

"Speak for yourself!" John 14:15-21, I Peter 3:13-18 (The Message)
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Call to Worship

We are ordinary folk with ordinary weaknesses and limitations. Yet the risen Christ promises to empower us and to infuse us with the same life-giving, powerful Holy Spirit that so empowered him.

All who love Jesus, all who strive to keep God's commandments, all who are open to the Spirit who leads us, come forward today to praise, to pray, and to proclaim!

Prayer of Invocation

Jesus, you are the way, the truth, and the life. With the help of your Spirit may we hear clearly today your will for our lives, so that in service to each other in your name we may more perfectly become your witnessing people. Lord, Open us to all that you would have us be, for you and for others. 'Breakthrough' into our lives and our church with new possibilities. Amen.

The Word

John 14:15-20; 1 Peter 3: 13-18 The Message

"If you love me, show it by doing what I've told you. I will talk to the Father, and he'll provide you another Friend so that you will always have someone with you. **This Friend is the Spirit of Truth. The godless world can't take him in because it doesn't have eyes to see him, doesn't know what to look for. But you know him already because he has been staying with you, and will even be *in* you!**

"I will not leave you orphaned. I'm coming back. In just a little while the world will no longer see me, but you're going to see me because I am alive and you're about to come alive. At that moment you will know absolutely that I'm in my Father, and you're in me, and I'm in you.

If with heart and soul you're doing good, do you think you can be stopped? Even if you suffer for it, you're still better off. Don't give the opposition a second thought. Through thick and thin, keep your hearts at attention, in adoration before Christ, your Leader.

Be ready to speak up and tell anyone who asks why you're living the way you are, and always with the utmost courtesy. Keep a clear conscience before God so that when people throw mud at you, none of it will stick. They'll end up realizing that *they're* the ones who need a bath.

It's better to suffer for doing good, if that's what God wants, than to be punished for doing bad. That's what Christ did definitively: suffered because of others' sins, the Righteous One for the unrighteous ones. He went through it all—was put to death and then made alive—to bring us to God.

Living the Word

I chose the first hymn for today "Come and Find the Quiet Center" as I think it is a good place for us to begin when trying to find our voices. I invite you to relax, close your eyes if you like and hear again these words as a prayer for this time: "Come and find the quiet center in the crowded life we lead, find the room for hope to enter, find the frame where we are freed: Clear the chaos and the clutter, clear our eyes that we can see all the things that really matter, be at peace, and simple be." Amen.

When we can 'simply be' and 'be at peace' and 'see all the things that really matter'...that is when we honor God. When we can honor the Spirit of God that is within us, we honor ourselves and in doing that we honor God, our Creator. How can we know this? Because Jesus has come and given us this Word, from God.

It is up to us to 'Learn & Confirm' what God has made available to us through Jesus' life, death and resurrection. We learn by reading the scriptures and acknowledging the Spirit at work in our lives. We confirm by sharing our understandings with others: some of like mind and some of differing understandings.

With every level of knowledge we acquire new information. How we decide what is truth is established according to our perceptions of the truth as it is presented to us. After every acceptance of knowledge we become a different person than we were before. Who we listen to and accept as truth, becomes a part of who we now are.

In John, Jesus tells us that God will provide a friend, who is the Spirit of Truth. He also says that not everyone will recognize the truth, but those who are connected to the Creator will recognize the Spirit because they are aware of it in their lives.

We recognize this new friend in us through a knowledge of the commandments we have been given: yes, the big 10 'thou shalt nots,' but also, and more importantly they are combined in the two commandments from Jesus: Love for God, love for each other. As we do what is best for the common good, so that all are valued, and not just what we would like, we draw closer to God. Jesus said: "You're in me and I'm in you."

We honor ourselves not by always getting what we want, but by working together to show God the honor. Jesus **is** alive. The Word that we have received from Christ about how to live our lives is the truth that God has to share with us. We are alive with *hope*, because the hope comes from God.

When I arrived back in Hayward three years ago, this church was in a bit of a flex. A disturbance had rent the air and the church and there was anger, hurt and disillusion. In February at the Special General Conference, decisions were made that split the crowd in two. When these things happen, people begin to take sides and then no one can win.

On Good Friday when the scripture was read, and we arrived at Matthew 15:37-38 "Jesus let out a loud cry and died. The curtain of the sanctuary was torn in two from top to bottom." At that moment and in all of the moments of our lives when things seem to be devastatingly falling apart; when relationships are ripped in two from the top to the bottom; where can we find our hope?

Three years have gone by, so I took another look around Hayward UMC. What I see is that healing has come for many with time. The tear, though it looked unfixable has been mended. There are some new faces in our church family, and some new faces on the working teams, with more and people stepping forward to be a part of ministry. We have a lot to celebrate at Hayward United Methodist Church, and there is a lot to prepare for...

Are we ready for whatever God has planned for us? Can we look at ministry in new ways, while still honoring the old ways? Can we own the hope before us and speak to the hope within us.

Peter wrote in his letter: "*Be ready to speak up and tell anyone who asks why you are living the way you are*" Have the hope and then live it:

From *Parade* magazine comes the story of self-made millionaire Eugene Lang, who greatly changed the lives of a sixth-grade class in East Harlem. Mr. Lang had been asked to speak to a class of 59 sixth-graders. What could he say to inspire these students, most of whom would drop out of school? He wondered how he could get these predominantly black and Puerto Rican children even to look at him.

Scrapping his notes, he decided to speak to them from his heart. "Stay in school," he admonished, "and I'll help pay the college tuition for every one of you." At that moment the lives of these students changed. For the first time they had hope. Said one student, "I had something to look forward to, something waiting for me. It was a golden feeling." Nearly 90 percent of that class went on to graduate from high school.

When leaders like Eugene Lang speak up, sharing what they know for the benefit of the rest of us – the good news they have been given, they not only honor themselves, but they also honor God.

Peters letter continues the statement by adding this ending: "and always with the utmost courtesy." Not to flaunt or taunt or brag, but to share as if you have been given a new idea or example of how to live. Sharing the gift of yourself and what you have received, by way of the Spirit of truth.

There is at one end a tactless way to speak and on the other end a wishy-washy way to present:

In the early 1900s George Riddell acquired the sensational London newspaper 'The News of the World.' Meeting British journalist Frederick Greenwood one day, Riddell mentioned that he owned a newspaper, told Greenwood its name, and offered to send him a copy. The next time they met, Riddell asked Greenwood what he thought of The News.

"I looked at it and then I put it in the wastepaper basket," said Greenwood, "and then I thought, 'If I leave it there the cook may read it,' so I burned it."

Certainly truthful, but not the most tactful. "Being" means we have to accept people as they are and love them even in the tactless times. But to be loving means speaking the truth in love. Show it, speak it – live God's love, that is all God asks of you...through the guidance of Christ and the Holy Spirit that works within you.

Honor God, by honoring the Christ within you, the Spirit working to empower you and honoring yourself in who God would have you be. Know God enough to know the truth, and then speak for yourself, share the good news.

I used to be invited each year to one of the Eau Claire Catholic Confirmation Classes along with three other clergy, for an ecumenical panel to share and discuss our differing denominations.

There was a Catholic moderator who would guide us with questions that the Confirmands had written down, and we would politely answer, taking turns as we are called upon. The topics vary from how in our differing denominations we share communion - to how many classes do we make our Confirmands go through (the youth's wording, not mine).

We were at the end of the session and the moderator said "One more question: 'Will those who have never heard the Good News be condemned to damnation?'" Before I even knew what was happening, from my mouth came: "Will we be the ones condemned for not sharing the Good News?"

I was out of order, I had not thought through an appropriate answer, which would have been something more like, "We believe God is a good God and wouldn't condemn the innocent." Or "We don't know for sure what God will do." But from deep within came a spontaneous combustion of words to challenge everyone in the room, myself included. "Will we be the ones condemned for not sharing the Good News?"

The poor moderator just stared at me and then stumbled through thank yous and goodbyes. Where had that come from, I kept asking myself as we left? I knew I hadn't planned on doing that, so I know it was a statement from the Holy Spirit – the Spirit of Truth. I don't know if anyone else in the room that night comprehended what had happened or evaluated that specific question and answer, but I have.

When the Apostle Peter wrote this letter to those Christians that had scattered into the unchristian parts of Asia Minor, he was encouraging them and giving them hope to honor God, by being themselves, through hearing and absorbing Jesus' words and then sharing that Good News - Word of Hope with the world.

Not a wistful, nebulous optimism that in the end things will turn out all right, which so often passes for hope; but religious hope, hope that rests not on us, but on God, the living God who raised Jesus Christ from the dead and gave him glory, so that our faith and hope might be in him.

"Will we be the ones condemned for not sharing the Good News?" God is honored when we can "Be ready to speak up and tell anyone who asks why we are living the way we are" We can know that God doesn't ask more of us than God is willing to help us accomplish...

Good news: Soon we will celebrate Pentecost – the coming of the Holy Spirit – start watching for it's coming...God is at work within you, do you recognize it?

PRAY: "Lord speak to me, that I may speak in living echoes of thy tone; as thou has sought, so let me seek thine erring children lost and lone.

O strengthen me, that while I stand firm on the rock, and strong in thee, I may stretch out a loving hand to wrestlers with the troubled sea.

O use me, Lord, use even me, just as thou wilt and when and where, until thy blessed face I see, they rest, thy joy, thy glory share." Amen.