to the world?” Jesus answered him, “Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words; and the word that you hear is not mine, but is from the Father who sent me.

“I have said these things to you while I am still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.”

ONE: It gets lonely

My title asks, does God live in you? And that question arises from the question in the text. Several times Jesus told his disciples that he was going away, that this was actually a good thing, and that even though he wasn't going to be with them physically, he would be with them in an even better way. Because he lives, disciples will live. The world won't see him but disciples will see him. So one disciple¹ asks the obvious question: “Lord, how is it that you will reveal yourself to us, and not to the world?”

Isn't that our question too? We want to see Jesus. And we've lived long enough to know that sometimes that's hard to do. The cares and concerns, the hurts and distractions of the world make it hard to see Jesus. But we so want to see him. Somehow we know that only in seeing him can we find

¹ See Gail R. O'Day, “The Gospel of John” *The New Interpreter's Bible*, vol. IX (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995) 748. “The name of this second Judas does not occur in any synoptic lists of the twelve disciples. John 14-16 does not explicitly restrict the disciples present at the discourse to the Twelve, however; therefore, it is a misguided exercise to try to harmonize this name with those lists.” This is certainly the most straightforward explanation for why the name Judas (not Iscariot) shows up in this text. It does suggest, however, that the methodology of the Jesus Seminar, the conclusions of which are too skeptical (and are criticized elsewhere in these notes), is not a totally inappropriate methodology. Clearly, every word of the Farewell Discourse doesn't fit the synoptic context of Maundy Thursday following the Last Supper. Yet I do not think this fact forces one to the extreme skepticism of the Seminar or those who embrace a similar hermeneutic. To agree that the Discourse is not all from the hours just before the crucifixion is a long way from agreeing that these words and ideas are not historically or theologically directly related to Jesus.

the kind of life we want and the kind of life this world cannot give us. So we come today with that question. Perhaps it sits quietly in our hearts. Or, if life is falling in on us, the question throbs like a migraine between our temples. How will the Lord reveal himself to us? Dare we really believe that God lives in us?

How can we give an honest answer to that question? William Willimon answers this way. He writes that child psychologists say that the reason why a baby loves to play “Peek-a-boo” is that, for a young child, when you are out of sight, you are out of mind. When she can see you, you are there. When she cannot see you, you are gone, you no longer exist. So when you reappear, only a moment later, saying “Peek-a-boo,” the child cackles with delight at the unexpected reappearance.

“Peek-a-boo” no longer delights adults because as we grow older we learn that, just because someone is not standing there in front of us doesn’t mean the person no longer exists. We learn to deal with time and absence.

Or do we?²

Some of you will recall that a couple of years before we came to this church, my wife Merrie was a Fulbright Exchange Teacher and spent nearly ten months in Spain. After she had been gone a couple of months, I still remember one of the saints of the church I was serving at the time, one of the widows in that church, of which there were many. She shook my hand after worship one Sunday and asked in a lighthearted way, “How are you doing by yourself?”

I replied, “I’m doing okay. Just taking it one day at a time.”

Then she became very serious very quickly and said, “It gets lonely, doesn’t it?”

Yes, it does. And my spouse, thanks be to God, came home after several more months. But as we move through life we all come to the time when our spouse does not come home any more, or our children, or our parents, or other loved ones. And, yes, it gets lonely.

Jesus said, “I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live.” But as disciples we wonder about this. Barbara Brown Taylor writes, “A little while became a long while. A long while became a lifetime. Ten years turned into a hundred years, then five hundred years, then a thousand. Now, from where we sit, it has been so long that some of us wonder if we have not been orphaned after all. Is [Jesus] gone or isn’t he? And if he is gone, where has he gone and what in the world will we do without him? And if he is not gone, where is he, exactly, and why doesn’t he show himself?”³

It gets lonely.

TWO: We are not alone

But we are not alone. The gospels reaffirm this time and time again. We are NOT alone. Sometimes it feels that way but our feelings are not the whole truth. Jesus’ word is the truth. He said before he left, “Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them” (14.23). Not visit. Not pass through from time to time. Not send a postcard.⁴ “We will come to them and make our home with them.”

² William H. Willimon, “We Are Not Left Desolate,” *Pulpit Resource* 29.2 (2001): 36.

³ Barbara Brown Taylor, *Gospel Medicine* (Boston: Cowley Publications, 1995) 80.

⁴ Taylor, 81.

That's Jesus' word to us and as hard as it sometimes is, we can trust Jesus' word. Oh, there are those who say we can't trust Jesus' word, that he's been gone too long now, or that we can't really know much about what he said anyway. Even some scholars known as the Jesus Seminar say that. You've read about the Jesus Seminar in the papers from time to time saying all kinds of crazy stuff. In fact, just this past Thursday, one author and filmmaker who belongs to the Jesus Seminar announced his conclusion that Mary became pregnant with Jesus when she was raped by a Roman soldier and he wants to make a movie about that.⁵ Although why anyone would want to see such a move is beyond me.

But that's a little extreme even for many in the Seminar. Mostly they are a bunch of middle-aged professors, who voted on what words in the gospels were authentically said by Jesus. The voting went like this. A verse from one of the gospels was read. Then they take a vote on each verse⁶ by using a box that was passed around and into which the scholars put colored beads. A RED bead meant that Jesus undoubtedly said this or something very like it. A PINK bead indicated that Jesus probably said something like this. A GRAY bead meant that Jesus did not say this but the idea is close to his thinking. A BLACK bead was for things that Jesus did not say and the idea expressed is of a later or different tradition.⁷

The problem is that this quest for Jesus' authentic words doesn't really get us anywhere. First, the Jesus Seminar concludes that there are no RED words at all in John's Gospel, *nothing* that Jesus truly said. There is only one PINK verse — maybe Jesus said that — and a couple of GRAY verses — ideas that are a little like Jesus' ideas.⁸ But second, and more importantly, what do we have even if we had a tape recording of Jesus' exact words? Just words and that's the weakness of the Seminar.

I agree with what William Willimon said. "I'm in the business of words, think the world of words, but you can't follow words. Words won't save you. Words of Jesus, no matter how authentic, will not release your energies to follow Jesus, wouldn't make you want to die for him. We don't want words of Jesus; we want Jesus. And so that's what we get. The Father and the Son at home with us. The Holy Spirit. The helper."⁹ The promise of Jesus isn't mere words. The promise of Jesus is the true word that God will live in us and that we are never alone.

How do we know that? Well, we catch glimpses of it sometimes in ourselves and in other people too. We glimpse it in the true story of Marietta Jaegger. She was camping in Montana with

⁵ Film director Paul Verhoeven has written a book that contradicts the Bible by suggesting that Jesus might have been fathered by a Roman soldier who raped Mary, online, www.cnn.com/2008/SHOWBIZ/books/04/24/verhoeven.jesus.ap/, Internet, 26 Apr. 2008.

⁶ Willimon, 37. Willimon's critique of the Jesus Seminar is typically sarcastic. In my opinion, the sarcasm accurately critiques the weaknesses of the Seminar's conclusions: "The problem is not only that the Jesus they come up with sounds suspiciously like a middle-aged professor from a college Department of Religion, but also, where did the Jesus Seminar get the idea that what we worship in Jesus is words anyway?" However, it appears that Willimon has not actually read the Seminar's own description of their methodology for his characterization of their voting process is both unnecessarily facetious and blatantly inaccurate.

⁷ Robert W. Funk, Roy W. Hoover, et al., *The Five Gospels: The Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus* (New York: Macmillan, 1993) 36-37. "The Seminar employed colored beads dropped into voting boxes in order to permit all members to vote in secret. Beads and boxes turned out to be a fortunate choice for both Fellows and an interested public." Maybe not.

⁸ Pink = John 4.43 and Gray = John 12.24-25.

⁹ Willimon, 37.

her husband and their five kids, when her 7-year-old daughter Susie was kidnapped and killed. At first Marietta was so filled with rage that she wanted to kill the kidnapper. But then she reminded herself that “in God’s eyes the kidnapper was just as precious as her Susie.” She said: “I worked hard to remember that he was a member of the human family, and I tried to pray for him every day.”

But then, to add insult to injury, after one year the kidnapper, still at large, phoned her to taunt her. But she quietly asked him, “What can I do to help you?” There was a long silence, and the kidnapper began crying, and said: “I just wish this burden could be lifted from me.”

So he was captured and convicted, and at Marietta’s request, he was offered life imprisonment without parole rather than the death penalty. She said: “My concern is how best to honor Susie’s life. Do I honor her by becoming someone who wants to kill somebody else, or do I honor her better by saying life is sacred, even the lives of those who do horrible crimes?”¹⁰

Maybe we would react differently or have a different perspective. None of us can say with certainty how we will react when suffering overcomes us. But Mrs. Jaegger’s response witnesses to the truth of what Jesus said. There is a peace that comes, not from the world, but only from God, the God who makes a home in our hearts. We are not alone.

Conclusion

Perhaps we sense this best right here, in worship. When we worship regularly, we attune ourselves to the Father, Son, and Spirit who are making their home in us. And as one writer put it, when God moves into our lives he seems to make lots of keys.¹¹ Keys for other Christian disciples who in their going and coming we learn to recognize, and we call on them for help and friendship and love. And they call on us. For when God lives in us, there is more and more room for others in our lives too. That’s what we learn in worship. That’s what we celebrate in worship.

Does God live in you? Yes, he does, my friend. In you, and in me. Therefore, do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.

¹⁰ “Deacon Sil’s Sixth Sunday of Easter (C),” The Sermon Mall, May 2001, Theological Web Publishing, LLC, webedit@theology.org.

¹¹ Taylor, 82.