

## It's Better that I Go Away, John 16

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Inhale. Exhale.

Inhale. Exhale.

This is the rhythm of breath.

This is the rhythm I want you to keep in mind for this sermon.

Inhale. Exhale.

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*How is it good that Jesus goes away?*

How is it good for the disciples that Jesus is going to leave them? I'm sure it doesn't *feel* good when he's arrested. I'm sure it doesn't *feel* good when he's tortured and humiliated. I'm sure it doesn't *feel* good when he's dead. I'm sure it doesn't *feel* good when they're thinking, "are we next?" Do the Jewish leaders and Roman officials know that we were his disciples? Are they coming for us?

That can't *feel* good.

For us today, do we really believe that it's *better* that Jesus isn't physically here with us?

But here Jesus says, "I tell you the truth," which is like bolding and underlining the next statement, "it is for your good, for your advantage that I go away."

Don't you think it'd be better if he was sitting next to you and you could see his face and touch his scars and hear his voice (like, his *actual* voice) answer your questions and say your name? Then, you'd *really* believe, right?

Wouldn't it be better if he was sitting next to you and could just give you a hug? After the week you've had? After the month you've had, after the last two years we've all had. If you could just have an actual hug from the flesh and bones Jesus, maybe that would be enough.

*How is it better that he go away?*

This reminds me of a meme I saw a few months ago. I can't find the original one, but...

It was an image with a mom and her child in a crib.

The text on the top had the mom saying something classic like, “I love you so much, now I’m going to turn the light off and leave the room. Goodnight, sweetheart.”

Then on the bottom of the image it had the baby’s imagined response, something like, “Cool cool cool, no big deal. I’ll just lie here in the dark all alone in a crib I can’t get out of, with a body that can’t walk. No big deal, I’m totally fine.”

Sure Jesus, you go head off to heaven and leave us alone with our own sin and division and the tricks and deception of satan and a planet we can’t seem to take care of. Cool cool, cool, no big deal.

*How could it possibly be better that Jesus leaves?*

John 16:7 “But very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate [the Helper, the Comforter, the Holy Spirit] will not come to you; but if I go, I will send the Spirit to you.”

According to Jesus, it is better to have the Holy Spirit within us than his physical body next to us.

The context of John 16 is that it falls within a larger “Farewell discourse” of chapters 14 to 17 in which Jesus is compassionately preparing his followers for his death. There’s so much going on here that I will barely scratch the surface. Jesus is attempting to soften the trauma about to occur to the disciples, to provide hope in their coming bereavement by letting them know that they actually aren’t being deprived of a loved one, and that even when they abandon him, he’s not alone, but with the Father.

He tells them that the coming Spirit will guide them into all truth. He tells them that their grief will turn to joy. He tells them that though they will have trouble, they will ultimately have peace because Jesus has overcome the world. All of this is cloaked in language about the intimacy Jesus has with the Father, and how through the Spirit he is going to share that intimacy with us.

I don’t know about you, but for me this isn’t easy to comprehend.

This is the mystery of the Trinity.

The Trinity is a mystery — it’s not a riddle designed to trick us, or a puzzle that we just have get the pieces right to understand, and its definitely not some confusing theological doctrine that has no value for our daily lives.

The Trinity tells us that it is relatedness that stands at the core of God’s being. There is a fellowship of God, a community that is revealed to us as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Among many things, the rich language of chapter 16 shows us that. Speaking about the Spirit in verses 14 and 15 Jesus says, "He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you. All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will receive from me what he will make known to you."

Let's be honest, this isn't the easiest sentence to follow but what is clear is the relationship of giving between Jesus, the Father, the Spirit, and now us!

The Trinity of Father, Son, and Spirit is a community of love. This, by the way, is what John means when he says in 1 John 4 that God is love. God is in a mutual loving relationship with Godself and there is so much love between the three persons of the Trinity that it overflows to us.

Jesus is saying it's better that he go away, because if he sends the Spirit we can now enter into fellowship with the full Trinity of God.

1 John 4:12-16 really highlights this:

"No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made *complete* in us. This is how we know that we live in him and he in us: He has given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in them and they in God. And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them."

God is a relationship of love, and because the Father sends the Son, and the Father and Son send the Spirit, you and I are invited into that relationship.

The life of the Trinity is made possible to us by the Spirit. One of the primary Hebrew words for Spirit is *Ruach*. *Ruach* is one of those beautiful diamond words, and depending on the context and which way you turn it it means something different yet the same. In the Hebrew Scriptures it most often gets translated as spirit, wind, or breath.

In Greek the word is *Pneuma*. It carries the same layered meaning as spirit, wind, or breath. In the story of Nicodemus in John 3 we see it used back-to-back and translated differently.

John 3:8 - "The wind (pneuma) blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit (pneuma)."

This isn't just within Judeo-Christianity. In fact, in ancient Greek medicine, pneuma is the form of circulating air necessary for the systemic functioning of vital organs. This couldn't be more right theologically speaking, because the Spirit/pneuma is the animating life force for all creation, and especially the church.

Hear this beautiful poetic prayer of Psalm 104:27-30

“All creatures look to you  
to give them their food at the proper time.  
When you give it to them,  
they gather it up;  
when you open your hand,  
they are satisfied with good things.  
When you hide your face,  
they are terrified;  
when you take away their breath [hebrew - *ruach*],  
they die and return to the dust.  
When you send your Spirit [*ruach*],  
they are created,  
and you renew the face of the ground.”

In Genesis 2 God breathes his Spirit into humanity in creation, and spoiler alert, next week in John 20 Jesus will breath his Spirit on the disciples as he commissions them to be God’s agents of renewal in the world.

The Spirit is breath, and this is the rhythm of God.

In (breath in) and out (breath out).

This is the rhythm of the Trinity, and the rhythm of our life in God as well.

This is the rhythm of John 16, which is succinctly summed up in verse 28: I came from the Father and entered the world; now I am leaving the world and going back to the Father.”

From before creation Jesus is (breath in) in the heavenly places with God the Father, and then (breath out) he is sent to the earth on mission to redeem and restore all things. Then Jesus ascends (breath in) back to his rightful place at the right hand of the Father, and then (breath out) the Spirit descends upon the church. The Spirit, draws us (breath in) into the life of God, so that we too (breath out) are sent into the world. For what purpose? (Breath in) but to draw others into the life of God as well! Who then are (breath out) sent out joining in the redemptive purposes of God.

This is why baptism, which we saw last week, is always into the name of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit — into the Trinity!

This is my desire for my ministry: that I am, like the rhythm of breath, intimately drawn in to communion with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, inhaled up into the Trinitarian life of God, and then sent out, exhaled out for the sake of the community.

I want to be one who deeply abides in Jesus, full to the point of overflowing, and I want that which overflows to be given to those in need of God.

To keep this desire in view, I bought an art print by Scott Erickson.

There are three persons, interacting as one. Each one pouring out their drink while simultaneously being filled by the other. It might be too hard to see but one of the characters has scar marks on his hands.

The three angles of the triangle have lines of movement, as if what's happening amongst these three expands outward to others.

This is what I want my ministry to be grounded in.

Andrew Root says something similar,

“Ministry isn’t necessarily about building or maintaining something. Ministry is the gift given us by God to share in God’s life, to participate in God’s action as we share in the person of others.... Ministry is God’s gift to us, the gift of leading others in sharing in the life of God.”

This is the kind of ministry I want to have with and among you, First Free.

This is my hope for our church as well. I imagine a church that sits at the feet of Jesus and dwells in the presence of the Holy Spirit for the sake of the glory of God and the good of the world. I want us to be a community that is so in step with the Spirit, so in tune with the voice of God, so near to Jesus (inhale) that we perceive what He is doing in our midst AND join in (exhale).

Can we be that kind of church?