

## **Homily – A Humble Spirit**

**Rob Keim**

**June 5, 2022 – St. Barnabas' Episcopal Church**

Today is our annual celebration of Pentecost. With this feast day we celebrate the third part of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit. We give thanks for the ongoing spark of life and divinity that is within each and every of us. We remember that the curse of the Tower of Babel is lifted and that we are connected to one another and the universe in ways that we can scarcely imagine. And, we celebrate the birth of the Church.

As we heard in today's readings, Jesus sends the Holy Spirit to be with us. Two thousand years ago, Jesus departs but he ensures that his followers continue to feel the embrace and guidance of God. God is always present, and through the tongues of fire and the sudden understanding of multiple languages, Jesus made sure his followers had a tactile and memorable experience of the eternal and unchanging presence and love of God. Of note, we should always remember that the Holy Spirit was not new on that day two thousand years ago. Like Christ, the Holy Spirit has been across the universe for all of eternity. However, that day in Jerusalem was a turning point for the followers of Jesus. They knew the Holy Spirit was present with them, just as we are to know the Holy Spirit is with us here today.

Now, in our Gospel reading we heard Jesus call the Holy Spirit the spirit of truth. "This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you." Spirit of truth. Truth is such a slippery word these days. Wikipedia defines "truth" this way. "Truth is most often used to mean (1) being in accord with fact or reality, or (2) fidelity to an original or to a standard or ideal. The commonly understood opposite of truth is falsehood..." "Truth" can be associated with the hard facts of science or with the long-term tenants of theology and philosophy. And here is another definition. "Eternal truth" is a fact or reality that is unchanging. It is valid yesterday, today, and tomorrow. "Eternal truth" can be associated with the laws of hard science, and some would even say, with religion.

Now, in twenty-first century America we all know that there are some problems with truth, that are actually age-old problems. We argue over truth. We mistake opinion for truth. And, Christians add to this in some awful ways since after all we have the spirit of truth. With religion we use truth as a weapon in which I have the truth and others don't. I have the right beliefs, the best way of doing worship, and the only valid morals and values. As I said early, truth is such a slippery word these days.

So, let me introduce another idea about the spirit of truth. The Holy Spirit does not just lead us to proper beliefs about Jesus. It does not validate our facts over those of

others. Instead, the Holy Spirit leads to better living. Again, truth is more than facts, it is a state of being that is in alignment with God. When we live in the midst of the spirit, when we welcome the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, when we abide in the Advocate then we shift into a state of being that is in union with God, and by extension connected to the rest of creation. This truth, this state of being, is our birthright. It is a free gift from God, though we have to do the work to claim it.

And, this week I want to use the emotion of humility as the foundation for this state of being. Humility is part of the work to align ourselves with God. At first glance humility may be an odd springboard to truth, so let me show you how they are linked.

In contemporary American society, humility is seen as weakness. It is seen as having low self-regard and a sense of unworthiness. In our society, pride and self-assertion are valued, as we claw our way to the top. To that extent we are very much like the Romans of two thousand years ago. But, as we all know, Jesus had a lot to say about humility that was at odds with his society. And by extension it is also at odds with our society.

Jesus taught and modeled humbleness. He showed that there is strength and greatness in humility. Pride may seem more straightforward, for there is tension in leading a humble life – the tension of discerning how to love our neighbor as we love ourselves; the strain of how to honor the heart of another nation as we honor our own homeland; the strain of how to revere the truths of another wisdom tradition as we cherish our own inheritance; and, the struggle with how to protect the life of other species as we guard the sanctity of our own life-form.

Jesus knew this tension of leading a humble life. He was tempted to use his wisdom and his power of presence to serve himself, to lift himself up over others. But to the tempter, he says, “Away with you!” Away with the falseness of believing that I can love myself and put others down.

Living a life of humbleness leads to truth because through humility we get rid of falseness of all sorts. And, it is primarily getting rid of the false self and the mistaken belief that we have to earn God’s love. God’s love is freely given. That is what grace is. Grace is the unearned love that God keeps pouring out onto each and every one of us. There is nothing that we can do to increase God’s love for us. And, there is nothing we can do to decrease God’s love for us. God’s love is always there, and we just need to lean into it.

And, God’s love is all that we need. A humble person remembers that it is his or her connection to God that sustains and builds up. Even during the dark night of the soul we can lean into God for hope. John of the Cross was a sixteenth century mystic and

writer. John wrote of this dark night of the soul. And, he insisted that the true meaning of humility is not self-depreciation or low self-esteem. Instead humility is when a person accepts and acknowledges that they are very small, quickly passing, and insignificant as a separate self. Not easy stuff, but this is just objective truth. Our value, dignity and even sacredness comes in our connection to God. And, to our delight this is a connection that cannot be taken from us.

John of the Cross expresses a humility and way of living that is consistent with Jesus. And, to John, humility means accepting our unquenchable thirst and needs for God. And, humility means acknowledging our emptiness. Thirst for God and emptiness go hand in hand. These two truths live in tension, but together they are also the foundation for healthy, positive self-esteem and living. We are the beloved of God, and with this foundation we can love God back, love others as the beloved, and love ourselves. Again, we are not special because of what we do, and certainly not for what we have. Each and every one of us is special because we are the beloved of God. Though it is not easy to do, this is what we need to hold onto at our deepest core self. And, this is what can lead us to live into the virtue and emotion of humility.

Now, the easiest way to learn humility is at the feet of someone who already has it. You know these people. They listen more than they talk. They don't need control. They embrace silence, stillness, and solitude. They emphasize having less. We each need role models and saints in our lives who show us the path to humility. Do you have someone in your life? If not, then find that person. Learn from them. Be like them. Or, are you this role model for someone else?

And, there is something else we can do to live a humble life, and that is to lean into the spirit of truth. Again, truth is not just about facts. It is also about a state of being that is in alignment with God. With our celebration of Pentecost we remember that Jesus has left us an advocate and guide. The Holy Spirit sustains us through the ups and down of life. Like a beacon, it leads us to Jesus.

May the spirit of truth lead us to our own humble spirit. And, may other people point to us and say, "They have the Holy Spirit. I want what they have. How can I get it?"