

## **Title: Truth**

Text: John 16:12-15 (Trinity Sunday)

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This sermon is not a doctrinal reflection, nor will you receive an instructional recipe on how to make a Trinitarian cookie. We have more suitable texts than today's for such use. So, what does this passage speak to us on this Trinity Sunday?

As this text proceeds Jesus' prayer for the unity of the church that starts in chapter 17, this Farewell message is mostly concerned about advancing the teaching ministry of Jesus. This text speaks more to the "community of Jesus' disciples" rather than to the individual. In an age of Individualism, this text emphasizes the community, which will be led to "into all the truth." (v. 13) As we move forward this morning, I want to unpack the concept of "Spirit of truth" as understood by John. If we believe that "truth" is a set of facts, we are wrong. In John's gospel, "truth" is a reference specific to Jesus, who IS "truth (14:16)." In other words, truth is the revelation of Jesus Christ. We are to look to Jesus, my friends. So, truth into which we are to be guided has to do with the person of Jesus himself, who provides greater clarity. Truth is more than facts but revelation, specifically the revelation found in Jesus, God's begotten Son.

So, what is the TRUTH revealed in Jesus' life, ministry, death, and his resurrection, and how does this revelation connect with the mystery of Spirit and Creator? Let us think about this Truth.

**One way to understand the Spirit of truth is to guide us either a set of facts or opinion.** This text encourages us to keep open to fresh encounters with the revelation of Jesus. Jesus' intent is shaping our community by our being curious with the revelation of Jesus and receptive to the Spirit-guided growth. It is not that there will be new "truth" beyond the Word made flesh; John cannot imagine that happening. But he does imagine that the message and meaning of Jesus will require our ongoing interpretation. He anticipates that changing circumstances or emergence of new questions – stem cell research, prolonging life by artificial means, or nuclear use – will require us to think afresh.

Into this ongoing debate, Jesus reveals to us that the job of the Holy Spirit is to point and guide us to truth. Let me offer you an example of what I mean.

A certain pastor for years started each confirmation class with a jar full of beans. He would ask each of his students to guess how many beans were in the jar, and on a big pad of paper he wrote down their estimates. Then, next to those estimates, he helps them to answer another question. He asked them to name their favorite songs. When each of the lists were complete, he revealed the actual number of beans in the jar. The whole class looks over their guesses, to see which estimate was closest to being right, and the one who got closest to the number received a small prize. Easily done, right? There is a set number of beans and a certain number picked by each student.

Once they were done and the prize awarded, the pastor turned to the list of favorite songs. "Now which one of these is closest to being right?" he asks. The students protest that there is no "right answer"; a person's favorite song is purely a matter of taste.

Here is the question from the pastor, "When you decide what to believe in terms of your faith, is that more like guessing the number of beans, or more choosing your favorite song?" The answer for him from the students was always the same answer: Choosing one's faith is more like choosing a favorite song. But is this true? Is it subjective like a song or more like a fact like the number of jellybeans?

John is confident that, relying on the guidance of the Spirit of truth we, as a community of faith, will be led where we need to go. Where we need to go is more than counting jellybeans in a jar, or is it? Put a pin in that thought. Where we need to go is conforming our life to Jesus' life and teachings. Jesus reached across the aisles of life and included the lost and lonely into his journey. We, as disciples, are called to care about the things Jesus cared, the people with leprosy and tax collectors and is our litmus test of our following his life and ministry.

Many of us treat our faith like it is subjective, yet the Spirit of Truth reveals that our faith should be more like guessing how many beans are in the jar. And rather than jellybeans, we must study and be open to an encounter with the living Christ. And as we look to the life of Jesus just maybe, our faith is more certain and not so vague. While some aspects of our faith are a mystery, there is a truth about it as well, and more importantly as we as a community of faith live cross shaped lives, there is where THE Truth is working behind and through our faith.

Now back to the pin from a moment ago and let us take the mystery of the Trinity. This is important because this Sunday is called Trinity Sunday, and we work around this concept of three aspects (or persona of God) but still one God working in all and through all. There is a mystery here, but it is not a matter of opinion. The number of jellybeans in the Trinity jar are worked out when we say together:

*I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.*

*And in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; on the third day he rose from the dead; he ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.*

*I believe in the Holy Spirit; the holy catholic Church; the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting. AMEN!*

Or take the Lord's Prayer, where we say: "Our Father, who are in heaven..." These examples/encounters with Jesus are important landmarks for our faith and witness. These concepts and others binds us together in the Spirit of Truth spoken by Jesus.

Friends, we make a big deal and fight over issues, but the truth is it does not matter whether you were sprinkled or dunked. It does matter whether you were baptized. It does not matter your denomination: Presbyterian, Lutheran, Episcopal, Methodist or Baptist. Yet it does matter whether you believe in begotten Son of God Jesus and the life he calls us to live.

It does not matter that the Trinity is a mystery, but it does matter we believe it reveals, expresses, and witnesses to how God relates with this world and how we are to relate to it as well. That is how many Jellybeans there are! Jesus life and ministry reveals the Spirit of Truth.

**Friends, the Spirit of Truth will set us free.** (John 8:31-32) We say it to our children. It is one of the greatest concepts of Jesus' teaching in the gospel of John. But there is a problem. There is

a requirement. To become absolutely free, we must become a disciple of Jesus, and as Jesus' disciple we like him must be willing to stand against the authority that is seeking to bind others to a system of oppression. In other words, as followers of Jesus we must resist like he did! We must resist conforming to our culture and as a community of believers' bear witness to the love of others as witness in the life of Jesus.

When we have found the Spirit of truth, we must stand in that truth and bear witness like Jesus did against the authorities and structures that bound the people. It is not enough to know what the truth is; in order for us to be free in the truth, we must act upon it. Many of us, when confronted with an issue, know what the right thing to do is. Yet knowing and doing are not the same. Our question is will we act on what we know to be true.

This morning, we have confronted two difficulties with Truth. We talked about seeking the Spirit of Truth. We talked about acting upon the truth as witnesses. Our last part to consider this morning is the hardest part. **As disciples of Jesus, we are called to speak the Truth.** Henry Augustus Rowland, professor of physics at Johns Hopkins University, was once called as an expert witness at a trial. During cross-examination, a lawyer demanded, "What are your qualifications as an expert witness in this case?"

The normally modest and retiring professor replied quietly, "I am the greatest living expert on the subject under discussion." Later a friend well acquainted with Rowland expressed surprise at the professor's uncharacteristic answer. Rowland answered, "Well, what did you expect me to do? I was under oath."

Friends, we must speak the truth, like Dr. Rowland. We are not the bearers of some of the truth or half the truth. We are hope bearers of the Spirit Truth as we bear witness to the life and love of Jesus! This does not mean we are arrogant and self-righteous. Rather, we are to be humble and, in our humility, to be confident in our sharing the Truth.

In honor of Trinity Sunday, we must share that God is the Creator of this world and everything in it. Thus, we need to remember to treat others as children of God. God's only begotten Son Jesus is God incarnate. In his life and ministry, he reveals and call us to relate with God and this world in love, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, hope and joy and in self-control, and offer ourselves as bearers of The Truth in a non-violent way in a world desperately needing an encounter with The Truth, who is a person: Jesus Christ.

Friends, like Dr. Rowland, we are under oath. We are to speak the truth, my friends. We are to act upon that truth. We are to speak that truth in love to those we encounter as we are bound by what we have heard the Spirit reveal to our hearts and obligated to speak it to the world. Amen.

### Prayer of Illumination

O Lord, help us as we read these scriptures together. Come among us and bring your understanding and reveal your truth. Come into this place and open our minds, hearts and souls to all that these words of life offer us. We long to be continually challenged, transformed and renewed by your word. May we hear your voice of life as we read and draw close to you. Amen.

John 16:12-15 "I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he, the Spirit of **truth**, comes, he will guide you into all **the truth**. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you. All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you.