

Year C Trinity Sunday Let Us Hear, Trust, Act John 16 vv12 to 15

The first thing that jumps out at me in this Gospel reading is the word, “truth”. Jesus says to his disciples, “When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth.” If I asked you what “truth” is, you may say that the truth is the opposite of a lie, the truth is something that is not false, or the truth is a proven fact. That is where our modern brains go to when we hear “truth” in John’s Gospel today. Increasingly, truth is spoken of as if it is completely relative to each person or political group – you have your truth and I have mine. But, that concept of truth – the opposite of a lie or the idea that truth can be a little different and still be the truth and especially the idea that truth can change according to each person – is not at all what John means when he uses the word “truth” in his Gospel. To uncover the treasure beneath John’s use of the word “truth” in today’s piece of his story, we need to dig into how John uses the word “truth” in *other* places in his Gospel.

Let’s start at the beginning. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... And the Word became flesh and lived among us... The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.” That uncovers part of the treasure so let’s look some more. Fast forward to chapter 14 to where Jesus says to Thomas, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me...Whoever has seen me, has seen the Father.” That unearths the rest of the treasure so let’s put it together using Pilate’s help. In John’s Gospel, Jesus stands before Pontius Pilate, accused of treason and heresy, and Jesus says to him, “For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.” And Pilate famously asks Jesus, “What is truth?” John gives *us* the answer that Jesus

did not give to Pilate. Pilate didn't stick around to get an answer. What is truth? According to John, Pilate was staring right at it. Jesus is Truth.

This concept of truth – not just the truth versus a lie sort of concept – is what the Greeks call “*alethia*”. The Jewish people originally used the Hebrew term, *emet* – meaning fidelity, integrity, trustworthiness, perfection. In other words, “truth” involved being in faithful relationship – to be “true” to someone. This is where we get the word “troth” – like becoming engaged (betrothed) to someone. Truth – *emet* – is what God is – perfectly faithful and trustworthy – and God is in faithful relationship with all who choose to be in relationship with him. When John uses the word “truth” in his Gospel, like when Jesus says, “I am the way, the truth and the life; I came to testify to the truth”, John is talking about the faithfulness of God. It is simply what God *is*. Jesus is God's revelation, the Word made flesh, God's perfect love for us to see and experience. Jesus was the way in which we could know an indescribable, unfathomable God who is faithful to us. Throughout history, God has always come to us in ways that our limited minds can understand – the burning bush that appeared to Moses, the pillar of cloud that led the Israelites out of Egypt, the wind that swept past Elijah...and then, Jesus – the second person of the Trinity.

We can look at Jesus and understand what we are looking at because Jesus looks like us. And he says in John that when we see him, we see God. When we know him, we know God. There is a problem though. We have never seen Jesus. We have never spoken to Jesus. Jesus took his place at God's right hand long before we were born.

John gives us the solution today. Jesus is preparing his disciples for his approaching death, resurrection, and ascension. The disciples are understandably confused and a little frightened by the idea that Jesus will be leaving them. But Jesus reassures them that he will not leave them alone – the Father will send the Spirit to be with them, to

keep them connected with Jesus. Well, how does that work? Why are we connected with Jesus if we have the presence of the Holy Spirit? John gives us the answer to that too. Jesus says “All that the Father has is mine” and the Spirit “will take what is mine and declare it to you.” All that the Father is, is in Jesus, and all that Jesus is, is in the Holy Spirit. That is the mystery of the Trinity.

We believe in one God in three persons. In other words, we are able to know the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit as distinct from one another, yet at the same time they are completely united in essence, will and purpose.

If it hurts your brain a little to think that way that’s because the Trinity *is* a mystery. The disciples didn’t understand it either. What we don’t hear today is that, when Jesus finishes speaking, the disciples say to each other, “We don’t understand what he is saying.” One God in three persons is a reality beyond human knowing that we may begin to understand, but only know in experience through our worship, our symbols and trust. We can understand it by living according to what it means for our lives. There is a relationship that exists among the three divine persons. The presence of the Holy Spirit within us, draws us into that relationship. The Spirit that moved across the waters at the creation of the world, the Spirit that conceived our Saviour, Jesus Christ, the Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead – *that* Spirit is in us. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have a perfect relationship with each other, they are “true” to one another, since they are completely one. They have perfect love binding them together and that perfect love contains all else – perfect peace, joy, and absolute Truth.

We have access to the relationship, to the love that flows between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We are surrounded by it, immersed in it. We *become* that love. That is truly a treasure worth digging for.

Becoming God's love is a process...we certainly don't become the perfect love of God the instant we are baptized into Christ's body. It's a process – we continuously strive to be more and more Christ-like, closer to being in perfect relationship with God. Jesus tells his disciples that there is much more he could teach them but they would not be able to bear it right then. Throughout John's Gospel, Jesus makes it clear that he reveals things to his disciples when they need the knowledge and when they will be able to understand that knowledge. It is the Spirit who continues to be with us in place of Jesus' physical presence, telling us what we need to know, when we need to know it, helping us to immerse ourselves more and more in our faith as we grow in the perfection of Christ.

Jesus tells us that the Spirit will lead us into truth – lead us into God, into faithful relationship with God, into people able to be faithful. The Spirit speaks with the authority of God because the Spirit *is* God. The Spirit comforts us and convicts us. The Spirit guides us, tells us the words to say and keeps us in relationship with God even when we don't have any words at all. Like the disciples, we don't need to fully understand *how* this oneness is possible, we need to live trusting that it is so as Jesus has told us it is. We can feel joy and encouragement even during tough times, times of sadness, and times of confusion.

As we participate in the life of God – in this constant flow of perfect love, peace, and truth – Jesus instructs us to let these things overflow from the Spirit within us into the world around us. The future is open. It requires our discernment, our listening, watching for, and trusting that God will continue to reveal Godself through the Spirit of Truth. We can trust that the God Jesus has shown us is the God still at work for us and in us and in the world. The key will be to allow the voice of the shepherd to be heard above the voice of the world and to have the courage to act on the promptings

of the Holy Spirit because the Holy Spirit will often be asking us to do things we do not want to do, things that may seem – at first – counter-intuitive to our continuing as the body of Christ, the Church.

Mother Teresa tells the story of when, on her very first trip down the streets of Calcutta, a priest approached her asking her to give a contribution to a collection for the Catholic press. She had left her home in the monastery, to come to Calcutta with just five rupees. Four of them she had already given away to the poor she had encountered. She hesitated, then gave the priest the one that remained. That afternoon, the same priest came to see her with an envelope in his hand. He told her that a man had given him the envelope because he had heard about her projects and wanted to help. There were fifty rupees in the envelope. Mother Teresa heard, she trusted, she acted on the prompting of the Holy Spirit. After many years of working with the poor in Calcutta, she further explains:

The Missionaries of Charity, [of whom she is a member], take a special vow to God to give wholehearted, free service to the poorest of the poor. We have no income, [she says], no church assistance, no government salary, no government grants. We have none of that. And yet we deal with thousands and thousands and thousands of people, and we have never had to say to anybody, “We’re sorry, we have run out of supplies.” (p.20 of *Mother Teresa Her Essential Wisdom*)

The Missionaries of Charity hear, trust, and act on the promptings of the Holy Spirit.

“We [do] humbly acknowledge that there may still be truths that we are not able to bear, and that God accompanies us along the way. The spirit will not be taken away from us in those times when we are least able to trust, understand, or persevere. For Father, Son, and Spirit of Truth witness to one truth, *all* of which we cannot see, but all of which we dare to trust is God at work for us, revealing righteousness here and

preparing a place suitable for each and all of us in the fullness of God's reign" (Sarah Henrich at workingpreacher.org).

The great evangelist, D.L Moody was going to lead a huge campaign in America. The other clergy complained because Moody wasn't well educated like they were. But Moody knew how to talk to the people. In front of a large audience, Moody held up a glass and asked, "How can I get the air out of this glass?" One man shouted, "Suck it out with a pump!" Moody replied, "That would create a vacuum and shatter the glass." After numerous other suggestions Moody smiled, picked up a pitcher of water, and filled the glass. "There," he said, "the air is out of the glass." He then explained that our victory as Christians is not attained by "sucking out a sin here and there," but by being filled with the Holy Spirit.

Let us fill ourselves to the brim with the Holy Spirit. And then, let us hear, let us trust, let us act.