

Making Sense (Part Two)

“Will guide you into all truth”

Reflection 39 in the series “A New World in the Morning”

Jesus’ remarkable promise the night before his crucifixion is that the Spirit of God would be with us and guide us into all truth. What’s more, he told us how. It’s recorded in John 15:1-17. Jesus says three things in this section. First, he says, You’ll have to remain in me (verses 4,5,7). Embody me. Stay in me. Absorb me. See things with my eyes, Jesus says. Take outcast women seriously. Treat even the woman caught in adultery with respect. Hold off on condemnation. Wash the feet of others, even those who you know intend to betray you. And when you’re at your wit’s end, trust God. And the Spirit of truth will guide you into all truth.

Second, Jesus says, My words will have to remain in you (v. 7). Take my teachings in. Trust what I am saying. For us, this means to devote ourselves to understanding Scripture, taking in these timeless archetypal stories and words, reliving them, wrestling with them until we have grasped their wisdom, like Jacob that night by the brook Jabbok not letting go until we have been blessed, drawing from Scripture the way things really are, taking these words, these Jesus words, not as prooftexts but as the living structures of our lives.

Third, he says, You’ll have to remain in my love (vs. 9,10). I’ve talked, Jesus says, about obeying my commands. And I don’t want you to get confused about this. My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you (v. 12). This is my command: Love each other (v.17). Don’t get confused. In the end, only love will guide you into all truth: listening to one another, learning from one another, staying in spiritual community with one another, having spiritual companions to run your ideas by, letting your ideas meld and merge, caring about one another. Jesus is saying: You have to have some people to know with because learning and knowing are, in the end, communal experiences, social experiences. It’s what the word “consciousness” suggests, from “com,” meaning “with,” and “scio,” meaning “to know.” You have to have some friends, some spiritual friends, some people who know God, you can reliably know with. Here’s the key: It will be love that will guide you into all truth. And in your heart you will always know whether what you are thinking or saying or doing is loving.

Tying it all together, what Jesus is saying is this: If we remain in him, if his words remain in us, and if we remain in his love, we will be guided into all truth. Things will start to make sense both for ourselves and others. If we embody Jesus, if we seek to understand his teachings, if we wrestle with Scripture and let Scripture wrestle with us, and if we stay in loving spiritual community with others, we can increasingly trust our intuition, trust our “hunches”, trust our grasp of reality, and trust our hearts.

The Spirit of truth will guide us into all the truth, not infallibly, not perfectly, not privately (only in community), but surely and confidently. But do not miss that the heart is a very, very fine place to find truth, if you factor God in, if you act with integrity, if you go down deep, to the kind of knowledge the heart knows, like: What is really loving? What is really honorable? What is really driving me? What is really in the best interest of others? For that matter, what is really in my best interest? And if this were done to me, if what I’m about to do were being done to me, would I find it to be kind and caring?

It's all pretty basic stuff. It's for this reason that Jesus typically began his teaching with words that imply, "Who of you doesn't already know this?" It's very near you. It's in your mouth and in your heart. It's what you already know in your heart to be true. We know these things. These are the things that make sense. We know what is kind and loving and caring and compassionate. We know when we are acting in kind and loving and caring and compassionate ways. We know when a piece of legislation is kind and loving and caring and compassionate. And we know when the teachings of the church are kind and loving and caring and compassionate. We know when we are interpreting Scripture with love. We know when circles of care and compassion are enlarging and when they're getting smaller. Every good heart knows these kinds of things and has known them from the dawn of time.

When we realize this we stand on the threshold of a great global spiritual awakening. A new world is being born. When we do what we know is kind and loving and caring and compassionate, when we work to enlarge circles of care and compassion, we will find people everywhere who agree with us. It will make sense to people everywhere and we will all work together for a better world. May you trust God, and what God is accomplishing in our world. May you receive and believe the good news of great joy that is for all the people. And may you tell it to others. There are so, so many others who need – who want – to hear this.

– Dale Pauls