

Day of Pentecost      The Spirit of Truth  
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*When the day of Pentecost had come, the disciples were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.*

*Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language?"*

*Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs-- in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power." All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" But others sneered and said, "They are filled with new wine."*

*But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, "Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:*

*'In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy. And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist. The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day. Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.' " Acts 2:1-21*

*Jesus said to his disciples, "When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father, he will testify on my behalf. You also are to testify because you have been with me from the beginning.*

*"I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you. But now I am going to him who sent me; yet none of you asks me, 'Where are you going?' But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your hearts. Nevertheless I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. And when he comes, he will prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: about sin, because they do not believe in me; about righteousness, because I am going to the Father and you will see me no longer; about judgment, because the ruler of this world has been condemned.*

*"I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you. John 15:26-27; 16:4b-15*

Pulitzer Prize winning American poet Archibald MacLeish once said, “Religion is at its best when it makes us ask hard questions of ourselves. It is at its worst when it deludes us into thinking we have all the answers for everybody else.”

Long before that, Jesus said, “I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come.”

Truth. How do we define that? MacLeish suggests that we are deluding ourselves if we think we have all the truth. And Jesus is clearly saying that we do not have all of the truth; that it will come to us when we are ready to hear it, ready to understand it, ready to bear it.

That is the work of the Holy Spirit, to reveal the truth.

Today is the day in the church year when we remember and celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit to the disciples. In our reading from the Acts of the Apostles we are told how the crowd reacts to the coming of the Holy Spirit – they are bewildered, amazed, and astonished that everyone there was able to hear about God’s deeds of power, each in their own language. But there were some who sneered and suggested that they were drunk and speaking nonsense.

But Peter confirmed that the disciples were not drunk but rather filled with the Spirit, and he reminded the crowd of what the Prophet Joel had said God promised, that on that day “I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh.” Even so, not everyone was ready to hear the truth that day.

Isn’t that what happens today when people don’t like hearing what others say? They sneer, accuse, denigrate and discredit those whose different truths threaten their self-esteem, shatter their preexisting beliefs, make their daily lives more difficult, or threaten their status. There’s been a lot of that going on for some time. Even now that the pandemic restrictions are being lifted, we are not all on the same page, we are not all of one mind, and none of us has the whole truth, the ongoing revelation about the COVID virus.

Now we are being told we don’t need to wear our masks any more. But some of our friends have compromised immune systems, some of our friends are unable to receive or have chosen not to receive a vaccine. Our children are not yet vaccinated, and new variants of the virus continue to appear. There’s still much we just do not know. That’s only one example of how we believe we have all the truth when we really don’t.

In the Gospel reading, Jesus tells his disciples about the Advocate, the Spirit who will come when he has gone away. The Spirit will guide them into all truth. Having this explanation from Jesus is helpful, so that we know that the gift of the Spirit is not always and only about energy and excitement; not reduced to violent winds and speaking in tongues. The gift we receive at Pentecost is the gift that might stir us up and motivate us to action on behalf of the Gospel, yes, but it might also convict us of a truth we need to hear, or a truth that needs to be spoken into the brokenness and tragedy of the world. Sometimes the Spirit can speak to us about where we have strayed and redirect us on the path of truth. This is good news of repentance, forgiveness, healing, and hope!

Have you ever noticed that it's a lot easier to speak our truth than it is to hear someone else's truth? Sometimes hearing truth makes us uncomfortable, sometimes we don't like how it feels to be guided. We have a tendency to avoid feelings that don't feel good. So, if the truth is uncomfortable, then we are not all that interested in hearing it. If the people we disagree with are the ones speaking truth, how can it be truth? What if we don't like the truth that is revealed to us? What if the truth requires something of us, like a change in our way of thinking, or admitting we might have been wrong? What if the truth asks hard things of us, like laying down our life for another, or setting aside our preferences for the sake of another's wellbeing?

What if we were to begin to recognize the truth that every single person is created in the image of God? That we are asked by Jesus to love one another, our neighbors, *and* our enemies? Somehow, I think if we just work on that, it will go a long way toward helping us begin to recognize more of the truth God is waiting to reveal to us.

Is recognizing the truth easy? No! Sometimes it's a lot like eating crow. Sometimes it makes us angry at first. Sometimes it fills us with regret and sadness. None of these are feelings we like to experience and acknowledge. Remember, we have a tendency to avoid feelings that don't feel good. We have a tendency to prefer our own truth.

But here is something else to remember. Life is filled with hard things and walking in the way of Jesus is not always easy. It requires something of us. And here is the good news. When something difficult is required of us, the Spirit will guide us and help us live into that truth. And isn't that where all the greatest Gospel witness comes from? Think of the stories of those who were lost and then found; those who were once blind and now see.

When have we heard someone else's truth and found it impossible to accept? When have we mistakenly assumed our own truth to be the truth of the Holy Spirit? When we hear a difficult truth, what if, before we reacted, we stopped and prayed, "Come, Holy Spirit! Come and guide us into all the truth." All the truth, not just our own tiny part of it.

Jesus still has many things to say to us that we need to hear. Come, Holy Spirit!