

## **When We Are Ready**

**John 16:12-15**

**Home Moravian Church, June 15, 2025**

Jesus is going away. How do you feel in this moment?

You don't know where he's going, though you have asked. You're beginning to sense that it might not be anyplace good. Jesus may not be headed for that big military triumph over the Romans that you and all the other disciples have been dreaming about. It feels like Jesus might be headed somewhere not only dangerous, but dark—and he's not taking you with him; and you can't decide if you want him to.

You and the other disciples have asked plenty of questions. "Where are you going?" "Why can I not follow you now?" "How can we know the way?" "How is it that you will reveal yourself to us, and not the world?" Jesus' answers, as usual, have been cryptic. And even as you struggle to understand, he remarks that although he still has lots of things to tell you, he's *not* going to tell you those things, because "you cannot bear them right now."

Why not? What does he think of you? Does he think you're not *strong* enough? Does he think you're not *smart* enough? Don't you hate it when someone else gets to decide if you're ready? How will Jesus know? How will *you* know? When will you be ready to hear these things?

Well: Not right now.

Right now, in this place in this gospel, it's hard for any of the disciples to understand anything; all the mutual understanding is between Jesus and God. Father and Son are one. As Jesus said in chapter 14: "I am in the Father, and the Father is in me." The Son and the Father—

together, they *know things*. Especially in these chapters just before Jesus' arrest, the Gospel of John depicts a oneness of Son and Father in which mutual understanding flows like electricity through a circuit.

But an electrical circuit functions only when closed. Where, in a closed loop of mutual understanding of Father and Son, is an entry point for a human? How will *you* gain understanding—not at the level of Father and Son, of course, but perhaps enough to equip you to bear whatever Jesus has to tell you? If a door would open—even just a little—you could sit at that opening and maybe eavesdrop on some of what is passing between Father and Son; but if a door were to open, would the circuit still function? Would the flow of mutual understanding cease? In a closed electrical circuit, there is no place for a door.

So imagine, instead, that the mutual understanding flowing from Father to Son and back again is not like an electrical circuit after all, but more like the flow of blood through a body. Blood travels to the heart and away from the heart in a continuous loop through the body. That loop, too, is closed, holding a life in its embrace. But sometimes, a body might be opened: through accident, or violence, or medical intervention. On one singular, mighty occasion, a body was opened through grace.

It happened in the Gospel of John, when one of the Roman soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a spear. Our Moravian forebear, Count Nicholas Ludwig von Zinzendorf, regarded that wound as a door. He wrote that through that wound, the Holy Spirit came into the world. And the Holy Spirit draws us into the loop of understanding between Father and Son. Centuries of Christian tradition tell us that the Holy Spirit connects us to God, makes possible our faith, and teaches us that we belong to Christ.

We have, for example, the authority of Paul, who said in Romans 8: “We do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with groanings too deep for words.” We have the authority of Martin Luther, who wrote in his Small Catechism, “By my own reason or strength I cannot believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith.” We have the rich theological imagining of Zinzendorf, who pictured inside the Holy Spirit innumerable “little spirits” who are distributed to each human individually, so that, as Zinzendorf wrote, “if one wants to describe himself, he says, I know him, I know that I belong to him.”<sup>1</sup> We have the words of the modern German theologian Jürgen Moltmann, who wrote, “One prays through the Son to the Father in the Spirit.”<sup>2</sup>

That mutual understanding between Son and Father? The Holy Spirit opened the loop so that that understanding, like the blood of Jesus, could flow into the world.

What passes from Son to Father and back again, that mutual understanding, is truth. Naturally, the Holy Spirit opens the door; in today’s text Jesus calls the Holy Spirit “the Spirit of truth.” And on this night, when he will be betrayed, Jesus knows you cannot bear the truth of what is about to happen.

You cannot bear the truth that he will be arrested—for he has done no wrong, has in fact done nothing but good, healing and blessing and embracing multitudes of hurting people. You cannot bear the truth that he will be beaten—for you assume that his kindness will inspire others

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<sup>1</sup> Zinzendorf’s Twenty-first Discourse, quoted in Arthur J. Freeman, *An Ecumenical Theology of the Heart: The Theology of Count Nicholas Ludwig von Zinzendorf* (Bethlehem PA: Board of Communications, Moravian Church in America, 1998), p. 109.

<sup>2</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology* (1974; first Fortress Press edition, Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), p.247.

to be kind to him. You cannot bear the truth that he will be hung on a cross to die—for you are confident in his greatness, and are expecting him to triumph over any adversary. And you cannot not bear the truth of his coming resurrection; or his ascension; or the coming of this new and world-changing creation called the church. The truth is often too strange to bear.

Jesus knows that the truth will change you. Jesus surely also knows that in the very near future, you and the other disciples will be overcome by grief, fear, and anger. People who are overcome by grief, fear, and anger are not receptive to change. It feels safer to lock the door against the truth. But the Holy Spirit will insist on opening that door.

Very soon, you and the other disciples will find yourselves huddled in fear in a stuffy room; and the door will be locked; and Jesus will enter anyway. And he will breathe on you and say: “Receive the Holy Spirit.” And then maybe you’ll remember the night when he called that Holy Spirit “the Spirit of Truth.” You might even remember that further back, Jesus promised that the truth would set you free.

Do you worry that Jesus doesn’t think you’re strong enough? Do you worry he doesn’t think you’re smart enough? Don’t you worry about that! Jesus just knows, as he prepares to go away, that you are not quite ready to be changed. The truth will change you. The truth of a love that persists, unconditionally, in the face of all enmity and evil: that changes a person. That will set a person free. Whatever fear, grief, anger, misunderstanding you might be tempted to cling to: If it doesn’t set you free, then it’s not the truth. It’s not the truth.

But when you and the other disciples see the resurrected Jesus, you will receive the Holy Spirit. And receiving the Holy Spirit will set you free to become something entirely new, which will soon be known as the church. That Spirit who emerged from the opening in Jesus’ side created an opening in the mutual understanding of Father and Son, and that understanding, that

knowledge, that truth of God's love will create the church; and that truth still flows to the church today. Does the church remain ready to bear the truth? Does the church remain free?

“Receive the Holy Spirit,” said Jesus. So long as we embrace the Spirit of truth, we, the church, are free. Free to do good, to heal and bless and embrace all people, even when we are falsely accused of doing wrong. Free to be kind, even knowing that kindness does not always inspire kindness in return. Free to follow Jesus, even when that might mean risking comforts we enjoy, structures we depend on, the very lives we have built. Free to be the church.

Jürgen Moltmann says that the purpose of God's love is freedom; and “as its purpose is freedom, it is directed toward freedom.” God's love, he says, “opens up the future to change.”<sup>3</sup> We tend to think of the Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—as a circle, but what if we picture a circle with an open door, through which truth flows toward us and carries us toward the future?

*We are being carried toward the future.* How do we feel in this moment?

May our answer be: *Ready.*

Amen.

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<sup>3</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology* (1974; first Fortress Press edition, Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), pp. 247-8.