

# “Getting to the Truth”

John 16:1-22

April 24, 2016

5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter – Confirmation Day

The room was quiet. The students were puzzled and confused. The teacher obviously had more to teach but, equally obvious, was the students' unreadiness to receive any more teaching at that time. Now, our 2016 Confirmation Class may think I'm talking about our class. They are worried that I'm going to schedule one more class together; assign one more memory work; and require one more sermon study. Relax! That's not it at all.

I'm talking about the scene described in our Gospel reading for today. After three years of catechesis, Jesus, the teacher, and His students, the twelve apostles, arrived at this Thursday night for the Passover supper. Jesus had so much more to teach them and tells them so. He also said that they were not able to bear what He had to teach. They were too busy arguing with each other about who was the best student in the class. How could they handle teaching from Jesus about His coming crucifixion – what it was for and what it meant? How could they believe an empty tomb – what it signified and what it promised? So Jesus foregoes one final confirmation lecture.

Instead, Jesus makes a promise. Jesus promises to send them a Helper (John 14:16) – the Spirit of truth (John 14:17) – the Holy Spirit (John 14:25) – to complete their instruction. “He will guide you into all truth,” Jesus said. The Holy Spirit would not mislead them into error or falsehood, but lead them into truth. The Holy Spirit would not lead them into partial truth or some truth, but into all truth.

The Holy Spirit came on Pentecost just as Jesus promised. The Holy Spirit led the disciples into all truth just as Jesus promised. Beginning on Pentecost, the Holy Spirit inspired the disciples to preach, teach, and record a written record of all truth. The disciples preached the truth of sin – all sin – whether it was popularly regarded as sin by the surrounding society and whether it was actually

doing something evil or simply failing to do something that was good. They boldly called people to repent – to turn from sin and to turn to Christ by faith.

The disciples proclaimed and taught the truth of the Gospel – the Good News – that their Master’s death on the cross had not been a tragic misfortune but was the fulfillment of God’s plan to provide an all sufficient sacrifice for all sin for all people that would satisfy God’s justice, forgive the debt people owed to God, and provide all who believed with a clean slate before a holy God.

The disciples proclaimed and taught the truth of the resurrection of the dead - that their Lord’s death was not the end but that He bodily rose from the dead, never to die again. This means, as the Lord Himself declared, that every person who believes in Jesus will live, even though he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Jesus will never die.

In other words, when the Holy Spirit led them into all truth, He led them into Jesus who IS the way and the truth and the life and all that He said and did for them and all humanity. The Holy Spirit took what was Jesus’s and declared it to the disciples. The disciples declared it to others through the spoken and written word.

We find ourselves today in a similar situation as did the apostles in the Upper Room that night long ago. Whether you are a confirmand today or perhaps someone whose confirmation was many years ago, you are in need of the truth and, perhaps, you cannot bear the truth because of societal and cultural pressure.

Truth is being greatly challenged these days. Truth is being ignored. Truths about a holy God, the reality of sin, death as a punishment for sin, heaven as a place for the righteous, and hell as a place for the wicked are being ignored and rejected as quaint remnants of an earlier, more superstitious times.

Truth has been and continues to be changed. Truths about marriage, gender identification, sexual behavior, issues of life before birth, issues of life near death, and many other things have all been radically and swiftly changed. They have been replaced with new truths that cater to our perversions and convenience us in our evil.

Truth has even been denied. There are many in our post-modern culture who even deny the existence of absolute truth. They say there are many different truths, each one being as good as another one. Or, they say there is no truth at all – only differencing opinions, all of which must be respected.

We are in need of truth to guide us in how we live, as well as to prepare us in how we die. Is there truth and, if so, how can we obtain truth? We were not in that Upper Room to receive our Lord's promise that night about a Spirit of truth who would lead us into all truth. But our Lord has not forgotten us. On that night, He prayed for you and me. In His prayer to His Heavenly Father in the following chapter, Jesus said, "I do not ask for these [disciples] only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word." (John 17:20) That's us!

Our Heavenly Father has sent His Holy Spirit into our lives, not directly as He did for those apostles on that Day of Pentecost, but through the means of water in Holy Baptism. And even though the means of the Holy Spirit's being given are different for them than for us, the Holy Spirit we have received is not different; the reality of His presence in our lives is not different; His work in our lives is not different.

The Holy Spirit is to lead into Jesus who is the way, the truth, and the life. He takes the Word of Jesus which He gave to the apostles and inspired them to record for us in the Holy Scriptures and gives that to us. The two catechumens before us today have been through an intensive study of that Word for the past four years. And to what end? It is not simply to get to this day and this celebration. It is the same reason that we read, hear, and study the Word. It is so that they and we can know truth.

Jesus has made a wonderful promise to us. He has said, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth." (John 8:31-32) Through His Word, you can know the reality of your sin before an Almighty and Holy God, a knowledge which can lead you to repentance and confession.

Through His Word, you can believe that God loves you, despite your sin of thought, word, and deed, and that He forgives you for all the evil you have done and all the good you have left undone. All this He does because Jesus took all your sin upon Himself to the cross where He endured God's wrath for your sin and experienced all the punishment due you for your sin. As Jesus said on the cross, "It is finished!" Everything has been taken care of. There is no debt to be paid or punishment to be suffered for those who know Jesus by faith. As His Word says, "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." (Rom. 8:1)

Through His Word, you can have hope for the future, despite the awful consequences of sin which we still suffer in this present life – sadness, loss, pain, need, and death. Jesus Christ rose from the dead and lives, nevermore to die again. He promises that same thing to us. Each of us shall rise from our grave and live, nevermore to die again. Only THIS life will be life will be in the direct presence of God and as God intended for life to be. As we read in our second lesson for today, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away." (Rev. 21:3-4)

Jesus says you can know all of that, not by occasionally hearing or reading His Word or even by studying it for four years and then getting confirmed. Jesus says, "If you abide in my word", that is, if you remain in His Word all of your lives. By frequently reading and meditating on His Word, you can know the will of God so that you will not be fooled by the almost daily redefining of sin nor be intimidated by those doing the redefining. By being in Divine Service regularly to hear our Lord's word and receive His body and blood, you can receive forgiveness for all of your sins and be assured of our Lord's constant and unchanging love so that you are not overcome by the sadness and loneliness that fills our world.

In addition to simply knowing truth, Jesus says, "the truth will set you free." You are free of worry regarding this present life because you know the truth of God's love and care. You are free of

guilt and shame regarding your sin because you know the truth of our Lord's full and free forgiveness. You are free from the fear of death because you know the truth of your resurrection from death and your eternal life through Jesus' resurrection from the dead.

On this day, we thank God that the Holy Spirit led the apostles into all truth. We praise God that this same Spirit of Truth used the same apostolic testimony, both oral and written, to lead us into all truth. And we pray God to continue leading these catechumens and each one of us in that truth, not only on this special day, but every day of our lives. Amen.