

Last week, we decided there are things about which you can be wrong. This week, I wonder if there are things about which we can claim to be right.

Some people say the church is collapsing in on itself. I wonder if they say that because they don't hear anything coming out it. Sometime, the voices in the church are so soft and silent that others might not think there's anything going on in here. We forget, perhaps, that we come here to praise God, to open the windows and let everyone hear that praise. This is not the time for us to be silent. This is the time to give it up for Jesus! It's the time to speak truth and love into the world so that these walls and this roof are trembling — not because they're falling in but because we're shaking the foundations with the power and praise of God. No, the church is not collapsing in on itself. We can't let it. We must speak so that people hear.

One thing we hear, unfortunately, is that the loudest voices coming from “the church” make us sound like Christian thugs. We know the voices that resonate from here are always to be about love. Thus, we take care in our discernment about what we say here and who hears it. Paul says we are to be sensitive to the will of God, so what we are saying comes across as compassionate. We are to be fervent in our praise and humble with the power God has given us.

That is who we are called to be. Paul calls all of us into discernment, and it's not a question of “maybe.” Paul doesn't say “you may discover what you are called to do” and “you may figure it out in this life.” Paul never qualifies any call in that way. To him, it is your work, and it is not negotiable. It is the call every one of us must listen for and hear. And we are not to be timid or fearful in our discernment or in our voices about what we hear from that call.

We have been silent, it seems, in the church about what's going on in our world right now. We talked last week about how oppression or supremacy of any kind are wrong. But there is more to be said. We have heard over the last couple weeks about symbols and statues. I wonder if we might discern from God's will what the church might say about that. I see those symbols and feel shame. Others see

those same symbols and feel pain. They see those symbols and are reminded of a history of human trafficking. They see symbols of kidnap, transport, buying, selling, exploiting, profiting, brutalizing, sometimes killing and then blaming of a people. And the world is asked to make decisions about whether those symbols stay or not. We are here to discern through our shame and our pain what God would have us do. And out of that place of discernment, we speak compassion.

I know speaking about things that seem political might offend some. But we trust in God. And so we have to speak the words we hear in this place, fervent in our praise, humble in our power. That's what Paul says. We are discerning as we are living in and close to the will of God, with humility. This is a place, then, whose voice should be both loud and humble.

Regarding our Gospel this morning, I want to help us understand what's happening in Jesus' world. Jesus says to his disciples, "Who do they say that the Son of Man is?" Often, the translation makes it sound like Jesus is asking the question about himself. If you were a Jew in the first century, however, and somebody said to you 'who do you say that the son of man is,' you would think back to the history of the Israelite experience. And you would hear prophetic voices talking about the Son of Man. In the book of Daniel 7:13-14, the prophet talks about hope and about vision and a prophetic experience of life. "The Son of Man shall come in a cloud from the East." (I like the King James version for this passage.) That's what people would think of. It was a messianic figure, defined in a very particular way, and it was about establishing the reign of God on earth at the end of time. So when Jesus asked the question, what he's saying is "Who's he? Who's that figure? Who do you think about when you hear about that figure?" And then he says, "who do they say I am?"

Now at this time, the people following Jesus have seen certain things. We know Jesus has fed thousands, and Matthew tells us Jesus was walking the countryside with crowds following him. Those who are mute can speak, the maimed are made whole, the lame can walk, the blind can see. So when Jesus asked his disciples,

“who do you say I am,” what he's saying is you are seeing a difference between the reign of God at some end time and what is happening right now in this world. What is happening in this world are miracles of healing, power from the spirit of God coming into this world that needs a voice of compassion and love, into this world that is marked by Jesus’ presence here healing people and bringing us to wholeness.

I know we don't often say explicitly that we come to this place to praise Jesus but that is why we come. We come here not only to praise, but we also come here to find out what God saying to us. We come here to listen for how we are to say things —gently, humbly, compassionately, and above all with the love that was given to us by God in Jesus. There is no other conversation. We are crystal clear that we are called and created to come here in love.

Yes, there’s more. What do we do now? Where do we go now? Who do we see now? What do we claim now? That’s a matter of discernment not only for the church but for you and for me. It’s a matter of getting close to the spirit of God and being sensitive to the will of God. You might wish I could issue a directive from this pulpit and tell you what each of you is to do. I can’t. That’s something for each of us to kneel and to pray and to ask God to come upon us to tell us what we are to do because we know for sure that doing nothing is not an option. And if you feel you may sit back in the world that we live in right now, a world which is far from ordinary, then you have not yet heard the call of God. And we still have work to do.

One of the things we claimed last week was that we are called to create a beloved community. A Beloved Community. A community we cannot create without Jesus’ help. And we cannot create that community without the union — not coexistence, not cohabitation, not sharing spaces — without the union of all people. For Jesus, that was The Work. Come and unite a people in love, and give them a voice to claim healing and power and love in this world.

Amen.