

Text: [Matthew 28:16-20](#)
Date: July 31, 2022
Title: “Choose to Say Yes” > Finding Your Way Again, Week 6
Theme: Discernment is NOT about certainty, it’s about faithfulness.

1

Over these past few weeks, we’ve been talking about what it means to find our way again

Tools for doing spiritual discernment – listening for God – individually and collectively

So just as a recap, where we’ve been – and we invite you to watch some of the messages if you’ve missed them:

We started off talking about the difference between discernment and decision making (June 26)

Then we talked about discernment as a practice of listening (July 3)

About how listening requires us to slow down (July 10)

About the importance of holy conversations (July 17)

And finally last week about the importance of being open to thinking differently (July 24)

And you may be here this morning wondering:

ok, so maybe I have some things that I’ve been working through, something important that I’d like to discern and invite God into rather than just deciding for myself

But the problems is: how do I know when I’ve gotten it right?

That’s what I want to talk about today

2

First, though: how many of you have ever tried to assemble IKEA furniture?

And second, for how many of you does the mention of IKEA furniture immediately make you want IKEA meatballs? Love those.

So, meatballs yes, all about it. Putting together the furniture? Not so much.

There usually comes a point in every IKEA build when I literally have to stop and remind myself:

“You have an engineering degree, Joe. You can do this.”

Part of the problem is that their instruction manuals have no words, only very basic line drawings

And let’s be honest, a lot of the parts look the same, so getting your bearings can be difficult

But, you know, they have tried to help you with this

Open up one of their instruction books, and you are greeted by this friendly little guy – IKEA man <slide: IKEA man & logo>

Who helps you guide through the process

Now, he’s no Pollyanna – he recognizes you might have questions – he does too! <slide: question mark>

And he definitely advises you not to do this alone – that you should call a friend – preferably one more skilled than you! <slide: x over left side>

How do I know this person is more skilled? They showed up with a pencil tucked behind their ear – so you know they’re official

Why does IKEA do it this way?

Why not just provide clear instructions with words and photos?

Because they’re designed for use worldwide

One product, one package, wherever you buy it

Which means that IKEA needed to develop a way to present instructions in a language that’s almost...BEYOND language

I don’t think this is so much different than our listening for God

God doesn’t come to us with clear step-by-step instructions

Maps or photos of what’s coming next

When God speaks to us...we’ll often hear in a language that we might describe as “beyond language”

Through a feeling we get when we read a scripture or devotion or when we come to church and hear a sermon that “this was for me”

Or you might hear God in a random conversation that affirms something you’ve been thinking for a long time

Often we hear God speaking to us in the challenges, opportunities, and circumstances of our lives

Almost by the accumulation of evidence, more than anything else
Sometimes that's why it pays to wait – because clarity typically comes not in a thunderbolt but in the accumulation of evidence

But no matter how long you wait – and let's be honest – sometimes we don't have the luxury of time -

No matter how long you wait, you will NEVER have 100% certainty

We shouldn't expect that

You will inevitably make a choice that you feel is of God, and then face resistance or difficulty and wonder if you made the right decision

You may doubt it a hundred times, even a thousand times

But no one ever said it was about certainty

Nowhere in signing up for faith were you promised certainty

Instead, discernment is about FAITHFULNESS

3

For centuries, today's scripture, the Great Commission, has been held up as THE WORK of the Christian Church

Jesus sends the disciples forth with this mission statement for the movement:

“Go and make disciples of ALL nations,
baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit,
teaching them to obey EVERYTHING I have commanded you.”

Curiously though, even here the disciples have some questions

When they saw the risen Jesus, it says, they worshipped him, but SOME DOUBTED

Even the witnesses to the Resurrection did not have certainty

And, if we keep going with this, what seems here like a very CLEAR command – to make disciples of ALL nations

Turned out to be the topic of A LOT of heated debates in the early church

At a couple points in this series, we talked about this, looking at scriptures touching on this very issue and how divisive it was

Because there were some who wanted to continue with the work Jesus had begun, which was to minister to the people of Israel
There were others who were ready to embrace this final command, this Great Commission, in order to preach to Gentiles – non-Jews
Thank God that people heard and followed this call to a more inclusive approach, because otherwise, we wouldn't be here

4

So a degree of uncertainty is always to be expected
And how much more when I'm discerning direction not just for myself, but within a group
So it was inevitable that disagreement would appear in the church

Because when there are 10 or 20 or 50 or 500 voices
Each one listening for and hearing God in their own particular way

It's hard to discern ONE THING God is saying to us
ONE direction God is calling us to move
Even when the command is as clear as: "Make disciples of all nations"

This realization gives me some hope when I look at the debates happening in the broader church today
I am heartbroken by disagreements, but I'm not surprised by them

5

Now, at this point, you may be thinking:
Ok, so we're often learning to listen to language that's beyond language
And there's not necessarily certainty in what we're hearing
So what good IS discernment, anyway?

Which brings me to my final point in this series, which is to reiterate something I said earlier:
Discernment isn't about certainty. It's about faithfulness.
Ours and, most especially, God's.

It's about developing the DISCIPLINE of inviting God into your life and into your decision making
Of giving God a seat at the table

And taking seriously the notion that when you do that,
God CAN and WILL guide you
IF you are willing to engage the process and LISTEN with openness

Jesus made one last promise to the disciples:
“I myself will be with you every day until the end of the age.”

We need to take that promise seriously
Because there are choices we’ll make, individually and as a church, that
will scare us
Where we’ll wonder if we’re making the right decision
Where we’ll wonder if we’re hearing God correctly

We need to trust that God goes with us in those moments

We’ve made a lot of hard decisions in the time that I’ve been with you
Whether to move ahead with building our new building
Whether to become a Reconciling Congregation
How to navigate a global pandemic
Most recently, how to structure our Sunday mornings

None of these were easy things
And certainly there will be more difficult decisions to make in the coming
months
We had disagreements with each other as we moved through those
processes of discernment
I still regularly hear critiques of how we moved through the pandemic

But the reality is that we discern the next step as best we can
Being faithful to the process of listening to God and each other
And when things are unclear, when the decisions are difficult, sometimes
all we can rely on are two things:

- 1) That WE have been faithful to a process of discernment
- 2) That Christ goes with us as we take the next step

Sometimes, that's all the clarity there is
Sometimes, it's all we have to go on!
But it's gotten us, as a church, through 201 years
And I don't see that changing anytime soon

Remember, Christ promises to be with us, to the end of the age
Even when we're off the edge of the map

Thanks be to God.

Amen.

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