

June 12, Trinity Sunday C (John 16:12-15)

## **We are not the first to face complex global crises and wonder, “How can we possibly come back from this?”**

by [Elizabeth L. Evans](#) in the [June 1, 2022](#) issue

I am not the type to learn as I go. Even when others around me believe in my abilities, I prefer to train and prepare in excess, hoping to achieve some internal standard of readiness that provides the illusion of preventing mistakes and embarrassment.

When I started in my role as an advocate for victim-survivors of sexual assault, I dreaded the first time I would have to answer a hotline call. Despite nearly a decade of experience in ministry, plus the month of training my agency offered me related to advocate counseling in particular, I still felt unprepared.

Then two advocates were occupied and unavailable to answer the hotline, so my director asked if I was ready to turn on my phone. Turning to a colleague who had worked for weeks with me on role-play scenarios, I asked, “Do you think I’m ready?”

“I can’t answer that,” she said. “Only you know. But at some point, you’re just going to have to learn by doing it.” So, I did.

There comes a time when we have exhausted all the available training and must act. What I’ve learned as an advocate is that not every situation can be anticipated enough to train for or plan ahead. Sometimes we cannot take in any more information until we face the crisis at hand. It is in responding to crises in real time that fresh understanding and wisdom reveal themselves to us.

Perhaps this is what Jesus means when he tells his disciples they cannot bear what he still has to tell them. It’s not that he is finished teaching them or that there is nothing left to reveal to them. Nor is it that he considers them too faint of heart to handle what’s to come. It’s that the things Jesus has left to share will only make

sense in the future, when they face new challenges in real time.

In anticipation of Jesus' death, the disciples face a crisis themselves—losing not only their friend and teacher but also the ultimate, embodied revelation of God's loving presence among them. How will they continue to know God after Jesus' death? How can they continue to live out Jesus' teachings as they endure unanticipated challenges without his physical presence?

Furthermore, what implications will Jesus' death have on the first readers of this text, huddled together in their house churches as they endure their own crisis, trying to remain faithful to the teachings of a man they never met while facing persecution from the authorities of the day?

For the Gospel of John, the Holy Spirit is the answer to such a crisis. John conceives of the Holy Spirit as a divine advocate who persists in guiding communities of faith in the way of Jesus after Jesus' physical life on earth has ended. The Holy Spirit is the eternal promise to communities of faith of God's loving presence with humankind, continuing to reveal God's nature and God's hope for creation in new ways—ways particular to who, where, and when we are. The Spirit of Christ empowers communities to face the challenges that arise in their context with new understandings of Jesus' life and teachings.

The Holy Spirit is the one who makes tangible the life and teachings of Jesus for contemporary faith communities, thus assuring us of God's loving presence with us in the 21st century, as we face our own crises particular to our time and place.

Communities of faith the world over have grappled with crises that feel like a signal of the end. We are not the first to face multiple, complex global crises and wonder, "How can we possibly come back from this?" Yet it is unlikely that if Jesus had unloaded onto the disciples the truths of how to respond faithfully to every crisis that would ever befall the world, they would have been able to conceive of global climate change, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the indignities of late capitalism.

Similarly, there are undoubtedly more crises bubbling up that we cannot anticipate, fathom, or prepare for. Anecdotal evidence suggests that many feel unprepared to respond to the crises already at hand. Perhaps, like the disciples, we are waiting with bated breath for Jesus to reveal the many things he still has to say to us.

The Holy Spirit reminds us that we already have all we need to respond to the current needs of the world. We have already learned all we can learn before it's time to act, and we are not acting alone. While our particular crises were foreign to the disciples in Jesus' time, feelings of fear, anxiety, grief, burnout, and pain are universal. The disciples also knew injustice, violence, and suffering, and as they were equipped to face the manifestations of those challenges in their day, so are we in ours.

The Holy Spirit, the continued embodied presence of God's love through Jesus, makes possible the collective memory of how God has worked with communities of faith of every generation to respond to such challenges. As long as the Holy Spirit keeps reminding us who Jesus is and nudging us toward fresher understandings of Jesus' way in light of our own circumstances, we will have what we need to respond. For now, there is nothing left to prepare.