

**Pentecost: The Spirit of Truth** Readings: Acts 2:1-21; Romans 8:22-27; John 15: 26-27; 16:4-15  
By The Rev. Karen Faye Siegfriedt; St. Barnabas Episcopal Church, Arroyo Grande CA 5/23/21

Happy Birthday people of St. Barnabas Church!!! Today is the Feast of Pentecost, the day we celebrate the birthday of the Christian Church that began some 2000 years ago. Today is a great day of joy and hope. Scripture reminds us: “When the day of Pentecost came, the disciples were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven, there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind...and all of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages as the Spirit gave them ability.” (Acts 2)

Pentecost comes from the word meaning 50. Originally, Pentecost was a Jewish festival that included such elements as the reading of the Ten Commandments, the celebration of the goodness of God, and a focus on the harvest. It took place 50 days after Passover and was a time when many Jews (from many different regions of the world) would make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem.

But something extraordinary happened on this particular day of Pentecost. The disciples were praying together in the upper room. Suddenly, they were overcome by the power of the Holy Spirit who transformed them from a place of fear and grief to a posture of boldness and joy. This same Spirit of joy has been promised to us. We only need to welcome the Holy Spirit into our lives to claim its power.

For the past seven days, many of us at St. Barnabas have been praying as a community of faith, inviting the Holy Spirit to direct our lives and release us from the fears and disappointments that deplete our joy. How did this practice of prayer go for you? Were you inspired? Did you gain any insights? Were you comforted? Are you more hopeful? I know that I am! And I pray this Spirit continues to grow within us. This Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God who will “lead us into all truth and enable us to grow in the likeness of Christ.” (BCP 852) It is this ‘Spirit of Truth’ that I would like to emphasize in today’s sermon.

In our gospel reading, Jesus tells his disciples, “I still have many things to say to you but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, [this Spirit] will guide you into you into all truth.” (John 16) There is a frequent question that some Christians will ask when trying to make faithful decisions: “What would Jesus do?” While Jesus spoke about doing the “right” thing when it comes to healing, forgiveness, generosity, and justice, there are many complex issues facing us today that Jesus never fully addressed. For instance, Jesus never specifically spoke about gender equality, racial bias, homosexuality, global warming, nuclear energy, capitalism, border walls, the right to die, or campaign finances. How do we decide which path to take with these complex issues when our emotions and the cultural wisdom of today are just not reliable guideposts? This is where the Spirit of Truth comes in!

Truth is the property of being in accord with fact or reality, the opposite of falsehood. Truth is something that is in short supply today! Society once believed that truth was absolute, something that was universal. But in more recent times, many philosophers would say that truth is relative and that what you personally believe is just as valid as someone else’s opposite belief. In addition to relative truths, we are bombarded with fake news, flexible ethics, media manipulation, ideological framing, fraud, scientific fabrication, half-truths, false witness, mental cheating, and propaganda.

So how do we channel this Spirit of Truth when our cultural environment does all in its power to confuse us, divide us, and assault us with fake news? As Christians, our truth comes from God, the very foundation of which is LOVE. It is only through the promptings of the Holy Spirit that we can fully detect distortions of the truth that derail us from the path of love, generosity, justice, and the dignity of every human being.

Last week, I spoke of ways to capture the power and presence of the Holy Spirit by practicing the spiritual disciplines. These include: prayer, worship, meditation, fasting, confession, silence, solitude, submission, celebration, and service to others. These spiritual practices open the mind to the promptings of the Spirit of Truth. I encourage you to be diligent in these practices. This week, I would like to highlight three attitudes that can block the Spirit of Truth from informing our decisions as well as deflate our spiritual and emotional well-being. These are **narcissism**, **discouragement**, and **pessimism**.

In his book, Let us Dream; The Path to a Better Future, Pope Francis claims that narcissism, discouragement, and pessimism disconnect us from the Holy Spirit. These three postures “armor plate” the soul, hindering the Spirit of Truth from entering into our consciousness. Let us take a closer look at each of these soul-destroying postures.

**Narcissism:** Narcissism is an excessive interest in oneself, where *Me, Myself, and I* become the center of the universe. As a result of this self-centeredness, there is a sense of entitlement, a lack of empathy for others, and an insatiable desire to satisfy one’s own desires, goals, and emotional neediness at the cost of the common good. While we all have a bit of narcissism in our personalities, it is not hard to conclude that narcissism in America is on the rise and out of control. Our collective narcissism is destroying the planet. Our refusal to lower our carbon footprint has led to global warming and the extinction of many species. Our individual narcissism has played havoc with the spread of the pandemic, resulting in over 3.4 million deaths worldwide. Imagine refusing to wear a mask at the height of the pandemic because it is uncomfortable or delay getting the vaccine because you have the right to say NO! With narcissism, individual rights and privilege overshadow the truth. Until we place God at the center of the universe and practice more humility and compassion, truth will be hard to come by and our lives will remain rocky.

**Discouragement:** Discouragement is a loss of confidence or enthusiasm; a sense of dispiritedness. When we are discouraged, we often lose the motivation to press forward and thus retreat into our own bubble. The mountain seems too steep, the valley too dark, or the battle too fierce, causing us to lose the courage to engage with the struggle. For sure, life is full of disappointments that can deplete our joy. I know this is something I have struggled with when my expectations in life have been thwarted or I have experienced great loss. Discouragement can also be a warning sign that we have lost our primary focus which is to love God and love our neighbor. A sense of entitlement can worm its way into our hearts and highlight the discrepancy between what we have and what we believe we are owed. Practicing gratitude is one way to keep discouragement at bay.

**Pessimism:** Pope Francis denounced pessimism as endlessly complaining that “nothing is going well [in] society, politics, the church.” Or in other words, the world is going to hell in a handbasket! A pessimist “gets angry with the world, sits back and does nothing.” Pessimism is particularly damaging at this time when the world is making the effort of “beginning anew,” because pessimism is “the tendency to see everything in the worst light and to keep saying that nothing will return as before.” So more than ever, we need to sow the seeds of hope, for without hope, the human heart would break.

“The Spirit of truth reminds us that we are born from a gift and that we grow by giving, not by holding on, but by giving of ourselves. We need the light and the strength of the Holy Spirit today. The church needs [the Spirit] to walk in harmony and to witness courageously to the Gospel. The entire human family needs [the Spirit] so as to come out of the crisis [of this pandemic] more united, not more divided. You know that from a crisis such as this we do not come out the same as we were before; we come out either better or worse. So let us have the courage to change, to be better, to be better than before and to be able to build positively the post-crisis world.” (Pope Francis)

Jesus said to his disciples: “I still have many things to say to you... When the Spirit of truth comes, [this Spirit] will guide you into all truth.” (John 16:12-13) “God of Grace and God of Glory on thy people pour thy power.” (Hymn #594) Come Holy Spirit, Come!