

Dwelling: Guidance

John 14:23-26; 1 Corinthians 2:11-13

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I think that one of the greatest gifts of the technological age is GPS. I've mentioned before that I have a terrible sense of direction. I think my wife, Nancy, is part homing pidgeon. She just seems to know where to go and how to get from here to there. Not me. I can get lost in my own driveway. But GPS has changed all of that. I just tell my phone where I want to go and within seconds it's telling me when to turn and how long it'll take me to reach my destination. I love it!

Imagine what it would be like if there were a similar technology to help you to navigate through life. You come to an important decision, a kind of fork in the road, and this technology would guide you, help you to make the right decision, follow the right path. I'm not talking about something that would help you to pick the right lottery numbers...though that would be nice. I'm talking about something that would help you see the world and other people as God does, something that would keep the teachings of Jesus before you and even empower you to follow Jesus more nearly. How awesome would that be?

That isn't technology we need to wait for. Truth is, it isn't technology at all. According to Jesus, that's the work of the Holy Spirit in us. And that's what we're talking about today as we continue our worship series entitled "Dwelling."

Before we hear how Jesus describes the Spirit's work, let me set the stage for today's Scripture reading. It's the Last Supper. Jesus and his disciples are in the Upper Room. They're sharing a meal together and, knowing that he's going to be crucified the next day, Jesus is comforting his disciples and giving them some final instructions. He tells them to love one another and serve the needs of others. And then he shares with them this good news about the Spirit that God will send to them. Let's listen,

²³ *Jesus replied, "All who love me will do what I say. My*

Father will love them, and we will come and make our home with each of them. ²⁴ *Anyone who doesn't love me will not obey me. And remember, my words are not my own. What I am telling you is from the Father who sent me.* ²⁵ *I am telling you these things now while I am still with you.* ²⁶ *But when the Father sends the Advocate as my representative—that is, the Holy Spirit—he will teach you everything and will remind you of everything I have told you. — John 14:23-26*

This is the word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

We know from the Gospel accounts that Jesus taught a lot during his three years of public ministry. He told people about the Kingdom of God and how they were to live in this new Kingdom reality. I'm guessing that our four Gospels capture only a fraction of what Jesus taught during those three years. And unlike us, Jesus' disciples didn't have a written account of his teachings. They only had what they could remember. And those who wanted to follow the way of Jesus in future generations only had the oral traditions that were passed down. How would these disciples, who loved Jesus and wanted to follow in his ways, possibly remember everything he taught?

The answer, according to Jesus, is that God would send them the Holy Spirit, God's living presence, to live within each one of them. And the Spirit would teach them and remind them of everything that Jesus had taught. And that was the experience of Jesus' disciples after his death and resurrection. St. Paul put it this way in his letter to the disciples in Corinth,

¹¹ *No one can know a person's thoughts except that person's own spirit, and no one can know God's thoughts except God's own Spirit.* ¹² *And we have received God's Spirit (not the world's spirit), so we can know the wonderful things God has freely given us.*

¹³ *When we tell you these things, we do not use words that come from human wisdom. Instead, we speak words given to us by the Spirit, using the Spirit's words to explain spiritual truths. — 1 Corinthians 2:11-13*

Think about that. The Spirit, who knows the mind of God, lives in you, teaching and guiding you. That's mind boggling!

Have you ever been in a worship service and suddenly the words of a song we're singing or something in the sermon speaks directly to a situation you're facing in life? That's the Spirit at work.

Or perhaps you're praying about an important decision that you're wrestling with or a significant problem that you've been trying to solve and seemingly out of the blue you have a flash of clarity about what you need to do. That's the Spirit at work.

Several years ago I was having my morning coffee and I suddenly got this insistent nudge to call a friend with whom I hadn't spoken in a while. I couldn't shake it and so a bit later that morning I picked up the phone and gave him a call. He picked up the phone and without even saying hello he said, "I can't believe you're calling me. I just got off the phone with my doctor. I've been diagnosed with cancer and I need someone to talk to." That's the Spirit at work.

The Spirit, who knows the mind of God, lives in you and me. And the Spirit teaches us and guides us to live as Jesus lived. That's amazing. But if you think about it, that isn't necessarily good news. Why? Well, because following the way of Jesus isn't easy. It can feel risky. And, in fact, it's often beyond my capacity. Following Jesus means loving people I don't like. Forgiving people who have wounded or offended me. Being generous when I'm not certain I have enough for myself. Thinking of others as more important than myself. Well heck, you might as well tell me to jump to the moon. On my own I can't do those things, not consistently. And neither can you for that matter!

But here's more good news: the Holy Spirit doesn't just show us the way we should go in order to follow Jesus. The Spirit also empowers us to follow. Speaking of Christ St. Paul wrote, *"...as the Spirit of the Lord works within us, we become more and more like him."* Did you catch that? The Spirit who lives within you is working to transform you more and more into the likeness of Christ.

In his letter to the Galatians, Paul put it this way, *"But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control."* When I think about what I need to follow in the way of Jesus more consistently, it's those very things. So, the Holy Spirit doesn't just guide us to follow the way of Jesus; the Spirit also empowers us to do it. Does that mean that within a week or two we'll do it perfectly? Nope! We're talking a life-long journey of learning and growing and changing. We're not promised perfection; we're promised progress.

When I need directions on the road I just say, "Hey Google, navigate to..." wherever I want to go. But how

does that work when it comes to receiving guidance from the Holy Spirit? There are lots of ways, including spending regular time in Scripture and seeking the wisdom of trusted and faithful friends. But I want to focus on a powerful practice that, in my opinion, isn't used nearly enough— the practice of silence and stillness.

We are a bit like snow globes. Because we are always in motion, whether physically, mentally or emotionally, it's hard to see through to the center of ourselves where the Spirit dwells. But when we learn to be silent and still, things settle, and we are about to gain clarity. Or we could think about ourselves as water. Moving water churns up the sediment and the ripples in the water make it opaque. But when water is still we are able to see through it. Perhaps that's why the Psalmist says that God leads us beside still waters.

In the last congregation I served the senior pastor went home almost every afternoon at about 4:00. He went into his study and sat in his favorite chair in silence for nearly an hour. Sometimes he would think through challenges he was facing. Sometimes he actually fell asleep. But more often than not he simply sat in silence and listened. And that practice of silence and stillness shaped him. His best sermon ideas, his most creative solutions to challenges, his wisest insights came from those afternoons, in that chair, practicing silence and stillness.

Most of us are running through life so quickly, jumping from one thing to the next, that we react to life, and rarely are we at our best when we're merely reacting to life. Practicing silence and stillness opens our ears to hear the Spirit speak so that rather than reacting to life, we are responding out of the richness and wisdom of the One who lives within us. And when the practice of silence and stillness becomes a habit it shapes us and opens our ears to hear the Spirit's still, small voice even when we're not still and silent.

Here's a great example. Watch this: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4OAAJwnMNRQ&t=16s>

I want more moments like that in my life, don't you? And I'm convinced that the reason we don't have more of them isn't because the Spirit isn't speaking, but because we haven't allowed silence and stillness to tune our hearts to hear the Spirit's voice.

So, I want to challenge you to practice silence and stillness this week. Start with just five minutes at a time. Sit comfortably in a place you aren't likely to be disturbed. Then bring to mind a challenge or decision

you're facing. Once that's clear in your mind, offer this intention from Psalm 143:10 up to God, *"Teach me to do your will, for you are my God. May your gracious Spirit lead me forward on a firm footing."* And then just sit in silence. Conclude with these words: *God dwells with me...and I dwell with God.*

You may not hear anything at all. You might fall asleep. Or you might just feel a tap on your shoulder that leads you down a pathway of blessing. Let's try it right now.