

June 20,2010

First Baptist Vancouver

Text: John 15:26-16:16

Title: "The Witness of the Spirit – Part III"

(Continuing a series in "The Space in which He Calls Us to Follow")

Yet one more time, I invite you to explore with me "the space" in which the Risen Jesus is calling us to follow.

It is not like "the space" in which the first band of disciples followed Him. Peter and Martha, Mary Magdalene and John, Jesus, and Susanna...could actually see Him with their own eyes, and hear Him with their own ears, and touch Him with their own hands. They were the most fortunate human beings to ever live!

And "the space" in which we follow is not like the one in which we will one day follow.

In the new creation, in the new city, we will, as the last book of the Bible joyfully discloses, "see His face" (22:4). Oh, what a day that will be!

"The space" in which we now follow is marked by the absence of Jesus' physical presence - *not* by His absence...thank God! - but by the absence of His physical presence.

And it was for living in this space that Jesus that Jesus began to prepare the first band of disciples, on the night before going to the cross. During what has come to be known as "The Last Supper" Jesus told the first disciples that He would soon be leaving them. "I am going to the Father," He said. He had come from His Father, and was now going back to His Father.

He then spends the rest of the evening preparing the disciples to go on living in the absence of His physical presence.

In what has come to be known as "The Upper Room Discourse" recorded in John, Chapters 14 to 16, Jesus helps us disciples understand what is happening in the places where we live and work.

As I said last Sunday, four facts stand out to me from what Jesus develops in the Upper Room:

- 1) First, I know that for the most part the people in the places where we live and work are trying to make sense of life. They are trying to do the best they can in light of what they know at the moment. Some are making progress; some are not. Some are messing up big time. But everyone, for the most part, is seeking to make sense of their existence, wants to be in the words of St. Irenous, "fully human, fully alive".
- 2) Second, I know that the great "enemies" of life are at work in the places where we live and work. I know that sin, evil, and death, are at work in my situation and in your situation. Need I illustrate? Jesus never sends His disciples into life and ministry wearing rose-coloured glasses. He does not want us to get blindsided. He wants us to face the facts that there are powers at work moving against Him, seeking to thwart His redemptive purposes.
- 3) Third, I know that sin, evil, and death, do not have the last word in our situations! Oh, it often appears that they do! And often it feels that they do! Right? But they do not.

Jesus has done something to sin, evil, and death. He has faced sin, evil, and death head on...and done something to them. They tried to defeat Him...but could not. He defeated them! He did not abolish them...not yet, anyway. But he has defeated them. Sin, evil, and death...though still present...and still active...do not occupy the place in our existence they once did. They do not have the last word.

We affirm this every time we hold a funeral, a memorial service. We look at the body of our loved one, and in one way or another say, "Death has done all it can do...it can do no more." Jesus gets the last word.

[Again, I am going to try to unpack this theme the first three Sundays of July.]

4) Fourth, and most importantly, I know that we are not alone in any of our situations. Oh, it can feel like we are! Right? But our feelings, however strong, are out of touch with reality. This the major fact of life Jesus wants us to get. We are never alone. Never. Anytime.

There is a Presence in the absence of Jesus' physical presence, a Holy Presence. A Person, the Paraclete as Jesus calls Him, "One called in alongside". "Another Paraclete", as Jesus puts it. Another of the same kind. Just like Jesus. So much so, the Presence of the Paraclete is the Presence of Jesus!

"I go to the Father", and "when I go, I will send the Paraclete, the Holy Spirit. And He will be with you and in you." And, as we emphasized last Sunday, not "just there", not just "hanging out", but at work there, on the job there, in every situation we find ourselves. The Paraclete is there, on the job. Do you believe this?

"When the Paraclete comes," says Jesus, "He will bear witness of me." That is His chief job, to witness for Jesus. (John 15:26: "He will bear witness of Me." To those who already believe in Jesus, and to those who do not yet believe in Jesus.

It is one of the greatest privileges a human being can ever be given! To tell another person about the Saviour of the World.

But what Jesus is wanting us to realize is that even if we do not bear witness, the Paraclete does, the Holy Spirit does.

Indeed, even before any disciple of Jesus shows up to bear witness, the Spirit is already on the scene; the Spirit is already on the job. Do you believe this?

In "the space" in which Jesus now calls us to follow, the Paraclete is present and active, bearing His own testimony to who Jesus is and what Jesus does.

This is how Michael Green puts it:

"It is the role of the Spirit to make Jesus attractive to people..."

What a relief! We try, do we not? We try to make Jesus real and attractive to loved ones and friends and colleagues. We so want them to also know and follow the Saviour.

The great mystery of any situation is that the Spirit is there..and it is finally His job to make Jesus attractive!

Michael Green continues:

"There never was a man, woman or child who came to a living faith in Christ unless the Holy Spirit made Jesus real and winsome to them. You and I cannot do that. We can only construct a neon light: the Spirit can light it up."

How? How does the Spirit witness to Jesus?

Look more carefully at what Jesus says in John 16:8-11:

“When He comes”...when the Paraclete comes...“He will convict the world.”

Or as the NIV has it, “He will prove the world to be in the wrong about...”

The Spirit will convict like a brilliant prosecuting attorney. The Paraclete will break through unbelief and convict the world.

Not in the sense of “secure a conviction before a judge”, as D.A. Carson puts it, but in the sense of “drive home personal convictions in an individual’s heart and mind”. (The Farewell Discourse”, 139) So we also render Jesus’ words, “The Spirit will convince...He will convince the world concerning me.”

How?

I do not know! But I know He does it. He did it for me! I am a witness to the fact that the Spirit bears convicting/convincing witness!

Again, John 16:8-11.

Look carefully at what Jesus says the Spirit is doing in our situations. “Until He comes, He will convict the world concerning sin, and righteousness, and judgment; concerning sin, because they do not believe in Me; concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father; concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged.”

Theologically loaded words!!

Consider each of Jesus’ affirmations one at a time: concerning sin, concerning righteousness, concerning judgment.

The Paraclete is “out there” in all our situations, convicting people of sin. “Because they do not believe in Me”, says Jesus. That has to be one of the most audacious claims Jesus ever made!

“Sin...because they do not believe in Me.”

He has changed the definition of sin! He has given sin a new “center of gravity” so to speak. He has revealed “The very heart and root of sin”. (G. Campbell Morgan 136)

Sin is not just breaking God’s good law. Sin is not just bad attitudes and behaviours. Sin is essentially unbelief. Sins – plural – are the symptom of sin – singular.

Sin is refusing to come to Jesus, to be forgiven and reconciled, refusing to receive His grace and bow before Him as Lord.

Sin is not believing that Jesus is who He says He is.

Sin is not believing that Jesus is who His Father says He is.

Sin is not trusting Jesus to be all He claims to be.

Jesus says, the Spirit is at work in all our situations convicting men and women of this sin, of unbelief. As He did on the Day of Pentecost, when after Peter disclosed who Jesus is, the people were “cut to the heart” and repented of being wrong about Jesus.

You can see then that this convicting work of the Spirit has to happen not only in the world, but in the Church! The Church needs the Paraclete’s ministry too!

Jesus can say to us believers “they do not believe in Me”. He can?

Yes.

What does our grumbling and complaining say?

What does our low grade anxiety say?

What does our cowering in fear say?

What does our playing games with the cost of discipleship say?

It says”

- that we too do not yet really believe Jesus is all the Bible says He is;

- that we too do not yet really believe Jesus is as good and faithful as He claims to be.

The Spirit convicts us of sin. Thank you, Paraclete!!

And, says Jesus, the Paraclete is “out there” convicting human beings about righteousness, revealing human beings inability to discern right from wrong.

The religious righteousness of Jesus’ day was actually wrong...for “religious” ended up crucifying the Righteous One.

The Political righteousness of Jesus’ day was totally wrong too...for it too ended up crucifying the Just One.

Humanity’s righteousness – sense of right and wrong - considered Jesus a sinner, a pretender, a deluded messiah.

“Because I go to the Father”.

In going to the Father Jesus is vindicated. The resurrection and ascension say He is not a sinner. It looked like He was cursed – “cursed is He who hangs on a tree” – but it turns out that He was taking the curse on Himself, that He had become the curse for us!

(Galations 3:13)

The Spirit comes to convict us that we have misinterpreted Jesus’ death.

And Saul of Tarsus, the Apostle Paul, is history’s greatest example of this miraculous work. Saul despised the man of Jesus. Saul was out to wipe out the Jesus movement.

Then the Spirit broke through...and revealed to him that he was totally wrong about Jesus’ death. And revealed that it was through that death alone that true righteousness is given. Thank you, Paraclete!

And, says Jesus, the Spirit is “out there” convicting the world of judgment.

“Because”, says Jesus, “the Ruler of this world has been judged.”

The point?

The world’s standards of judgment are wrong. Not just in the particular instance of falsely judging Jesus...but in its standards generally of which the false judgment of Jesus “is the supreme example” (Carson, `148)

Jesus is saying the world got it wrong in its judgment of the things having to do with God.

And the Spirit came to convict us.

We just do not get it, so the Spirit humbles us...and teaches us about God and His ways.

The “world” thinks that the cross is the place

- where Jesus is judged,

- where Jesus is condemned.

But the exact opposite is the case!

The cross is where the world is judged. And then redeemed.
The cross where the devil, the satan, ruler of this world, is judged, then dethroned.
At the cross the power behind all human rebellion against God is condemned. The decisive battle has been won; it is only a matter of time until the war is over.
And the Paraclete came to convict the world of this great fact.

And to convict the Church of this great fact.
For we, too, slip into a misunderstanding of God's standards of judgment. We, too, often do not get it. We, too, fail to really believe that the weakness of the cross is the power of God; that the foolishness of the cross is the wisdom of God.

He will convict the world. He will convince the world.
How? I do not know. It is a great mystery to me. But I know He does it.
In the rough and tumble of daily living; as we mere mortals grapple with the joys and pains of life; as people search for meaning and hope...He does His work of grace and truth.

Sometimes it generates much hostility in the soul! As the soul realizes its whole sense of reality is being over-turned.

He will convict and convince the world...in who to win the world away from being "world".

How?

Again, I do not know. But I know He does it. He is doing it for me! He is doing it for you! And for your spouses, and children, and grandchildren, and neighbours and co-workers.

So, let me tell you about my friend Hafshin. Hafshin has been living in Canada 12 years now. I met him seven years ago when he audited a preaching course I taught at Regent College.

Regent College draws people from all over the world. But I was not expecting someone like Hafshin! He was born in Iran, and raised in a strict Muslim family, a Shihite Muslim family. Early on he learned the disciplines of Islam, eagerly giving himself to daily prayers and fasting. By the time he entered high school he was considered by his elders to be a "master student" of the Koran. He loved to study and debate the Koran.

During high school, he, like many other Iranian young men, became more and more disturbed by the injustice in the world. He, like many other Middle-Eastern young men, was especially disturbed by all the immorality of the West being broadcast into his world through satellite television. So, like other young men in his world, he joined Hezbollah.

Because of his brilliant mind and zealous heart, Hafshin quickly moved to a position of leadership. So much so, he was selected to leave Iran and go to Afghanistan to be trained for leadership in Al Quida, to be trained to bring down the immoral West.

The route to Afghanistan took him through Indonesia. At the airport in Jakarta he was arrested for carrying false passports – 26 of them! Hafshin was thrown in jail.

He says that for days and weeks he cried out to Allah. "Why am I here? I have followed you faithfully all of my life. I am willing to die for you. Why have you deserted me?"

No answer - for days and weeks...no answer.

One day as he walked back and forth in his cell he began to experience an overwhelming sense of guilt. He had never experienced guilt. Shame, yes. But not guilt. He saw that for all his zeal for morality he was a profoundly immoral...sinful man.

At one point he became aware of a Presence in the jail cell with him...a "holy presence" as he described it. A presence he had never known, yet, did not feel strange. He moved into a corner of the cell and said, "Who are you?"

And he heard,

"I am the Way, the Truth, the Life." Hafshin was stunned...shaken...humbled...afraid in a way he had never been before. He responded to the Presence asking, "What does that mean, I am the Way, the Truth, the Life? What does that mean?"

Then the Presence said, "I am Jesus" – in Arabic. "I know, I did not believe it then either," Hafshin told me. But I and others have pressed him every which way on this, and now take his word for it.

"I am Jesus."

And Hafshin fell to his knees and then on his face. And said he felt clean all over and inside. A clean he had never known. He felt alive as never before. And was no longer afraid.

Hafshin was subsequently released from prison – another story too long to tell right now. And is now pasturing a Persian Evangelical church in North Vancouver where I have had the privilege of preaching one Sunday.

You ought to witness Hafshin and his friends worship Jesus.

So, as we leave this sanctuary...and reenter the places where we live Monday through Saturday, we know at least four facts.

First, people are, like us, seeking life. Maybe in all kinds of wrong places and ways. But seeking, seeking.

Second, sin, evil, and death are at work. But keep your cool..

For, **third**, sin, evil, and death are defeated. They do not have the last word.

Fourth, the Spirit of Him who did the defeating is at work, applying the consequences of the victory. Doing what none of us can do.

We are to pray. We are to speak the truth in love. We are to "gossip the Gospel", as they say. We are to work the works of Jesus, from the posture of the Great Servant who washes feet.

And in the midst of it all, the Paraclete works: with us, in us. And apart from us! Ahead of us. Bearing His own witness to the living and reigning Saviour.

So I offer again a definite of evangelism my systems engineer friend Jodi Hoffman proposes.

"Evangelism is listening in on a conversation the Holy Spirit is having with a human being." And "speaking when invited into the conversation...either by the Spirit or the human being."

Let us pray.