

## Proper 14

It has been fashionable for sometime, in educational circles, to encourage a more active and participatory learning.

The students I used to occasionally teach in history sections were to read primary documents and gather in small groups for discussion,

not just read the textbook and listen to the professor's lectures.

I see the emphasis with even greater intensity in my children's elementary classrooms.

Students, we now see, need to learn content, but they also need to learn how to learn, how to discover, theorize, and prove.

So teachers have to learn new ways of inviting students, of any age, into that life.

And here is the way many have said it; the teacher can no longer be the "sage on the stage;" he or she must instead be the "guide on the side."

Go to any church built in the last few decades, older than this one, and you'll see that we have been thinking that way as well.

Historic church interiors like ours put the preacher up several steps from the congregation and in an authoritative pulpit,

from which to address you in your neat rows.

In newer churches, everything curves around a simpler, lower lectern,

and preachers wearing microphones even roam the aisles as they join the congregation as they teach.

We have long believed in what we might call a priesthood of all believers.

There is a radical egalitarianism at the heart of the Gospel.

All, absolutely all, have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

Rise up and rebel against any spiritual leader who does not admit it, for danger is near at hand.

And all, alike, in the life of the church, have received new life in Christ,

including the gift of the Holy Spirit, to guide and strengthen us.

All have a claim to the mind of Christ and to holy action in his name.

My amplified voice and this particular place I stand in worship do not change anything about those fundamental shares realities,

that before I am priest, we are a kingdom of priests, each of you called to share the gospel,

each of you to take your place in the celebration of the sacraments,

to be stewards of the life of the church and the good news of Jesus Christ.

Unless we spend a bunch of money remodeling our beautiful church,

I guess I will always look like the sage on the stage up here.

But surely, I hope, the way I am and we are together here at Resurrection

Suggests a common calling as guides alongside as well.

I have sometimes heard in the call to get off the stage a note of abdication, an abandoning of responsibility.

It isn't any easier to be the guide on the side (it may be a good bit harder, actually),

but perhaps you can make it easier, if you want it to be.

There is a nice tension in two of our lessons today that might be about this.

How do we foster spiritual growth in the whole community and still take the personal responsibility we have been given?

Our brother Peter was one to explore that dynamic in his following of Jesus.

He was often the first to speak after Jesus taught, a would-be star student who had great, misguided potential.

After the Resurrection, he would guide the church in Jerusalem, perhaps with a heavy hand and many who have want to guide the church with directive authority have claimed his mantle.

Today we see the pitfall of an excessive focus on the individual teacher, leader.

Peter hopped right out of the boat, leaving the other disciples behind, for a brief moment of spiritual glory.

Brief it was, for soon he sank, and no one else followed him, you might notice as well.

Jesus grabbed him by the arm and tossed him back into the boat.

The apostolic group didn't need Peter way out ahead, walking on water, doing amazing things.

They needed him in the mix with them, in the boat, plugging holes, bailing water, praying for a safe outcome for the journey.

I think we live in similar days in the life of the church.

For the Gospel to spread, for the Kingdom to grow, we need clergy and lay people to build significant relationships with each other,

to inhabit the church with some intensity,

and to undertake faithful things in Jesus' name together.

The lone ranger won't save us in the days we are in.

And yet (or indeed) St. Paul says in his letter to the Romans that good news needs someone to share it, that those who wait for a word for the Lord will wait in vain if no one brings a good word to them.

How are they to hear if no one proclaims?

Somebody has got to do it.

God has always used individual women and men to bring good news, to share holy gifts,

to accomplish God's purposes.

I am one of them are so are you.

If we seek to get off the stage,

if we want to be the guide on the side,

we need to do so in ways that don't abandon the holy purposes of God.

Sometimes, there is work that only you can do,

and when you do it,

you fulfill God's purposes for your life.

When you do it and see that others are with you in it,

then you know that truly the Spirit is at work among us.

It is fitting, as usual, to leave you with Jesus,  
who had the divine wisdom to find the balance between sage and guide.  
He was the only one who could do what he did,  
revealing the will of God and accomplishing a great work of salvation on the cross.  
Only he was restored humanity and perfect God.  
His stage was a cross and from it he taught the truth of love,  
as no one else has ever been equipped to do.  
He did what only he could, as we, in lesser ways, are sometimes called to.  
And yet from the cross, he is remembered as still drawing people together,  
commending his mother and John to one another, telling them to carry on together.  
And they did, for when he finally left them all to it,  
at his Ascension, they did not dissolve into ineffective puddles of confusion and anxiety.  
They lived in his Spirit and together,  
they changed the world,  
students transformed by their time with him,  
ready to claim their ministry in him.

So, school starts this week.

Our college students leave town.

And even those of us not connected to any part of the educational enterprise sense the season of renewal that is upon us.

May God give us all the wisdom to know all that is ours to do,  
then energy and skill to do it,  
and the Spirit to share the work and adventure with those God has given to us  
in all the communities of our lives.