

John 14:15-21

15 'If you love me, you will keep my commandments. ¹⁶And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. ¹⁷This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.

18 'I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. ¹⁹In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. ²⁰On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. ²¹They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them.'

Becoming One with Each Other

Begin with a clip from "Witches of Eastwick" – band rehearsal

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y6LvzS5SbQ4>

The clip you just watched was from the movie "The Witches of Eastwick," which was a fun movie and a great book by John Updike. And I think this clip is a great illustration for today's sermon, "Becoming One with Each Other." There are two musical words that are apropos to today's message: dissonance and consonance. Dissonance is the sound that is produced when people are not in tune with one another – the clip you just watched begins with this elementary school band playing some Mozart, and the children -bless their hearts – are doing the best they can based on the way they have been trained to play music, *by the book*. We might expect to hear this quality of music at a school concert, and we would applaud politely, and in the back of our minds we would say, "They are just children." You can't expect more than this... or can you? The band teacher, played by Susan Serandon, tells the children to get rid of their sheet music, to "throw away the book" and has the children just play from their hearts, and they sound great!... to the astonishment of the school principal who ends up running from the classroom frightened because something *strange* has just happened. Soon there is talk around the town that this teacher is a witch who is endangering the lives of these children.

Of course Jesus was also accused of "being a witch" of sorts; Jesus certainly didn't do everything "by the book." He handed out forgiveness freely and encouraged others to do the same, which subverted the authority of the priests. He touched lepers and allowed "unclean" women to touch his garments, which meant that he himself was unclean, contaminated, someone to be shunned. No surprise then that he hung out with tax

collectors and sinners. And he didn't go by the book when it came to healing the sick – that was not supposed to be done on Saturdays – it said so right in the rule book. And in our gospel lesson today we find him sitting at a table, having just stripped down to his “inner garments” – his nightshirt - and washed his disciple's feet – that's not something rabbis are supposed to do; a rabbi is supposed to have his feet washed by his disciples. He's supposed to wear fine robes and stay away from the “unclean.” No wonder that people thought that Jesus was possessed by an unclean spirit. Jesus is doing things in unconventional ways, not according to the rule book which had led his people for a thousand years. “You can't throw away the music, Jesus. You have to go by the book!”

There's nothing wrong, per se, about going by the book, about sticking to the written music or the written word when we begin to learn things. Like Jews and Muslims, Christians are “People of the Word;” we have sacred texts that instruct us. But I would say that Christians are people whose noses should not be stuck in a book. When we stick to the written word it gives us some comfort and some structure; we know where to start and where to turn the page and where to finish. We know what note to play and when to take a rest. But we can get so stuck in the word that we never act upon the word. We interpret the word and talk about the word, but we never DO the word. And when they do actually put the word into practice they are so confined by the word that they can't make beautiful music. They are the children who spent hours practicing the music at home, but when they try to play with twenty other children they just can't produce the right sound.

So when the teacher tells you to throw out the music, two things happen. First, you are forced apply what you've learned – the written word was a crutch that kept you from falling, but it was also slowing you down, preventing you from running or dancing. Now that it's gone, you may be a little nervous, but you are also free to “experience” the music as something more than notes on a page.

The second thing that happens is that you become more attuned to the other players around you. It's no longer you and the instrument and the conductor and the sheet in front of you; it's you and the instrument and the conductor **and the other musicians around you.** The dynamic has changed. You realize for the first time that you are no longer just the clarinet player; you are a member of a band, or an orchestra. You listen to one another, and you play with one another, and it's no longer a matter of how you as an individual sound; it's how you as an orchestra sound. Eventually you may start to **interpret** the music; you may even turn into a jazz band.

That's what a good Church looks like. When we're at our best we are a band or an orchestra creating beautiful music together. We're not just individuals playing what's on the sheet in front of us; we hear one another, and we adapt our playing to what others are playing. When Team Bethel rehearses, we bring in our individuality, as we've all been practicing on our own, and we all have a different idea of how a song should sound. So if you have had the "pleasure" of hearing us play a piece together for the first time, you may feel that you are witnessing an Elementary School band concert, smiling and nodding your head and in the back of your mind saying, "I hope they sound better next Sunday." And usually we do sound better, because as we play again and again and again we each modify our playing to accommodate others styles, and what we end up with is greater than the sum of our individual parts, and it's unique to US. It's the same thing with anything we do together in church; when we throw a festival or we teach Sunday School or Vacation Bible School we come with our individual ideas and lesson plans, but we coordinate with one another, and we accommodate one another, we uplift one another, and we rely on one another, and what we end up with is something better than what a congregation of individuals could come up with.

But there has to be a conductor, to help our little orchestra play, and that conductor is not me and it's not the Bible; it's the Holy Spirit. The pastor can facilitate, and the Bible can give some guidelines, but it's the Holy Spirit that conducts us. That's what Jesus promises to his disciples in today's gospel reading. Jesus, their teacher, their conductor, is getting ready to leave, and the musicians are not sure that they'll be able to play any music anymore. And Jesus promises that he will not leave them orphaned; there's no need to be afraid or to think that music is ending. Jesus will continue to guide them through the Holy Spirit. "This is the Spirit of Truth that the world cannot receive," Jesus says. We live in a world full of consonance, full of some awful noise and utter confusion as people struggle to figure out what is true – a lot of folks think that the person who speaks the loudest and seems most sure of himself must be speaking truth, and so they follow blindly. Some people think that if a person dresses or acts in a dignified manner that he must be a bearer of truth. Last week I sat here and casually gave the message, and some of you were taken back, perhaps because I didn't look like a pastor is supposed to look, dressed in robes and stoles and standing behind a pulpit. Some people read the King James Version of the Bible because it sounds so dignified with its "thys" and "thous." Real truth comes from God, and Jesus promises us a Spirit of **Truth**. Not a spirit of alternative fact – and an alternative fact is just another way of saying "it's what I want to believe." But we who put our faith in Christ KNOW THE TRUTH, and there is no alternative to that truth. The reason we live in such a divided world is that we have billions of people believing what they want to believe because they cannot see and

do not know the Spirit of Truth. Some of them have their heads stuck in the music. Some of them refuse to even try to play the music. Some of them are afraid to. Some of them put their faith those who look authoritative or sound authoritative But the Spirit of Truth is what takes our heads out of the music and attunes us to the people all around us, and then conducts us in a way that creates beautiful music. Today's message is about becoming ONE WITH EACH OTHER, and I've said that this happens when we submit to the authority of Jesus as he guides us together through the Holy Spirit, how we become an orchestra for God. Next week we'll talk about the music we play, about becoming one in ministry. But the key word for this short, three-week worship series has been ONE, becoming ONE with Christ, ONE with each other, and finally ONE in ministry.

One more thing about the Bible – it's like music, and some of the best music in the world combines consonance and dissonance. I like music with some dissonance, especially when that dissonance is resolved into beautiful harmony. That's human history. That's our Christian narrative. We live in a world that is full of dissonance, but we know that this symphony is going to end in beautiful harmony. The book of Revelation gives us this beautiful image of the Kingdom of God, when God rules over all creation and we are there with him;

Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the sound of many waters and like the sound of mighty thunder-peals, crying out,
'Hallelujah!

For the Lord our God
the Almighty reigns.

⁷ Let us rejoice and exult
and give him the glory,
for the marriage of the Lamb has come,
and his bride has made herself ready;
⁸ to her it has been granted to be clothed
with fine linen, bright and pure'—

for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints. (Revelation 19:6-8)

The "bride" is us, the church, whom Christ has come to claim. All the dissonance will fade and the beautiful sound of a heavenly harmony will come from a million Team Bethels, and none of us will have sheet music.