

John 16:12-15

Holy Trinity

June 3, 2007

Last Monday my conservative and in church every Sunday older sister told me, “I have been reading a book by a former nun who is no longer a believer in the Christians faith. She says that Paul had died before any of the gospels were written. Is that true? In the book she says that Paul made up the whole Christian faith.”

I told Kay that Paul who is responsible for writing much of the New Testament did write and probably died before the gospels we have today were written. I told her Paul does not seem to know anything about Mary or about the empty tomb – he writes of Jesus death on the cross and Jesus resurrection but says nothing of the miracles of Jesus. I talked about how I think about what happened when disciples experienced the crucified one to be alive once more. We looked at some passages in the scriptures together. I did not tell her to stop reading the book.

These days there are lots of books out there that are sowing doubts. My sister and many of you are being confronted with questions you never imagined existed. Like the questions the Davinci Code raised for some – the Jesus family tomb for others. Some of these things are false and foolish – someone just out to make a buck – other questions are being raised by some of the most accomplished scholars who are not believers. What should we do – gather up all our doctrines and all of our treasured ways of thinking and enter the fortress of our church and fight off this siege? Should we close our ears and our minds to anything and anyone that challenges the faith we hold dear? Should I have told my sister to put that book down and never more think about anything that troubles her faith?

John tells us that Jesus on the night he was to be betrayed spoke these words to his disciples, “I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come.”

I should have turned to this passage when I talked with my sister. Jesus is saying that what he spoke in his earthly ministry is not everything he wanted to teach. The disciples were not ready for everything yet. But the Spirit of truth would guide them later into all the truth.

The Spirit of truth – the Holy Spirit. This Spirit would be the guide and teacher of Jesus followers.

Now Jesus did not put a time limit on the Spirit's work - a year, two years, ten years, a thousand, two thousand. Jesus did not indicate a time when the Spirit's guiding and teaching would be done. Paul believed that it was this Spirit of truth that was pouring God's love into the hearts of believers in Rome. He spoke of this in our second lesson. Centuries later the majority of Christians believed that the Spirit of truth was guiding the church to declare in the Athanasian Creed, that God is one God in three persons, Father Son and Holy Spirit, the Trinity. More than a thousand years later Martin Luther wrote a catechism that Lutherans have trusted came through the Holy Spirit's inspiration. Jesus has had many things to say to his followers, but maybe even today we are not able to bear them all now. Maybe tomorrow or a thousand years from now the Holy Spirit will be teaching truth that we do not even now know.

But how can we know what the Spirit is teaching and what are empty and misleading words? In the South before the Civil War many a preacher was defending slavery in the name of God's truth and God's plan. When I grew up the truth of the church I attended was that women could not be pastors. Then suddenly some were arguing that God wanted women to be pastors also. Was this a truth that it took God's people nearly two thousand years to be able to bear? Jesus words make that a possibility. But how can we know? How can we decide what comes from God and what is not from the one true God.

Jesus said, "The Spirit of truth will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you." The Holy Spirit does not declare just anything but declares what belongs to Jesus and Jesus declares what belongs to the Father." In Jesus' life and his teaching, especially in his being glorified in his dying and being raised Jesus makes the Father known. The Spirit of truth speaks in every age - speaks what he hears from the Father and from the Son. Slavery is wrong, women can be ordained – these fit with Jesus life and ministry. Treating some human beings as

property or regarding women as limited in the life of God's people does not reflect how Jesus responded to women. In the encounter with the Syro-phonician woman Jesus himself seems to be changed by her.

God is not a dead God - a finished God - a stored up in a book God - but a living God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In the days to come this God may surprise us through what the Spirit of truth will speak. But what comes from the Spirit will never deny him who gave his life for us and who intercedes for us even now. The love of Jesus, his giving himself, his desire to save every one will be at the center of every truth the Spirit speaks. Amen.