

## **The Spirit of Truth**

### **1 Peter 3:13-22/John 14:15-21**

Today we are going to be thinking about The Spirit of Truth. I know it feels a little early to be thinking of the Holy Spirit, we haven't even quite got to Ascension yet, but just as Jesus is for life, not just for Christmas so the Spirit is also for life, not just for Pentecost.

The context for the reading from John's Gospel was Jesus giving final instructions to the disciples because He knew that He was about to be crucified. I will come back to this.

It is very interesting that Jesus describes the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of Truth. Truth has become a rare commodity in our society. Certainly it doesn't seem to be any kind of requirement in public office and in particular in politics anymore. Politicians have developed a technique of repeating their message over and over until somehow it becomes accepted as truth even when sometimes it is a blatant lie. We all tend to read and listen to the people we agree with and most people no longer believe that there is anything as straightforward as a simple undeniable truth anymore. We can believe whatever we want, if it is true for us then it is the truth, or our truth which is all that matters. And Christians are not immune to this, we are steeped in our culture and affected by it. But the Holy Spirit, third person of the Trinity, God Himself, is the Spirit of Truth. There may be many things that we choose to believe, many things where it is hard, if not impossible to know what the truth is, but the one truth we can count on is our faith in Jesus and the message of God's love and our salvation.

Jesus told the disciples that He would ask the Father and the Father would send another advocate to help them and to be with them forever and that promise is for us as well. Now Greek often uses one word that can have many different meanings or nuances, so this word advocate can also be translated

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as helper, comforter and counsellor. He is in fact all of these things. Another, is a key word here - *allon* in Greek meaning in this context, another just like me. The promised Holy Spirit who lives in each one of us and gives us God's light and life, is just like Jesus, and Jesus is just like the Father. That is why Jesus talks about living in us, and Him living in the Father. These are deep spiritual truths, and it is only the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth that gives us understanding of them. That and of course our own experience of being filled with the Holy Spirit, which also testifies to the truth that He lives in us. What Jesus is telling the disciples is that His ministry on earth will not end when He dies on the cross, He will rise again from the dead, and it will not end when He ascends into heaven and returns to the Father, because the Father will send the Holy Spirit to live in us and we will continue His ministry throughout the earth. It isn't that Jesus was here, told about God's amazing love, did a whole lot of miracles and then He returned to the Father and now we just have to wait for Him to return. No, there is an unbroken continuity in the work of Jesus, through the Holy Spirit of Truth, who descended on Him in the form of a dove at His baptism and on the disciples in the upper room at Pentecost and on all of those who believe and follow Jesus. Now I have said this before, every follower of Jesus has the Holy Spirit in them, but being filled with the Spirit is different. Jesus breathed into the disciples and they received the Holy Spirit just before His ascension - before Pentecost, but it is only after they are filled with the Spirit at Pentecost that we see this incredible change in them. The coward Peter is suddenly able to stand up before crowds of people and proclaim God's word. It is this same Peter who says to us in our reading today, "in your hearts revere Christ as Lord and always be prepared to give an answer

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to everyone who asks you, to give the reason for the hope that you have.” And so importantly he warns us to do so with gentleness and respect. One of the reasons that people refuse to listen to the Christian message now is that it has so often been presented to them in brash, insensitive, hard and even cold, damning ways in the past, with no respect at all. But if Peter, who on the same night that he promised Jesus that he would follow Him to death and then denied Him three times and ran, if that Peter can be transformed in this way, then so can every one of us. People are crying out for hope in the world now, and we have to be ready to tell them the reason for the hope that we have. Someone said to me this week that as she meets people and they tell her their troubles, she tells them she will pray for them. Just by doing that she is showing them the hope that she has. It is interesting that there are very few people who do not want us to pray for them.

You may have seen and heard many different people talking about how things must change and what an important, vital time this is for the Church. There are always lots of prophecies about and we must always test them, but when different prophetic voices from different parts of the Christian community are all saying very similar things, it is often a sign that the Spirit is on the move. Don't get me wrong, God's Spirit is always at work in the world. But there are times when we see Him at work in a new and powerful way. You may have heard what the Bishop of Lancaster, Jill Duff said earlier this week. I will get John to post the link on the church websites and Facebook pages. I heard Paul Harcourt from New Wine say something similar this week and there have been many others. I am reading a book called Unleashed by

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**Gavin and Anne Calver who head up Spring Harvest and this book was written before we knew**

**anything about the pandemic. The foreword was written by Malcolm Duncan who is an Elim Pastor, theologian and broadcaster and he said this:**

**“To try to be the church without the continual empowerment of the Holy Spirit is like trying to breathe without lungs. We, the church, are utterly dependent upon God’s presence and power. We need God’s wisdom to speak truth into a post-truth society. We need God’s grace to demonstrate love and acceptance to a society that is open to Jesus, but not always open to his people. We need God to give us courage to proclaim a gospel that is hopeful enough to bring forgiveness to those who seek it, and strong enough to enable transformation in the lives of individuals from the inside out. In short, we need the Spirit’s power to enable us to be God’s people in God’s world. There has never been a greater need for the Church of Jesus Christ in the United Kingdom to come back to the hopeful, inspiring, and life-shaping message of the book of Acts.”**

**In other words the message of the Gospel.**

**In my experience, the first thing that the Holy Spirit does is to cause us to revere Christ in our hearts, just as Peter says we must. The Spirit gives us a desire to worship Jesus and actually when we do that, everything else flows from it. Jesus told us that we do not need to worry about what we will say, the Spirit will give us the words. I don’t believe that we need to be stressed or worried about what comes next in terms of how we respond and relate to others or how we can be Church differently, more relevantly. We need to be ready, we need to be expectant, to be praying, we need to be listening, we**

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might even get excited. But the main thing is to continue to do exactly as Jesus commands us to do, love Him, Keep His command to love others, know that the promised Spirit of Truth lives in us, that through the Holy and life giving

Spirit, we are in Jesus, one with Him and He is in the Father. Jesus gave Himself unconditionally for us and we have to be prepared to offer our lives unconditionally to Him for the sake of others and He will do the rest. I am going to finish by praying Paul's blessing to the Romans for you.

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen