

“Help!”

Numbers 11:16-17; Acts 15:7-11;  
Romans 5:1-5; John 14:23-29

May 1, 2016  
Pastor Norman Fowler  
First Presbyterian Church of Moscow

What now? Have you ever had that experience where you finished something and you think *what now?* I was thinking about going to a workshop where they teach us all this stuff in a short time and then they say, “Go do it.” It’s that moment of *what now?* At the end of a school career, you may wonder *what now?* Or at the end of a job, *what now?*

Over the last few weeks I’ve been speaking about how Jesus has invited us to come abide with him and let the pathways of our lives be formed by him and allow him to be our friend in a way that shapes us to be those who show his love and grace. It’s great to think about all that. We think about how Jesus has shown us the love of God, the grace of God, the forgiveness of God, and we see that as a new lease on life. We get to follow Jesus and now we’re going to try to love one another.

It sounds wonderful until we start doing it. We find that loving one another is not quite as easy as it sounds. The world tells us there are some ways to make it easier—just love the ones who love you. Pay attention to yourself first. If we make some people be the other, then we don’t have to worry about them. We can make it easier.

I don’t think Jesus invites us to any of those things. He says, “I give you a new commandment.” In fact, if we were following this in the order of the Gospel, in Chapter 13, verse 34, he says, “I give you a new commandment to love one another as I have loved you.” In Chapter 15 he reiterates that and that’s where we picked it up. It’s important to hear his commandment, to learn about it, to begin to make decisions based on it, and to think about how we might implement it in our lives.

Some people talk about a pattern to how we do things. You start out with learning something or thinking about something, making a plan, deciding to do it, and then creating the action. Then after you’ve done something or you’ve lived through something, the idea is that you’re supposed to take a minute and reflect on what you’ve done so you can then learn from it. It’s that reflection part that I think is often the part we forget or leave off. We might be thinking: I had such a hard time; it didn’t really happen the way I expected it to; I don’t really want to look at why I failed at that. That kind of reflection can be hard. That’s when all those easy ways the world wants to tell us to do things can enter in.

It reminds me of a story of a friend of mine who said that one day he was in a new location, a new city, and he went out for a walk. This might be more of a parable than a real happening, but he went for a walk. As he started to go, he felt like Jesus came along side. He was a little surprised to feel like Jesus was walking with him, but he thought OK. As he went, he thought he should let Jesus give him directions in this new place. So he came to the first fork in the road and it felt like Jesus said to take the right. So he took the right. He walked along, enjoying the day and came to another fork in the

road and picked a way. Then he remembered: I was going to listen to Jesus, and I forgot he was with me. Jesus said, "Well that's not unusual."

It kind of feels like that to me. We listen to how Jesus invites us to love one another and Jesus will guide us in doing that. We may even go and try to do some of that and then we kind of forget that next step. At least it's easy for me to forget that next step: to reflect and let God work and change me so that the next time I might be better rather than begin to create divisions and shut off things and do all kinds of things that aren't that helpful. I quit listening to Jesus.

I think that's what Jesus is talking about today. When we come out of a workshop and say, "what now," we're on our own. The teacher was there, the teacher laid it out for us, and now we've got to try to do it. But who do we go to in the next minute?

I think God understands that it's easy for us to get excited about something new. It can be exciting to try something, but to deal with things that didn't quite go the way we planned, perhaps deal with our own failures, to try to learn something new from what we've done, to try to change a behavior that we begin to see is not that helpful, those are hard things to do. It's at those moments that I want to shout, "Help!" because I'm really not sure what to do. And here's what Jesus says, "You have help. I'll give you the helper and he will remind you and teach you."

The Spirit is present for us, to remind us and to teach us. When I get to the point when I say, "What now? What's next? What do I do?" it might be a time where I can begin to open my heart and listen, and ask that Spirit to be present and working.

I don't know about you, but for me, this is one of those areas I think is really hard because we don't live in a world that believes that anything is there for us. We're on our own. You've got to go it alone. You've got to be the one that makes your own decisions. You've got to live your life. And when you come up to a point when you don't know what to do in your life and you're being told to just live your life, what do you do? You're in a conundrum. I don't think we're alone. I think we have help. We have a God that has not only come to us and shown us grace and forgiveness and invited us to be children of God, but a God who continues to be with us as the helper to remind and teach us.

It might be fine if life were a little bit like an assembly line and we all sat and had one rivet we knew how to do and we could do it each time. I don't know about you, but I have not experienced life like that. There's always a new situation. There's always a new way of interacting. Even people I've known for long periods of time, all of a sudden we have these different ways of seeing. How do I live out the love of Christ in that moment, and how do I reflect on it?

I think the hard part about that is that so much of the way we're invited to reflect by the world, or maybe it's human nature, is to reflect that the reason things went wrong is because of some other. It's somebody else's problem. Somebody else is the cause.

It's because of the system. It's because of those folks. It's some other. The hard part about what I feel Christ asks me to do is not to say it's the other. Look at yourself. What can you do? What have you done? Who likes to do that, by the way?

But Christ is inviting us to not just blame the other. When he says love God with your heart, mind, soul, and strength and your neighbor as yourself, he's inviting us to see that we're all in the same boat and that our love for ourselves needs to be in conjunction with our love of the other.

I am thankful that we have the Helper. We have a God that continues to walk with us, to remind us and to teach us. You might look at the next line in today's Gospel because it looks to me like if we open ourselves to a God who will remind us and teach us, that we will also find that there will be peace, that Christ gives us a peace that the world does not give us, as it says here. In other places it says a peace beyond all understanding. This is not just an absence of violence, but it actually stepping into a time of harmony. It's those moments where we really recognize where things fit together. You see, I think when God works with us, and on us, and through us we experience ways that we fit together, we have an experience of harmony. Have you had that experience where things just meshed and there was a joy in it, and peace, and wonder, and beauty?

As we recognize what he calls us to do and as we try to do it, as we reflect what has happened and who we are, it is so that he can lead us. It's like a spiral that takes us into the wonderful place, the kingdom of God, the joy of Christ. And the wonderful thing is that it's not something we do on our own. We have help.

He helps us in a number of ways and in some ways coming to the table is one of those ways. It reminds us of what God has done, the forgiveness and grace God has given us, the way God continues to be with us and sustain us, the way God holds us together to support one another. We also then go out to live into the world as God's children.

We have help to live out that new commandment to love one another as he has loved us. Amen.