

Sermon

As you all know, I am training to be a chaplain in the Army Reserve. From January to April of this year I was down in Ft. Jackson, SC attending the Chaplain Basic Officer Leadership Course. This course is designed to basically teach chaplains how to operate within the military and also it helps us to dive into the specifics of what it means to be a chaplain in the military. This past week, I was down in New Orleans as a member of the team, teaching brand new Army chaplains. Meaning they haven't been to the Basic course; they really haven't done much, or anything at all, in the military yet. Now, I'm telling all of you this to set the stage that for the past 4 months or so, I have been engaging with and learning from many senior chaplains within the Army. Amazing chaplains that have been making substantial efforts to help our Service Members. However, there was a phrase and an idea that was said a few times that I believe relates to all of us here and to the greater faith community. A phrase that I argue is taken out of context and misused over and over. (Military phrases)

The phrase is "don't reinvent the wheel." Or as it was said to me, "If you think you are inventing something new, don't. It's probably been done before." Now, for the majority of things, I get it. Why reinvent how to write a memo when it's been done ad-nauseum? If someone has put together an amazing training event, why not use it for my own Soldiers? The phrases in themselves are not the problem. As with most things, the issue comes with how these ideas are used. Particularly within the religious context!

Far too often I have heard these phrases used to dampen religious ingenuity, restrict spiritual exploration, or shut down faith journeying. "Jesus said this, and this is exactly what he meant." "We've always practiced this way; we won't change now." God wants this, God doesn't love that, God hates that! These phrases and this ideology have been used so often I'm surprised we see God anywhere in this world! The Bible was written, the tenants of faith have been decided, and God was placed safely away in a box never to make an appearance again.

The scriptures just before today's passages emphasize this point. Or at least they have been *used* to emphasize this point over and over. John 14:6-7 state "Jesus said to him (Thomas), "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen me." Now, discussing Jesus as "the way" is a completely different

sermon that I don't have the time to dive into today. What I do want to point out though is when used on its own, when used with an some malcontent, this verse completely shuts down any work of the Spirit as we see in today's scripture. I have an idea of the answer, but I wonder which verse we all have heard stated more often? The first scripture feeds right into our society's love of maintaining the status quo and our love of the ideology surrounding "this is how we've always done it." If I say that isn't of Jesus, if my theology says that's not what the Bible means, then it isn't right and you won't be getting to God. ~~This is how it is and it isn't changing...~~ I think you all get the point.

Now, typically when I give sermons, I try to use scripture to offer some practical applications for our lives. How can we use this scripture in our everyday interactions? However, today I want to pause just a little bit and take some time to piece apart the scriptures from today and, in doing so, emphasize how we could view these verses when we take the ideology of "not reinventing the wheel" out.

In our scripture for today, verses 23-29, Jesus starts off by repeating what he said back in verses 6-7. Jesus states, "Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them." However, Jesus then adds a little more in this interaction. He then goes on to say, "We will come to them and make our home with them." God will come to make a home with us. The Greek word used in this section is monē (mon-ay') which more closely translates to "an abiding presence." So not only will God love us, Jesus says God will come and be an abiding presence within us. God will come and fill every ounce of our being. Do you see the difference here from verses 6-7? In 6 and 7 Jesus states that if we follow the way, then not only will we know Jesus, we will know God. However, here we see that it is not only *us* knowing God, God will know and be within us. Here Jesus focuses more on the relational aspect of our interactions with God. This is important for what he says next and for the future of our faith journey.

How does God know us and have a relationship within us? Jesus goes on to say, "I have said these things to you while I am still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you." The Advocate, the Holy Spirit, that Spirit that moves throughout this room, that flows from one to the next, that resides deep within our soul. That is the connection point in our relationship with God. Yet Jesus, doesn't say the

Spirit will simply reside within us. No, Jesus says the Spirit will be active within us. The Spirit will teach you everything. Now, I don't know about all of you, but to me, that doesn't sound like our knowledge of and relationship with God will be stagnant. That doesn't sound like the ideology behind "don't reinvent the wheel."

If we embrace a theology and relationship with God that is stagnant, a relationship that states we've been given all the information we need and no more will be forthcoming, then we have effectively shut out the Spirit within our lives. When God makes a home within us, when the Divine is in active relationship with us, it is not possible that new revelations, new meaning, and new life won't come from it. It is for this reason why I love the "motto" of the UCC so much. God is still speaking. The Word (with a capital W) is still active in this life. How invigorating is that? To be able to shut out the voices saying this way and this way only is the path. To be able to say that God is active within me, the Spirit is actively teaching and showing me the way within this life.

And maybe you all know this already here, if I know Rev. Paula, I'm sure this isn't anything new to you all. So, I do apologize, I'm not leaving you all with answers today. I don't have any practical tips as to how we can spread this message and this liberation to others. No, today I simply pray that I am leaving you with a sense of hope. Hope that when we have questions, when we struggle with our faith, when we explore all that is the Divine within us, we will know that it is not wrong, we aren't drifting away from God. For this is the Divine working within us, continuing to teach us and lead us as Jesus promised.

I pray I am leaving you with a sense of hope just as Jesus did with his disciples. "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid." The world will push back. The world will tell us to not "reinvent." Yet, Jesus left us with the peace to know that it is not us who is reinventing. It is not through our own will that we receive new revelations and new life each any every day. It is nothing less than the Divine within us. The Advocate, the Holy Spirit, that which when unchained from the clutches of this world will guide us to bring about the Realm of God into the here and now! Amen.