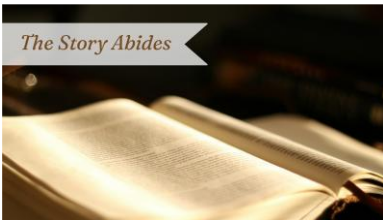


The Story Abides

May 10, 2026

John 14:15-21

¹⁵ “If you love me, you will keep my commandments. ¹⁶ I will ask the Father, and he will send another Companion, who will be with you forever. ¹⁷ This Companion is the Spirit of Truth, whom the world can’t receive because it neither sees him nor recognizes him. You know him, because he lives with you and will be with you. ¹⁸ “I won’t leave you as orphans. I will come to you. ¹⁹ Soon the world will no longer see me, but you will see me. Because I live, you will live too. ²⁰ On that day you will know that I am in my Father, you are in me, and I am in you. ²¹ Whoever has my commandments and keeps them loves me. Whoever loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them.”



Our gospel reading for today comes from Jesus' “farewell discourse” found in chapters 14 through 16. These words are followed by Jesus' prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane. Here he prays that the words of his final teaching will come true. He is then arrested, tried, beaten, and crucified.

As a whole, the Farewell Discourse is an amazing section of scripture. We have long taken these words as instructional, as they should be. Like a teacher attempting to prepare students for the upcoming final exam, Jesus wants to make sure his followers have everything they need for what comes next. We too are grateful for this gift. We are grateful because this gift empowers us to be a part of the great cloud of witness that has sought to live out these words of love. And now, as we enter this time together, let us pray...

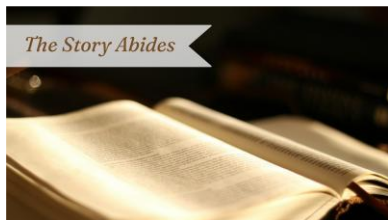
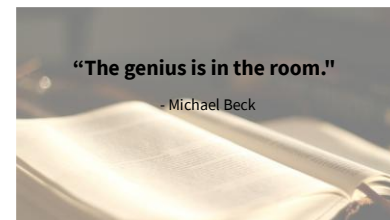
God of love, though you are infinite and unknowable, yet you make yourself known to us. You come to us in love, reveal yourself to us in love, and give us your Spirit of love. We open our hearts to you now. Speak to us, stir in us, so that we may know you, so that Christ may be in us and we in Christ, even as Christ is in you. And now, O God, I ask that you would bless the words of my mouth and the meditation of all of our hearts. You are our rock and our redeemer, our Christ and our king. Amen.

The followers of Jesus have lived out these words in the centuries that have followed. We have learned about how to be the church, how to be disciples, how to see all the people and invite them into a deeper relationship with the Christ that we have come to know. There is so much to learn from these powerful words. And even so, there are and will be times when we don't know. We don't know the answer. We don't know the next step to take. We don't know the words to say. And sometimes, we have trouble transferring what we know to a new situation. It was a simple but true illustration from last week that struck a chord with me. Stephanie's children knew how to wipe up toothpaste off the counter but struggled to wipe up spilled ice and water off the floor without instruction. The same can be true in our faith. We might, for example, know *how* to pray, but might falter when asked to do so in certain situations. This is why we need the Holy Spirit's presence in our lives.

The Farewell Discourse in John's Gospel gives us a picture of the church at its best. It is a vision to live into — a practice that is simple on the surface but takes a lifetime to perfect. This is why our journey to become more Christlike never ends.

The discourse also holds a reminder about why community matters in our faith. At a training I was at a few years ago, the "teacher" explained that he was not the expert.

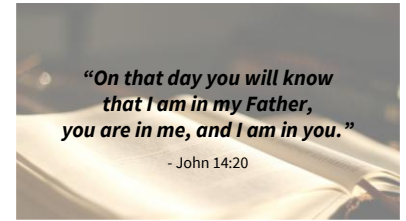
He shared that "The genius is in the room." He was getting at the idea that together we know more than any one individual could know. In terms of our faith, together we know and understand what it means to follow the one who claims to be "the way, the truth, and the life" better and more powerfully than when we practice our faith alone. Last Sunday, Pastor Stephanie asked a question that speaks to this idea. She invited you to ponder who you might help in their walk of faith this past week. Did anyone ponder that and put it into practice? If so, what were the results?...



While the words from Jesus today are definitely informational, there is also something more intimate going on here in Jesus' words. There is a binding, a gathering up that happens as Jesus shares his heart and his future hopes with those who have been following him. He is offering a way forward, hoping for a continuation of his ministry in and through those first disciples. In this sense, he is putting all of his earthly hope in his followers. As Jesus departs this earth, all of his missional hopes now reside in these somewhat inept followers. And he wants to make sure that they know how okay he is with that.

Like Jesus was on the walk to Emmaus, he will be a bit frustrated with us at times. But because Jesus knew our limitations, again, like on the road to Emmaus, but now in Spirit, Jesus will give us the words to pray or the steps to take or the knowledge to make the right decision. Like those two disciples walking with the risen Christ, we too can receive much when walking with the Spirit. Jesus is not just okay with this, in fact, it is the plan. The next step in the world-changing effort, in this kingdom building transformation, is for the followers of Jesus to see it through. And here's the important part: he will be with them and with us.

It's difficult to comprehend, yes, and it's in the next chapter when he talks about the Spirit's abiding presence, but he plants the seed here. In verse 20 Jesus says, *"On that day you will know that I am in my Father, you are in me, and I am in you."*

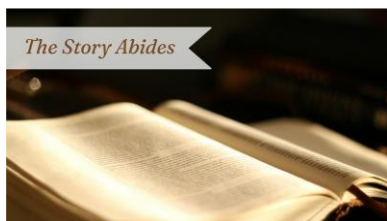


On that day? Jesus is talking about that day where they see him, but the world does not. That day where they understand discipleship a little bit better. That day. On that day, they will know that the story continues to abide, because it abides in them. They will begin to understand that they are the story. They live the story. They are the witnesses that this was more than just a dream. They are proof that hope is possible; that there is something beyond our vision. The story abides in them. Our question to consider then in this: What story abides in you? We all have a story. Maybe it is a story about a mission trip. Maybe it is a story of how God rescued you when you were in danger. We all have a story.

That's the gift that he offers them in this instructional, intimate moment — a promise of presence, of his presence, of the story's presence, of the Spirit's presence. Yes, the Spirit's presence. That is how we hold on to something beyond our grasp. That is how we make sense of the story, the experience, the relationship with this one that we call Lord and Savior. The Spirit gives us "utterance," as they say. But how does this work? How does this Spirit abide in us and become the means by which we become the story, the gospel on the move in the world, as it were?

If we are willing to see God at work and are willing to step into those opportunities that the Spirit provides, then we enter and become a part of God's story. It has happened for me in hospital rooms, at the hospice house, on home visits to dying men. This is my vocational setting.

Maybe yours is an office or a classroom or the city park or... Anywhere can be where God's Spirit can work in and through you and me, sharing our story of faith with others.



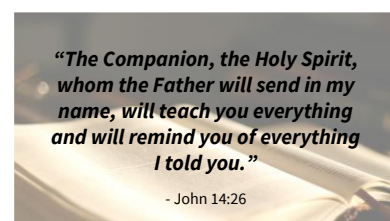
There is a lot that we don't know about the Spirit, no question about that. The Spirit blows where it will and all of that.

Remember Steve's magnet example from a few weeks ago? We don't know why those magnets seem to move on their own, but we do know they move in certain situations. The same is true of the Spirit.

But if we listen carefully to what Jesus tells us here, there is a lot we do know or can believe in. We need to extend the reading a few verses, though, to really understand the Spirit's power in our lives. First, there is the promise of the presence of the Holy Spirit. In verse 23 we read, *"Whoever loves me will keep my word. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them."* When we love and follow Jesus, we are loved in return, and the Spirit comes to dwell in our hearts.



Once a part of our lives, a few verses later we come to understand what the Spirit can do in our lives. In verse 26 we read, *"The Companion, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and will remind you of everything I told you."* There is a lot the Spirit does for us and for our faith!

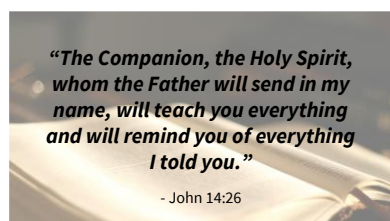


Access to or awareness of the Spirit is a function of faith. It involves a relationship with Jesus Christ. *"The world,"* John reminds us, *"cannot receive"* the Spirit.

The world doesn't know the Spirit, not because they aren't worthy, but simply because they don't have this relationship of love that opens the door to experience the Spirit. Yes, it is possible to have an experience of God without a relationship with Jesus. But to know and be known by the Spirit takes something deeper, an act of will, an offering of self to the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

"I won't leave you as orphans," says Jesus. I will not leave you Fatherless, out of touch with God. There is a connection, a link to the Father that once came from the person of Jesus, but now comes through the Spirit. Last Sunday, Pastor Stephanie spoke a word that resonated with me as she was speaking of how we connect to Jesus. She said, "We internalize Jesus so that we can be like him." When we receive the Holy Spirit, we internalize it. The Spirit becomes part of who and what we are. Because of this, we can reveal Jesus to the world.

To receive from the Spirit, we must first have ears to listen and hearts willing to follow. To have these, we must be willing to listen. Two weeks ago, we received a list of eight ways to listen to God. I found it helpful and, in case you missed it, here are the eight ways: music, scripture, prayer, dreams, Holy Spirit, miracles, circumstances, and people. All of these ways, in one way or the other, form a connection to Jesus, to God, and to the Holy Spirit.



The function of the Spirit, according to Jesus in verse 26, is to teach and to remind. This Advocate - which is the Greek word "*paraclete*" and is sometimes translated Helper, or Comforter, or Counselor - is the abiding presence that connects to our sense of who we are. We are reminded of what we already know. We are reminded of the teachings that we learned as children but may have forgotten or chosen to set aside for a time.

The word *paraclete* somehow draws me to the sheep we were around in Ireland. Maybe it is because the words sort of rhyme. Maybe it is because the visual of a helper or advocate reminds me of what I observed on our trip. Several times on the trip we were close to sheep, walking alongside a pasture or even through a few on our hikes. At times we saw curious lambs. They wondered what we were and began to edge closer. A little too close and momma would bleat, and the lamb would scurry back to safety. Other times, when hiking, we'd come between a lamb and its mother. The lamb became nervous, unsure. Mom would bleat and the lamb then knew where to go. It was then quickly reunited with its mother.

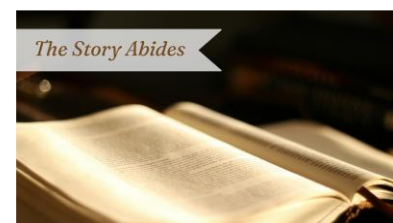
We tend to think of sheep negatively: dumb, wandering, getting lost. True, they can be all of these things. But they are also protective of their young, they know and listen to the wisdom of the elders, and they stick together, where it is safer. The mother teaches the way of life, of belonging to the flock. Living this way, life is simpler, unrushed even. In these ways, sheep have much to teach us.

It is the Spirit that comes and whispers in our ears to remind us that we are better than we sometimes behave. It is the Spirit that comes to remind us even in the darkest of nights that we are not alone. It is the Spirit that reminds us that we are loved - especially in those moments when we feel most unlovable. Even then - no, maybe especially then - the Spirit comes to us, calls us, woos us, invites us back into right relationship. As Mike said a few weeks ago, when we are broken, we can really connect to God. Broken, we have hearts and ears primed for a word from God. Whether broken by our own sin or the sin of another, or if we are intentionally seeking to be broken by God, in that place we can intimately connect to God's Spirit.

In the day to day living of our faith, it is not just what we already know that is recalled by the prompting of the Spirit. We are pushed further; we are asked to climb higher. The Spirit continues to teach us, calling us to new levels of understanding and experience. The Spirit works with our spirits to claim deeper truths and new applications. The Spirit guides us, it opens “windows,” to use Prairey’s word, to see life as it truly is. Sometimes this is convicting, sometimes guiding, sometimes leading us out of and away from a hard situation.

I often experience all of this and more during my morning quiet time. The Spirit leads and guides. It convicts and redirects. And it teaches. Oh, how it teaches. I've been reading through and sharing thoughts on the 3-year lectionary cycle for about 13 years now. That means I've read, pondered, and written on each passage at least four times. When I go back and look at the blogs, though, each is different. How the Spirit will work in and through us when we are open to its presence!

As we journey in faith, we are stretched beyond our childhood faith as we grow and learn and live into the realm of the Spirit. We have much to learn under the tutelage of the Spirit, and much of it



is learned by doing. When we tell the story, even the part of the story that abides in us, that intersects with our lives, then we learn more about what it means to be alive, to abide in him, and to know that he abides in us. In these ways, we grow into the story we tell. This was evident as Steve shared our last ferry ride story from the Seattle mission trip. He first spoke of how we learned not just to make lemonade when given lemons but of how to embrace it so that we could have a party at the lemonade stand.

Instead of being sorry for being loud and joyful on a somber day and just hiding out on the upper deck, we made the choice to support the crew who'd lost a good friend.

Being open to the Spirit's moving, adding "Amazing Grace" was a great gift to that memorial service and to those present. The captain's words about "divine intervention" was transformative for Steve and then for me. We began not only to look for God's presence on our trips, but to expect it. Eyes and hearts open, God did not fail to show up on any of our mission trips.



Along these same lines, two weeks ago Prairey had a story to share. It was deeply personal and she showed great bravery in her willingness to be vulnerable enough to share her God story. In sharing her story, she opened a door for this community, and maybe a door for someone in a similar situation. This God story has been transformational in her life and has the power to be the same in other people's lives. You can see the power of this story yet today, lived out in her wonderful heart for others and for building community.

In us and in the community of faith that we are a part of, the story abides. The story is in me. The story is in you. Together may we share the story of faith. It is your story. It is my story. It is our story. The story is meant to be told, to be shared. Doing so, together we build the kingdom of God. May it be so for us all. Alleluia and amen.

GPS – Grow, Pray, Study

- 1) *Grow*. What experiences with the Holy Spirit have helped you to grow in your faith?
- 2) *Pray*. Do you know someone who need to hear how Jesus changed your life? Pray for guidance and direction on developing your story of faith.
- 3) *Study*. Read 1st Peter 3:13-22. Why is it important to be ready to share our faith story?