

**Scriptures**  
**Proverbs 8:1-4 (NRSVUE)**

8 Does not wisdom call  
and understanding raise her voice?  
<sup>2</sup> On the heights, beside the way,  
at the crossroads she takes her stand;  
<sup>3</sup> beside the gates in front of the town,  
at the entrance of the portals she cries out:  
<sup>4</sup> "To you, O people, I call,  
and my cry is to all who live.

**John 16:12-15 (NRSVUE)**

<sup>12</sup> "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. <sup>13</sup> When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. <sup>14</sup> He will glorify me because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. <sup>15</sup> All that the Father has is mine. For this reason, I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

On Tuesday, The Free Press, a publication under the leadership of independent journalism, featured an article by Ted Gioia, entitled: **Our Knowledge System Has Collapsed. Can We Survive Without It?**

In the introduction, was this:

*“Would you believe me if I told you that the biggest news story of our century is happening right now—but is never mentioned in the press? That sounds crazy, doesn’t it? But that is often the case when a bold new worldview appears...The new knowledge system will be built on these human values. Technology will be forced to serve it—or it will get locked into a losing battle with the new “softer and gentler” knowledge system.”*

One of the greatest tragedies in our age is the cavalier attitude toward truth—that is, acting as though there were no such thing as truth, or as if it didn’t matter, when, in fact, it matters eternally. If one of the greatest *tragedies* in our age is the attitude that there is no such thing as truth, or that it doesn’t matter, then one of the greatest *blessings* we can give to each one another and our children is the passionate conviction that there is such a thing as truth and that it matters at every point in life and eternally.

When I finished my seminary education in the spring of 2016, one of my classmates gave me a T-shirt with these words on the back:

*Asking questions is the key to understanding.*

So how shall we approach this subject? I'll take my cue from Rudyard Kipling, the British poet and storyteller from a hundred years ago. He wrote many poems and stories for children. One of them is especially relevant for lovers of truth.

It's called "Elephant's Child" and has this verse (please excuse the gender reference):

I KEEP six honest serving-men  
(They taught me all I knew);  
Their names are What and Why and When  
And How and Where and Who.  
I send them over land and sea,  
I send them east and west;  
But after they have worked for me,  
I give them all a rest.

Today is Trinity Sunday, and the readings are about Wisdom. Or are they about the Holy Spirit, as per the John passage? Or perhaps some people would even interpret the Proverbs passage as being about Jesus. There's certainly a link between the 'Word' of John's gospel – which the writer of John explains is Jesus, and who was there before the world began – and 'Wisdom' in the Old Testament, which this Proverbs passage says, 'was set up... before the beginning of the earth'.

Jesus calls us in today's reading to listen to the Holy Spirit – which he calls the 'Spirit of truth'. The Gospel of John never lays down any rules. It is all very mystical and open-ended. It's about discernment and discipleship and ongoing revelation. It invites us, the reader, to listen to the 'Spirit of truth' for ourselves.

That is extremely helpful when it comes to the kinds of topics that an inclusive Church, like ours, is interested in, because the Bible is not always clear on each specific one. It is about discerning the Spirit of truth for our age – from Scripture, but also through experience, and by paying close attention to the words and actions of our great teacher, Jesus.

John admits that his book cannot contain all the things that Jesus said and did – he has only written down a small part. Even Jesus in the passage for today says that he has not told his disciples everything, because they ‘cannot bear it now’. There is always space beyond Scripture for learning something new from the Spirit.

Sometimes we’re not ready to learn something new. Sometimes we’re not open to the Spirit of truth. There have been times in my life and, perhaps, yours when we have been closed to new wisdom. As it says in our Proverbs reading, ‘Does not wisdom call and understanding raise her voice?’ We don’t always want to understand, but John’s gospel tells us that being open to new revelation – to all the things which we formerly could not ‘bear’ and all the things there was not room for in the gospels – is of essential importance to our faith and discipleship.

The Bible is not a closed book. It’s not even a book, as I’m sure you know. It is a collection of books – a collection of experiences of God, stories of God’s people, wisdom from God’s followers, and stories of Jesus’ life.

The Spirit of wisdom and truth – Sophia in Greek – was there long before the world began, so of course she is still here now, teaching us about God and one another long after the books of the Bible were written and handed down.

Today she might be calling *you* to new wisdom and insight, to take onboard things you formerly couldn’t bear. In order to hear the ‘Spirit of truth’, we need to lay down our defenses. We cannot be both defensive and open to new wisdom.

We need to ask:

- *What* is it that we have not understood yet?
- *Who* is it that we have not understood?
- *How* is God calling us into deeper community with one another?

The Trinity is an unfathomable, mysterious community at the heart of God. We are called into that mystery too – but we cannot be a part of God unless we are open to being a part of one another. This means laying down our defenses, opening up our arms, and being receptive to what other people are saying, especially those who have been marginalized and continue to be marginalized in our faith communities – those whose stories so often go unheard.

The Spirit calls us to be more like Jesus, and Jesus was always in community with those who were the most marginalized. He was open to learning from others – like the Syrophenician woman who challenged him for refusing to heal her daughter because she was not a Jew. She called him to expand his understanding and his ministry, and he commended her for it.

The stories where Jesus seems to learn and get it wrong make us very uncomfortable, and yet he is giving us an example to follow. We need to listen, learn, be challenged, and grow. We need to listen to the most marginalized people of today's world –

- people living in poverty
- people living on disability benefits
- people whose lives are threatened because of their gender identity.

These are the people whose lives and words the 'Spirit of truth' is calling us to heed...

- We need to grow in wisdom, so that we can be in community with all God's people.
- We need to expand our understanding, so we can all be a part of God's kingdom on earth.

How can we do this?

With the recent passing of the actress, Loretta Swit, I decided to watch the a few episodes of MASH, the long running television series that spanned eleven seasons, aired in 1983 and drew an audience of over 120 million viewers.

Part of the fleeting phenomena of MASH as well as other televised events such as ROOTS, was that they were experienced collectively in real time. Today's series, with streaming capability, may have much higher views, but a significant portion of that are multiple views by the same persons or households.

In viewing these episodes of MASH, I noted that the common experiences within the encampment helped form community, which may partially explain why Jesus invited the disciples to follow rather than to believe. Jesus offered them belonging, tutelage, and experiences rather than doctrine, tenets, and regulations. Their commitment was to Jesus and, by extension, the way of life they entered with him.

- Revelation came later.
- Understanding came later.
- Responsibility came later.

Jesus built a relationship of trust with his closest followers and avoided the easy acceptance of the amazed crowds for the deeper ties that true community and communion offer.

Trust functions in mutuality so while Jesus invited the disciples to trust in him; he also indicated his trust in them. Trust does not demand perfection, and it blooms with demonstrated commitment. By the time of the gospel reading, Jesus was preparing for the passion, which primarily entailed sharing more details with his disciples.

Jesus presents a promise steeped in community—the community that Jesus comes from and will return to—of the Triune God. Jesus, the One who was sent assures the disciples of the sending of another One, Spirit.

The Spirit of Truth comes to us as Advocate and Guide, not as a substitute but as a successor in the Trinity that is uniquely the Christian belief. There is continuity in the message if not in the presence. The nature of the relationship will fundamentally change. As disciples, we should not be concerned for the Spirit **will** provide, rather the wisdom of what we will need, as we need it, and as we can receive it in truth and love, as we continue to ask questions to further our understanding of the word, in truth and wisdom. Amen!