

A Charge for Sardis
Bob Stillerman
Trinity Sunday, 6/4/2023
Matthew 28:16-20



a spiritually
progressive
community
of faith

In the beginning, following Jesus was straight-forward for the disciples: they literally followed Jesus around the Galilee. Jesus mentored them. Jesus offered a ministry of presence and patience, but Jesus also provoked their thinking around radical hospitality and love. Teacher led students, and the students, buoyed by a safety net, could recognize their centeredness in God and one another. Their connection to Jesus credentialed their calling, and gave witness to their gifts.

But how does one follow Jesus when the living Jesus has been crucified, and the resurrected Jesus has ascended back to God? Pentecost reveals the answer. Jesus followers will be led by the Holy Spirit. But the Spirit isn't a consolation prize. Though not the same form as the Jesus that walked among the disciples, the Spirit is no less potent, is no less connected to us, is no less transcendent. In fact, the Spirit is actually the most potent, connected, and transcendent reality of God for us to experience!

Our recognition of Trinity Sunday affirms the varied expressions of our Triune God, and I would argue encourages us to find ever-evolving ways to the speak the name of the God Who Is.

To me, what's most impressive about the narrative arc of Ascension, Pentecost, and Trinity Sundays is the resolve of the earliest disciples. They were given the opportunity to create a whole new way of being a community of Jesus-followers. And wow, did they ever succeed! The Acts Church, the one where all was provided for any who had need, and where people broke bread and worshiped God with glad and generous hearts, remains the model (even two thousand years later!) for faithful, hospitable community.

I believe we share a commonality with those early apostles. For many of us, Sardis Baptist Church, in 2019 and prior to a global pandemic, was a relevant, tested, and transformative expression of Jesus-following. We had a sense of centeredness. And there were a lot of things we could do to live

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out, to feel, to affirm, to recognize our calling and giftedness and belonging on a regular basis.

But then, COVID-19. Every expression of living: home, work, play, school, worship, entertainment, travel, procurement, politics – all of it looks different than it did five years ago. And just like those disciples before us, it will not be a replication of the mechanisms, traditions, and expressions of our past that connects us in fulfilling ways. Though to be sure, we hold the stories of our past, those that have formed us, with no less esteem. But rather, it will be the guidance of the Holy Spirit, born out in the expressions of the present, that guide us to the green pastures, still waters, and banquet tables of our future.

The disciples could no longer occupy their pre-Easter roles in a post-Pentecost world. The Holy Spirit transformed them from spectators to participants. The things they did with Jesus in the Galilee, they now did in newer, more impactful ways beyond the Galilee. Our roles have changed, too, Sardis. We can no longer occupy pre-Covid roles in a post Covid world. We must instead work to express the same Spirit that has undergirded our past in the ways that best reveal our sense of calling, hospitality, and Christ-centeredness in the present. All of this is to say, we are not called to follow a Jesus that occupied an ancient space, or even a pre-Covid space, but rather we are called to be Jesus in the very spaces we occupy.

To that end, I want to enthusiastically invite you into a conversation about opportunity. We have the chance to give formal discernment to how Sardis can collectively listen for and be filled by the Holy Spirit, and use that guidance to best express our sense of calling, and best apply the gifts and resources that can help us realize our calling.

It is the season of Pentecost. May the Holy Spirit fall fresh upon us! Amen.