

TRUTH-FILLED WITNESS

Vicar Lincoln Albrecht—The Festival of Pentecost—May 23rd, 2010—John 15.26-27

Happy Pentecost! Do you ever wonder why don't we have more Pentecosts? Would that be great? To have 1000's baptized and impressive displays of God's power.

In our Gospel text for Pentecost Christ prophesied the day of Pentecost. The Comforter would come, sent by the Son, proceeding from the Father, and he would witness about the Truth in an impressive way on a specific day. This would be a Trinitarian effort with Three-fold blessings for the witnesses. Yet this didn't make the Truth they came to share any more comfortable for the disciples.

We recognize Truth comes from God alone. We know that the Truth will set us free. But free from what? Certainly not from hardships and struggles. The Truth isn't easy for us to hear and it's harder to put into practice.

As the Holy Spirit witnesses the Truth to you and me, we see that his Truth makes us uncomfortable. Because the Truth of Scripture convicts us as sinners. We are guilty of despising the gifts the Comforter gives each of us. Isn't it easy to be apathetic and lazy in our studies of Scripture? Thinking we know enough to get by. Sometimes we approach our knowledge of salvation as a student who is only looking to get a passing grade. We know the basics of salvation. Maybe we don't know as much as others about Christ, about our God. But we know that in 1st John 4:8 God is love. We know John 3:16. We've got enough to pass the test.

Because the reality is—the more we dig into Scripture—the more deeply we drink from the waters of life—the more we understand the love of God. We learn John 3:16 and 1st John 4:8 better—when we read 1st John 3:16. Yes God does love you because he is love—but in 1st John 3:16, John explains this love motivates us to lay down our lives for others. This is a hard teaching. We are certainly willing to lay down our lives for our loved ones, most of the time, especially when we feel like they would appreciate it. But what about those you don't really care for? Those 'brothers and sisters' you only see the differences in culture, mindset, opinions. Forget even dying for them. Are we willing to help those who have only seemed to cause us problems before ourselves, before other people we like better?.

The Truth from the Holy Spirit is not easy. Because even as it reveals salvation, we can't help but see how we have failed to live up to our calling. How many times we have shirked our responsibilities as children of God. How many times we have blatantly and obstinately disregarded the commands of our God.

Christ, just prior to telling us the Truth would set us free, told us that if we are truly his disciples we will obey his teaching. Talk about a hard teaching. Love God with all of our heart, our mind, and our soul. Love our neighbor as ourselves. And that is just the two. Maybe in our dark moments we wish we didn't have these burdens placed upon our shoulders. Maybe we wish God had only asked us to make him important in our lives, instead of our everything. Maybe we wish God had told us we only have to be better to our neighbors than they are to us.

We would rather only hear that God is love, and that his love motivated him to send his Son to die for us so we might have salvation. The rest of that sounds like work. Hard work.

But Jesus explained that whoever ignored what he commanded wasn't just ignoring him, but the one who sent him—his Father.

Because Christ wasn't merely teaching what he wanted, but he was teaching what the Father sent him to teach. The Father wanted us to know the Truth. We are sinful and depraved and unable to do anything pleasing in His sight. Not only are we incapable of following God's will—but we are completely unwilling. We don't want to submit to our God nor give him credit for our salvation. We only approach him in prayer when we need something—frequently forgetting to even ask him to do things according to his will.

Despite our unwillingness to recognize the Truth of the Spirit, despite our readiness to reject the teachings of the Son, despite our inability to live up to the standards of the Father—our God loved us unconditionally. That is the Truth.

The Father did not immediately destroy us for actively disobeying his commands, the Son did not come down to judge our rampant sinfulness, the Spirit did not leave us for all the times we apathetically avoided his Word. Instead the Father saw our sinfulness and saw an opportunity to demonstrate his love, the Son witnessed first-hand the sinful condition of the world, the diseases and other various consequences of sin in our world and had compassion, the Spirit saw our apathetic attitudes towards the Word and changed our hearts, our minds, and our attitudes toward his message. All three persons of the Trinity worked together to save us. The Spirit, sent by the specific direction of the Son, bearing the authority and the approval of the Father, came to witness an uncomfortable Truth, but an undeniably Truth-filled message.

Because the Truth is God wanted to save us. God sent his Son to live a perfect life of obedience as our substitute. His perfect adherence to the Law and his active obedience to the will of the Father earned our forgiveness for all the times we felt we had better ideas, a more comfortable truth.

But the work of our Triune God was not finished in the suffering of Christ alone—though our salvation certainly was complete. God saw fit to send his Holy Spirit to testify the Truth to all people.

But maybe you still wish we had more Pentecosts? It is easy for us to sit here and wish that the Holy Spirit would simply bring in thousands who don't know Christ as the only path to salvation. We might wish to have a modern day Pentecost—but the reality is that we weren't promised one, like the Apostles were, and frankly we don't need one.

We have the message of Pentecost still burning brightly in our hearts, still moving people to repentance, still washing people from their sins, still marking and claiming them as redeemed children of God.

We always are quick to recognize that God sent his Son to die for us, but his love didn't stop there. Jesus told his disciples that the Comforter would come and remind him of all the things he said and did. What a blessing! Think about it—the disciples weren't walking video cameras, they were not men with photographic memories, nor men who understood everything that Jesus said and did.

This is why the work of the Holy Spirit was so important. The Comforter reminded them of all that Jesus said and did. And he added depth and meaning to all the Jesus had taught them. Explaining to them the Truth he brought would set them free from slavery to sin, death, and the devil.

By nature we might wonder what Jesus really meant in his words & actions; we would come up with all sorts of wild ideas about why Christ said and did what he did. This is why it was so important for the Holy Spirit to come and witness the undeniably Truth-filled message of salvation. Yes, we struggle in our lives. But we see that Christ did too. He felt the weight of the will of the Father, and yet he went to the Father for strength. He suffered the brunt of the punishment we deserved and yet he took solace in the fact that Scripture testified that all this was necessary for the salvation of mankind. He was strengthened and encouraged as he fulfilled the Truth-filled witness of the Old Testament.

We are strengthened and comforted by the witness of the Holy Spirit too. When the Truth doesn't set us free from the hardships and struggles of this world—but seems to add more—we take comfort that God promised it would be this way. He told us life would be a strenuous race, but our prize is heaven. When we struggle to live lives worthy of the calling we have received God reminds us that we must continue to return to him—return to his Truth-filled witness in Scripture.

And as we return to this Truth-filled witness time and time again, we are renewed. Our spirit is refreshed and renewed and we look for many opportunities to witness to others. This is how Christ describes it. The Spirit of Truth will bear witness about me and you will also bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning.

We may not have walked and talked with Jesus in Galilee or in Capernaum. We weren't at the Wedding in Cana for his first miracle or at the foot of the cross on Golgotha for his last breath. But we know all these stories. We know all his words and deeds. Even those who were with Him needed the Holy Spirit to remind them of what Jesus said and did—they received the Truth-filled witness from the Holy Spirit too. And they passed down this message to everyone they saw—writing it down so this message could be passed down to future generations.

There is a chain-reaction in the sharing of this Truth-filled witness. Think about how faith comes through hearing, and the message of salvation is heard through the Word of Christ, the message Truth-filled witness the Comforter brought. We heard the message from someone; we continue to hear this same Truth-filled witness from others—let us continue to do for others as others have done for us. Share the message!

Our hearts have been set on fire by this Truth-filled witness, a message we can share. Maybe we don't get to preach to crowds of the lost like Peter did in Jerusalem—but we know someone who is lost in the crowd and needs to know that Jesus cares for them. Maybe we don't get to preach in a foreign language we have never learned, but we share a message foreign to those we know, a Truth-filled witness they never would have learned on their own. Maybe we don't get to baptize thousands—but instead we get to call one lost sinner to repentance, to remember the waters of their baptism, causing thousands of angels in heaven to rejoice.

Maybe we don't have impressive displays of God's power—like the day of Pentecost in Jerusalem—but God hasn't promised we would have another day like that, because frankly, we don't need it. We have everything we need to bring many to the knowledge of Christ as their Savior. We have the same message, the message of the loving will of the Father, the perfect obedience of the Son, and the inspired words of the Holy Spirit. We have the same Truth-filled witness. AMEN.