

The Spirit of Truth

June 12, 2022

Fr. Jacob Bush

One of the things that I like about the Anglican Church and the Book of Common Prayer is the lectionary. The lectionary prescribes readings for every day of the year to guide us through the Bible. You may have noticed that sometimes the readings begin in weird places. And if you aren't familiar with the context of the reading, it can leave you with questions. Which is actually good because then you can read the rest of the chapter or more. It gets you in the word even more.

Such is the case with the Gospel reading for today from John 16. It begins in verse 12 with Jesus saying, "I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now." To me, this seems like a weird place to begin the reading. The two questions that I have immediately are, 'who is Jesus talking with?', and 'what has Jesus been saying?'

To answer the first question, we need to go back to John 13. If you turn there in your Bible, you will notice that the context is the Lord's Supper. It is the night before Jesus would die on the cross, and He is eating the Passover meal with the disciples. This event continues into and through John 16. So, Jesus is talking to the disciples. And He has been speaking to them concerning his betrayal, and how He was going away.

Imagine being there at that time. You have been with Jesus for three years. And all of a sudden, He tells you that He is going away. Today, if you are with someone for a long time, perhaps a child. And they grow up and move away. You know that there are cell phones, and Facebook, and Snapchat, and Zoom, so you can still have a sense that you are still near the person. None of those things existed back in Jesus' day. Jesus was leaving, and soon it would be just the disciples, alone.

I'll bet that thought consumed them. And they did not understand what Jesus was saying to them. In fact, if we read further into John 16, we know that they did not understand, because in verse 17 the disciples were asking each other about what it was that Jesus was saying to them.

But they will understand once they have the Spirit of truth, the Holy Spirit, that Jesus told them He would send them. Jesus had more to say to them. But without the Holy Spirit, they could not understand. We read this account, and understand what Jesus told the disciples, but we have the Holy Spirit. The disciples did not have the Holy Spirit in them yet when Jesus spoke these words to them.

Jesus spoke to them concerning the Holy Spirit earlier, in John 14. In verses 16-18 Jesus said, "I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you."

This feeling of, "oh my goodness, we've spent three years with Jesus and now He said He is leaving," this feeling of separation anxiety, is alleviated. Because Jesus told them that He

would not leave them as orphans. That the Holy Spirit would be given to them, to be with them forever. Jesus really is comforting His disciples here in John 16. They might not fully understand that that is what He is doing. But I'm sure that hearing Jesus talk about the Helper, the Spirit of truth was a comfort to them.

Do you remember in Genesis, in the Garden of Eden, the Lord would walk there in the cool of the day? We were created to have fellowship with God. God was with man. That fellowship was broken when man sinned. The remedy was the work of Christ on the cross so that all who believe in Him will have eternal life. Jesus Christ is God the Son. The prophecy in Isaiah 6 and stated again in Matthew 1:23 states, "'Behold, the virgin shall be with child and shall bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,' which translated means, 'God with us.'" And now we have fellowship with God again because of Christ, and the Holy Spirit is with us.

The Holy Spirit is way better than any cell phone. He's better than Snapchat. He's better than Facebook. Those are wonderful tools, don't get me wrong. But the Holy Spirit is better than those because the Holy Spirit is the third person of the trinity, He is God. We have relationship with God restored by Christ on the cross and can receive the Holy Spirit by faith in Christ. And we don't need any electronic device to communicate with God long distance, because God is not far from us. God the Holy Spirit is present with us. We are not alone in this world.

Sometimes we all have moments where we feel lonely. But if we are in Christ we are never truly alone. We could be facing bad circumstances, bad situations. And we might feel like we are going through it alone, but we really are not. God is there with us guiding us, leading us through.

That is not all that the Holy Spirit does. In John 16:13, Jesus said, "But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come." First, notice that Jesus uses the personal pronoun, 'He.' The Holy Spirit is real, and personal. Not some mystical force. And Jesus said that He is the Spirit of truth and will guide us into all the truth.

Sometimes the Holy Spirit is referred to as the Spirit of Christ, because Jesus said in John 14:6, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me." Jesus is the truth, and the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth. Hence, He is sometimes referred to as the Spirit of Christ.

And it is the truth that this world desperately needs. Look around. Watch the news. This world needs the truth! But a lot of people don't believe the truth. A lot of people want to shape the truth for themselves rather than accepting the real truth. And a lot of people get very angry with those who know the truth. Jesus said that the world cannot receive the Spirit of truth because "it does not see Him or know Him" John 14:17.

All those who have the Holy Spirit know that truth is absolute. There is no such thing as relative truth. There is the truth and there are lies, there is nothing in the middle. Jesus is the truth. And the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth. Satan is the father of lies (John 8:44). He hates

the truth. And Satan is the ruler of this world (2 Corinthians 4:4) who has blinded the eyes of the world, so they do not see the Spirit of truth or know the Spirit of truth. We need to be in prayer for such people, that God would open their eyes so that they will see the truth, and that He will change their hearts so that they will accept the truth. But is it any wonder that there are people who do not believe the truth? Is it any wonder that people get angry about the truth? Is it any wonder that people get angry at those who know the truth? Jesus said it would be so.

But it is not so with those who are in Christ. We have the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth. So, when we read the Scriptures, we are able to learn the truth because the Holy Spirit teaches us. When we see things happening in the world, the Holy Spirit helps us to know what is really going on. The Holy Spirit also helps us to not be fearful of what is going on in the world.

And He lets us know what is to come. Every week, when we say the Nicene Creed, we affirm that the Holy Spirit has spoken through the prophets. When we read Daniel, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the books of the other prophets the Holy Spirit teaches us what those prophecies mean, which goes along with what I said earlier about how the Holy Spirit teaches us when we read the Scriptures. It is God's word after all. The Holy Spirit, being God, knows what God's word says.

But this requires two things of us. I'll list them in no particular order because they both are equally important. First, it requires us to be in the word, reading it and studying it. And second it requires us to be listening to the Holy Spirit. It's like being in school. If we are not studying the material for the class, we won't know it. And if we are not listening to the teacher, we will learn nothing.

It reminds me of when I was in college completing my undergrad. I was taking this class on science fiction. We were given a list of eight science fiction novels to read. I didn't read any of them. I went to class only about 5 times the entire semester. What did I learn from that class? Not a thing. Had I done the reading, and gone to class, and listened to the teacher I would have learned much. But I did not. Similarly, if we are going to learn God's word we have to be reading and studying it. How else will we learn it? And if we are not listening to the Holy Spirit, how will we learn from Him?

If we are listening to the Holy Spirit and applying what we learn from Him, then two things are happening. One, we are growing in our relationship with God, growing closer to Him. That seems pretty obvious since the Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity. And two, our thoughts, attitudes and actions will be more and more like Jesus', the process known as sanctification. The truth will be more and more evident in our lives. We will let go of ungodly thoughts and attitudes. We will stop acting ungodly. We will stop believing lies and acting on those lies and will instead think and speak and act according to the truth, just as Christ would want us to. And Jesus will be glorified.

Jesus continues in verse 14, "He will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose it to you." He reminds us of what Jesus has said and done, and He said in John 14:26. And when we think and speak and act as disciples of Christ should think, speak, and act it brings Him glory.

Verse 15, "All things that the Father has are Mine; therefore I said that He takes of Mine and will disclose it to you." God is one. Father, Son and Holy Spirit are one God. We remember that fact today, as it is Trinity Sunday. And Jesus reiterates this in His prayer in John 17, what we call the high-priestly prayer of Jesus. Jesus and the Father are one. And the Holy Spirit is one with the Father and the Son. Not three Gods, but one God. The Athanasian Creed states that wonderfully, and that is what the Apostles believed and taught.

We need to be in tune with the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth. Because there is a lot of deception out in the world. But if we are listening to the Holy Spirit and reading and studying God's word, we will recognize the deception. And as we apply His word to our lives we will think and act and speak more and more as Jesus did, to His honor and glory, along with the Father and the Holy Spirit.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen!