

June 12, 2022

John 16:12-15

¹²“I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. ¹³When the Spirit of truth comes, she will guide you into all the truth; for she will not speak on her own, but will speak whatever she hears, and she will declare to you the things that are to come. ¹⁴She will glorify me, because she will take what is mine and declare it to you. ¹⁵All that God, my Parent, has is mine. For this reason I said that she will take what is mine and declare it to you.

Joachim of Fiori was born in Celico, Calabria, Italy, around 1135 C.E. After a start in the business world of his time, a conversion experience in Jerusalem, sojourns in a couple of monasteries, one of which made him abbot, he eventually founded the abbey, San Giovanni in Fiore, the style of which was a precursor of the Franciscan monastic order abbeys.

Joachim’s claim to fame was his deep-dive into the Book of Revelation, attempting to understand its apocalyptic hidden meanings. This has been a task most church theologians throughout the ages have discouraged, because they felt it was beyond one’s understanding. There was, however, a great deal of apocalyptic thinking and writing in Joachim’s time. Today Joachim is considered the preeminent apocalyptic thinker of his time and probably second only to John, the writer of the apocalyptic Book of Revelation in the Bible.

This introduction to Joachim of Fiore is to share with you his greatest claim to fame: an interpretation of the Book of Revelation. Hidden in the text of Revelation, according to Joachim, is a development of world events. They are divided

into three parts. The Age of the Father, the Age of the Son, and the Age of the Holy Spirit.

The Age of the Father corresponds to the Old Testament, characterized by obedience of humanity to the Rules of God. The Age of the Son begins with the advent of Jesus Christ, when Humanity became the Child of God, and is organized around the New Testament. And, the Age of the Holy Spirit was impending and would be a contemplative utopia.

According to Joachim, the Reign of the Holy Spirit would be a new dispensation of universal love, which would proceed from the Gospel of Christ, but transcend the letter of it. In this new Age the ecclesiastical organization would be replaced and the Order of the Just would rule the Church. This Order of the Just was later identified, after Joachim’s death, with the Franciscan order by one of his followers.

I share all this information about the mystic Joachim of Fiore’s visions, because this is Trinity Sunday and in the last decade Joachim has been making headlines in some theological circles. There are some, including myself, who see a pattern in history, unfolding much as Joachim had seen it. In today’s theory, the Age of the Father is found in the story of the Hebrew people and runs from 2000 B.C.E. (Before the Common Era) to 0 C.E. (the beginning of the Common Era). The Age of the Son runs from 0 C.E. to roughly 2000 C.E. And now we find ourselves in the transitional period, merging into the Age of the Spirit. The rise of the Pentecostal churches and other churches greatly moved (in every sense of the word) by the Spirit are signs of the beginning of the Age of the Spirit and the future of the church.

While this is a good organizing outline, I want to make clear that God – Creator, Christ, and Spirit – was acting

throughout all of history in these, and other, forms. After all, just last week we focused on how the Holy Spirit filled the gathered disciples and sent them forth to preach the gospel message.

In today's Gospel reading Jesus tells his disciples that there is no way he can tell them how to handle every situation that will arise in their lives moving forward. So Jesus tells them "the Spirit of truth" will guide them as they seek to make life decisions.

The Bible – the recorded words and deeds of Jesus, the acts of the early church, and the saved letters – served as the guiding principles of the church. Over time those recordings, the so-called New Testament, took on growing legal status, especially after the Reformation in the form of "sola scriptura". As literalism began to dominate, the Spirit seems to have been "locked in a box".

In the present-day theory of Joachim's vision, the Spirit began to break out of its "box" about 150 years ago and began shepherding in the new Age, when the Western world began to question slavery, an institution allowed by scripture. The cracks in the box widened with the advent of women's right to vote (women, as you will recall, were told to be silent). And one theologian called the final crack a "nail in the coffin" of the Age of the Son. This crack was the acceptance of the LGBTQ+ community in the church.

I truly believe the United Church of Christ was led by the Spirit of truth, when thirty years ago they launched the "God Is Still Speaking" campaign. It was in the midst of this that I learned the phrase "Continuing Testament". We have the Old Testament, Hebrew Scriptures. We have the New Testament, Christian Scriptures. Both of which record people's experience of God in their lives. But God did not

abandon creation after the birth of the church. God continues to speak, in and through the history of the church, in and through us. We, you and I and the world, are still writing the Continuing Testament. It is Spirit led, revealing God working in the world.

Telling his disciples about the Spirit of truth Jesus is freeing them from the legalism of the law, which ruled the Age of the Father, and was a warning not to get caught up in the same legalism in the Age of the Son. The church is made up of human beings though. We cannot fault people for wanting to maintain a status quo; who fear change. I do believe literalism is fear based.

As we move into the Age of the Spirit, I am not suggesting we negate the Age of the Father or the Age of the Son. I am not abandoning the Bible as a help and guide. But, as a hymn writer once wrote: "New occasions teach new duties."

I truly believe the truth the Spirit shares is unconditional love, which is our guide, both in understanding scripture and in living our lives. I strongly encourage you to remember this truth of the Spirit: God is still speaking – in and through each one of us.

What are the people you encounter each and every day learning about God? I pray it is love. Amen.