

Day of Pentecost  
Christ and Grace Celtic Service  
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John 15:26-27; 16:4b-15  
May 20, 2018

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? Archibald 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. You may know the story from the book of Acts. “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.” The crowd was 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.

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.

But Peter confirmed that they were not drunk but rather filled with the Spirit, and reminded them 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.

In the Gospel we just heard, Jesus is telling 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. 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. When the Holy Spirit fills and guides us, it can speak to us about where we have gone wrong; the Spirit of truth can proclaim the good news that there is still 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. And 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 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 ways 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 the most important thing to remember is that if 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 blind and then found their sight.

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 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. Come, Holy Spirit, we are still listening!