

**Acts 2:1-21**

**Psalm 104:24-34**

**Romans 8:22-27**

**John 15:26-27; 16:4b-15**

Sermon for May 19, 2024

## **SPIRIT OF TRUTH**

By Rev. Dr. Don Algeo

When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth

Well, it's graduation time. Whether from high school or college or some variety of specialized education, this is the time of the year when students, having completed their course of study, cross a stage and receive a certification of some sort that they have now completed their course of study, and are prepared to step out into the world and, so enlightened and empowered, to forge the next stage of their life's journey, using the tools with which they've been equipped.

And at just this same time of the year, two thousand or so years ago, the first students of Christ took part in a similar ceremony, the one called Pentecost that we reread about every year in our selection from Acts. On that occasion, the first graduating class of Christ's instruction didn't receive a certificate, but rather something much more wonderful, and at the same time, much more mysterious: they receive the Holy Spirit.

Several weeks before that occasion, Jesus has gathered those same disciples together with him in an upper room on the last night of his life, and in the 15<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> chapter of his gospel, John shares with all the generations of Christ's followers to come, his memory of the final instruction that Jesus provided those disciples on the last night of his life.

Those chapters comprise what has come to be known as the Upper Room Discourse. As John presents the discourse, it takes place after the religious and

civil authorities of Israel had once and for all rejected Christ's offer of himself as the long promised Messiah.

What we have in the Upper Room Discourse is therefore John's memory of the final instruction that Christ provided to his disciples, after his message had been rejected by the world. To me, that's the important point to keep in mind, for at least two reasons. First, it is teaching that Christ is speaking specifically to His followers, not to the rest of the world. Christ certainly has a great deal to say to the world that does not yet believe in Him, but you will not find it in the Upper Room Discourse. This discourse is for His own.

And second, what He is teaching them here is offered to them as comfort and consolation, since He will very shortly be leaving them. He is telling them what they may expect and where they may look for help when He is no longer with them in flesh and blood.

The greatest of the promises our Lord makes to these disciples is the promise of the Holy Spirit, a promise which, for them, came to fruition in the tremendous and mysterious Pentecostal described for us in the selection from Acts that we read this morning.

In the Upper Room Discourse, Jesus talks about the promise of the Spirit several times, and each time he tells his disciples something new about what they may expect. At first, he simply assures them that the spirit will be with them and dwell within them (14:15); then he lets them know that the spirit will help them bring to remembrance what Christ did and said (14:26).

And then in our Gospel selection for this morning, Jesus goes on to complete the picture for those first disciples of what the Holy Spirit in them will enable them to accomplish. So let's read that together now.

[John 15:26-27; 16:4b-15](#)

What I want to focus on this morning is Christ's assurance to his disciples that the spirit will lead them into "all" truth. All truth. What does that mean?

It obviously does not mean that the Spirit will teach them nuclear physics or how to crochet or the history of the Korean War. No. What Christ is promising them, I believe, is that these disciples – his intimate followers, plus that strange man from Tarsus who will soon be miraculously added to their number on the road to Damascus – that these disciples will be led into all truth concerning the matters

which they are not yet able to support: the fundamental truths about Christ himself.

In other words, as I read our passage, Christ's promise is that this first generation of His followers will be tasked and enabled by the Spirit of truth to record for all subsequent generations the truth about the events of Christ's life and ministry, and their meaning. We will learn once and for all that Jesus Christ is the only begotten Son of God, that his death was sacrificial and accomplished the forgiveness of our sins and the eternal salvation of all who believe in him. We will learn once and for all the cost God is willing to pay to draw His children back to Himself. And we learn why. We learn that God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. We learn that Christ lives and reigns, now and forever, as the Son of Man as well as the Son of God, as our Lord as well as our Savior. We learn that God is also our Father, and that we will spend eternity coming to know Him better and better.

These are the truths the disciples, guided by the Spirit after the special blessing they received on Pentecost, these are the truths the disciples themselves were led to, and which they recorded for us. And these, I believe, are all the truth about Christ, at least all the fundamental truths God deemed it needful and important for us to know.

Christ died for the forgiveness of sin. He didn't die to provide a model of self-sacrifice for others to follow. He died for the forgiveness of sin. How do I know? Because Paul says so, and Christ Himself promised that the Spirit of truth would lead his disciples into all truth about Christ.

But then, what about the rest of us? What does that leave for the Holy Spirit of truth to provide for the rest of us?

I believe the answer can be found in the passage we read this morning from Paul's letter to the Romans, that same Paul who, first and foremost among the disciples, succeeded in fully and finally articulating all the fundamental truths about Christ that we need to know. Let me read again the beautiful and infinitely gracious assurance he provides us about what we, you and I, two thousand years later, can receive from that same Holy Spirit.

*<sup>26</sup> Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession <sup>[a]</sup>for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. <sup>27</sup> Now He who searches the hearts knows*

*what the mind of the Spirit is, because He – The Holy Spirit – makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God.”*

Prayer is the key. The time we spend in prayer is like the door we open in our cluttered and noisy lives to allow Christ’s own spirit within us to step through and out into the presence of God, and continue the process of bringing our lives, our minds and our human spirits into conformity with the image of Christ.

Jim often prefaces the invitation to join in the communal recitation of the Lord’s Prayer by saying that it is a model that Jesus provided us for when we do not know what to say on our own, and that touches on the heart of the same matter. Jesus gave us a simple prayer because we are simple people, in need of guidance in opening the door to God. The contents of the prayer are fundamental and universal, but equally fundamental and universal is the simple act of praying itself, or I should say, the habit of praying, the routine of praying.

The fact is that none of us knows ourselves, our deepest needs, our purest desires, our greatest weaknesses, what needs to be done in us spiritually for our eternal well-being, the way God and His Holy Spirit know us. The important thing, the all-important thing, the necessary thing is, not that we inform God about ourselves and our desires, but that we open the door for God and His Spirit to do their work.

But here’s the good news that we’ve been emphasizing recently from this pulpit: we are not destined to remain simple. We are destined to an eternity of growth and evolution in our relationship with God. But by divine engineering, that growth and evolution takes place, and can only take place, when we are in communication, through that heavenly door, with our heavenly Father. That’s why Paul instructed us elsewhere to pray without ceasing.

The greatest truth those first disciples, in the inspiration of the Spirit taught is that, in Christ, God has reconciled the world to Himself. The greatest tool that God has provided us, while still in this earthly life, for reaping the fruit of that reconciliation, our own glorification, is prayer.

And so, heavenly Father, let our prayer this morning be that the fundamental and eternal truths about our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ remain ever alive and active in our hearts and minds. We thank you for the tremendous gift of grace which You bestowed through your Spirit on those first followers of Christ, that they might communicate to all future generations the essential truths of the Gospel, the good news about your Son. We thank You and give You praise that these Gospel truths are not just cold intellectual recognitions, but that they are the truths we need to

find our way through this fallen world, to give us certainty in times of confusion, courage in the face of our enemies, and hope in place of despair. And we thank you that you have given us the unfathomable gift of prayer, the means of incorporating that certainty and courage and hope into our own lives, and thereby grow closer to you and Jesus, our Lord and Savior, in whose name we pray. Amen.