

## Are We There Yet?

On Sunday, we focused on an intriguing statement Jesus made shortly before his death: “I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now.” John 16:12. Pastor Vivian invited us to wrestle with what that statement might mean for each of us.

1. Warm up question: For most of us, when growing up, there were many things we wanted to do that our parents wouldn't let us do because they thought we weren't yet able to handle it. For Vivian, this included everything from dating, to drinking coffee, to getting a driver's license. When you were growing up, what's something you longed to do, but your parents thought you weren't yet ready?
2. Read John 16:1-13. As best we can tell, Jesus spoke these words at the very end of his earthly ministry, on the last night of his life, at the Last Supper. Jesus says a lot in this passage. Before we get to the statement Vivian asked us to focus on, let's think a bit about the other things Jesus says here.
  - a. Verses 1-4. Many of the early Christians experienced the pain of being kicked out of their faith communities, i.e., synagogues, because of their belief in Jesus. Some of us have gone through a similar trauma for being gay or being divorced, etc. Why do you think Jesus felt it important to warn his followers that they might get kicked out of their faith communities?
  - b. Verses 5-11. Here Jesus uses the word “Advocate” to refer to the Holy Spirit. He says it's actually better for us to have the Holy Spirit with us, than to have him still physically in the world with us. Why might that be? How is it better to have the Holy Spirit in the world than Jesus himself?
3. In verse 12, we come to the key statement Vivian asked us to focus on. There, Jesus says, “I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now.” Vivian reminded us that, in the days leading up to the Last Supper, Jesus had told his disciples several things that they seemed unable to absorb.
  - a. For example, several times he had told them that his death and burial was near. Why do you think they couldn't grasp that Jesus' death was near?
  - b. Shortly before his death, Jesus' disciples also had a big dispute about which of them would be greatest when Jesus established his kingdom. That spirit of rivalry seems to have even carried itself into the Last Supper, when none of the disciples volunteered to be the “servant” who would wash the other's feet, as was typical before ancient Middle Eastern dinner parties. So Jesus did it himself. Why was it so difficult for Jesus disciples then, and us now, to be the servant of others?
  - c. Think back over recent days. When was the last time you consciously did something that put you in the role of serving others? What did you do? And how did it feel?

- d. At the Last Supper, Jesus also told his disciples, “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me.” John 14:1. Scholar William Barclay writes: “In a very short time life for the disciples was going to fall in. Their world was going to collapse in chaos around them. At such a time there was only one thing to do—stubbornly hold on to trust in God.... If, in the darkest hour, we believe that somehow there is a purpose in life and that that purpose is love, even the unbearable becomes bearable and even in the darkness there is a glimmer of hope.” That’s also a hard lesson to bear. It’s much easier to fret and worry than to be at peace. In times of great trouble in your life, has believing in God helped you? How?
4. Although the foregoing teachings of Jesus can sometimes be “hard to bear,” Vivian suggested that Jesus’ statement in verse 12 – “I have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now” – actually refers to lessons that run even deeper. So what are these “unbearable” lessons, these “things to come” (vs. 13), of which Jesus spoke? Vivian said, “I have spent quite a bit of time thinking about this because Jesus’ ministry was very impressive and I was trying to imagine what he could have possibly left out. And if he didn’t speak about it specifically, surely, it was covered in his many teachings.”
    - a. So what kinds of lessons and truths was Jesus referring to that his followers wouldn’t able to bear until some future time? Any ideas?
    - b. Vivian offered this idea: “I believe that [in verse 12] Jesus is speaking to you and me individually. I believe it is that special revelation that Jesus has for each of us. We all have someone or something that challenges us – that thing that thrives in a small dark corner of our heart. We don’t let much light in there, because then we would have to acknowledge it and deal with it. But Jesus implies there will come a time when we will be able to deal with it. We will be able to bear it.” In other words, Vivian suggested that each of us has certain lessons to learn that are so sensitive and make us so uncomfortable, it may take us a lot of years and a lot of tears to finally get to the place where we’re able to bear it, hear it, and learn it. As you look back over your life, tell us about one of the toughest lessons you’ve ever had to learn – something you resisted before finally embracing?
    - c. Right now in your life, is there a lesson or truth that you sense God wants to teach you, but you’re not yet sure you’re ready to face? What’s the lesson or truth? And what keeps you from facing it?
    - d. Vivian said, “But how do we sit in the discomfort and allow the Holy Spirit to guide us into new truths? It **is**, well, uncomfortable. Discomfort isn’t bad. It’s just not what we’re used to. And so we avoid it, but at the cost of not being able to change and grow, not being healthy, not being open to adventure and the chaos that is life. Avoidance doesn’t help.” So what can we do to help ourselves be more open to hearing the “unbearable” personal lessons God wants to teach us?