

Pentecost – 2022C

On this Pentecost Sunday, many people are anticipating the unofficial start to summer. With the advent of summer comes the anticipation of vacation time. But what sort of vacation? Many folks will embark on relaxing trips like the beach, camping or soaking up the sun by a pool somewhere. Or given the high price of gas and just about everything else some will decide to stay in 'balconville'. After all, vacation is supposed to be a time to decompress and "get away from it all," right? However, an increasing number of people seem to disagree with that conventional wisdom. One of the fastest growing segments of the tourism industry is "adventure travel." They want to get up close and personal through exciting, arduous and risky adventures. This might mean trekking through a jungle, climbing a distant mountain or cycling through a developing country.

For these types of adventures, it's best to have a guide service to direct you and keep you on track. A good adventure guide service will help you plan your trek and even make some of the arrangements for your lodging, meals and dealing with your baggage. The service will provide a good packing list, the extra equipment you might need, maps and directions and even monitor your progress.

When we look at Jesus' last words to his disciples in the gospel of John, we might see them as an advertisement for the adventure the followers of Jesus have ahead of them. The Twelve had followed Jesus up and down the hills of Galilee, on the long road to Jerusalem and through the deserts of Judea. They had been in storms that might have drowned them, confronted demons that terrified them and seen miracles that blew their minds.

They had been with Jesus every step of the way as their guide and friend, but the time was coming soon when Jesus would trek to the cross, the grave and then to the right hand of the Father. He would soon be leaving his friends behind to continue the adventure. Both Peter and Thomas had previously requested Jesus' itinerary (13:36; 14:5), but as Jesus gives his parting words, he keeps the focus on how his disciples would continue the mission and the journey ahead.

For that adventure, they will need a Guide. and Jesus promises to send them the "Advocate," the Holy Spirit, "the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father" (v. 26). As the Spirit has testified to Jesus' person and mission, the disciples will now take that testimony to the rest of the world. It will be a difficult adventure because that testimony won't be welcome in a world that is hostile to the truth about Jesus. "They will put you out of the synagogues," Jesus warns. "Indeed, an hour is coming when those who kill you will think that by doing so they are offering

worship to God. And they will do this because they have not known the Father or me" (vv. 2-3). You wouldn't blame the disciples for thinking that heading for the beach and some drinks with umbrellas in them would be a safer use of their time.

This is going to be a tough trek, Jesus warns them, but it's a necessary one if the good news about Jesus is going to reach the distant cultures and remote places of the world. It's going to take some willing adventurers who will travel light with gear but be burdened with the need to speak the truth about what God has done in coming to the world in the flesh to bring light to the darkness and life in the midst of death (1:1-18).

Jesus had come into the world and was on his way back to the Father, but the disciples were now focused on themselves and what they would be doing. They don't ask Jesus where he's going anymore; the question for them is, "What's going to be our destination and how do we get there?" (v. 5).

It used to be that hiring a guide meant that you would have someone directly on the ground with you in whose footsteps you would follow to get to the destination. While that's still true for many adventures, technology has made it possible for you to be guided virtually instead, tracked by GPS and connected via radio, or mobile or satellite phone to a guide

who is always monitoring your progress with the big picture in mind.

Jesus is saying something similar to his disciples. They won't have Jesus as their on-the-ground guide anymore, but Jesus tells them that's a good thing. Sensing their sorrow and confusion, Jesus promises them a new Guide who will help them expand their trekking capacity and keep the big picture in mind. "It is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you" (v. 7).

The Holy Spirit Guide will point out the twists and turns in the route ahead and help the followers of Jesus know what to look for as they trek into the world. Jesus tells the disciples that their Guide will point out four wrong paths that the world has taken -- paths that their proclamation of the gospel, in the power of the Spirit, will correct (v. 8).

The Holy Spirit Guide will help us with the problem of sin (v. 9). The metaphor, if you want to extend it, is that the Holy Spirit will help us not to stuff anything into our backpack that is essentially worthless for the trek we're taking. No need to be overburdened. We don't need the hairdryer, the laptop, canned goods, etc., on this trip.

The world's idea of the nature of sin is that sin is something that a person does, or commits. On one level this is

true. But the Holy Spirit helps us understand the cause of sin. Too many people think that all we need to do is work harder and do more good things than bad things and that someday, God will decide that we qualify for heaven.

Wrong. The world has it wrong. The problem of sin is not what we do with our hands, but who we are in our hearts. Not what we do, but who we are. Acts of sin are caused by a sin nature, by a predisposition to sin. The Holy Spirit helps us conserve a lot of spiritual energy by understanding that in the path of life, Jesus has done everything for us and before us. This will help us to tell others on the trail that Christ's preparatory work has freed us from the burden of "trying our best" so we can simply do the work God has given us to do.

The Holy Spirit Guide will help us with the problem of doing good (v. 10). This is the flip side of the above. The Holy Spirit helps us stuff our pack with good things. Many people think that goodness is something we do. Thanks to the Guide, we know that goodness is not doing, but being. For our journey, the Holy Spirit Guide provides us with a new nature, a new heart. It's like we're a "new creation"! Unfortunately, the world's idea of righteousness is that the more good we do the more righteous we are. The Guide, Jesus says, will help the disciples see what true righteousness looks like, using Jesus himself as the model. He may be returning to the Father, but through the Spirit he will continue to guide them and empower

them to do what he has done. Indeed, they will do even greater things (14:12-14).

The Holy Spirit Guide will help us with the route (v. 11). The Holy Spirit Guide knows the route. We often make poor route choices because we begin with faulty premises and a poor understanding of the terrain. What the world thinks is important is usually not important. What the world thinks is wise is often pretty foolish. The world thinks success is measured by material things. The world thinks that greatness is when people are your servants. The world thinks that the one with the most toys wins. The world thinks that wisdom comes from being highly educated. The world values a "me-first" mentality. The world values the pleasure principle. The world values popularity, power and position.

The Holy Spirit Guide helps us reverse these judgments. Success is not measured by material things. The greatest among us are the servants of others. The wisdom of the world is foolishness to God. Selfishness is not a virtue in God's world. Because it feels good doesn't make it right. And so on. By understanding how God judges or looks at things, the disciples will be able to make good decisions.

Finally, the Holy Spirit Guide will help us with the Truth (v. 11). "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," says Jesus (v. 13). "Truth" is a major theme in John's gospel. In fact, it will be Pontius Pilate who asks the question on the world's mind as they are confronted with Jesus: "What is truth?" (18:38).

The truth is, however, that Jesus himself is the way, the truth and the life (14:6). In other words, if we emulate Jesus, our lives will not be a lie. Our lives instead will be lives of integrity, honesty, service, selflessness and humility -- all counterintuitive from the world's point of view. If the disciples want to follow Jesus where he is going, then that means following his way, his truth and his life in spite of the dangers, twists and turns ahead. The only way to navigate that way is with a Guide who will take what Jesus has said and done and "declare it" to us so that we will glorify him (vv. 14-15).

On this Pentecost Sunday, we remember that when the Guide arrived, he launched the disciples on a new adventure. Following Jesus has never been about retreating from the world to a tropical island and "getting away from it all." It's always been about following the way, the truth and the life of Jesus for the purpose of changing the world for God's glory. It's a tough adventure, but it's the only destination that ultimately matters.