

The Truth About the Trinity  
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John 16:12-15

“I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. **13** When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. **14** He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. **15** All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

THE UNBEARABLE TRUTH

Jesus is giving his farewell address to his disciples.  
He's telling them what they need to know after he is gone.  
But, there are some things that he cannot tell them, at least not right now.

These are things that the disciples could not bear.  
These things would be too great a burden.

On occasion I'm reluctant to tell some people the whole truth.  
I'm afraid that it would be too much to bear, at least at that moment.  
So, I hold back.

I have to remind myself when I preach that it's not just what I say that counts.  
It's what people are able, at that time to bear.  
I have seen terrible splits in the church because some preachers were not able to adapt their message to what the people were able to bear.

It's a balance.  
There is a need to speak God's truth to power.  
But, we also have to adjust what we say and how we say it to the needs of our audience.

Maybe you also have felt this way from time to time.

Maybe you wanted to protect the ones you love from devastating news. Or maybe you knew that someone just didn't have the experience and the knowledge they needed in order to hear everything you had to say.

So you held back.

That's how Jesus felt when it came to his disciples. He had a lot to tell them, but he couldn't tell them everything. Now was not the time.

What was this truth that was too much to bear?

I don't know for sure, but I suspect it had to do with the cross. Jesus tried to tell the disciples what it all meant, about the cross and the resurrection and the ascension.

And they just couldn't handle that truth. In order to understand some things, you have to live them first.

The hour was late and the cross loomed. In that hour of crisis, Jesus' purpose was more pastoral than prophetic. He wanted to reassure his disciples.

In the 14th chapter of John's gospel he said, "Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid ..."  
There's room in my Father's house for everyone.

Sometimes disciples need to know the truth and bear the burdens required of them.

But, sometimes disciples need to be reassured and comforted.

When the future looks bleak and we don't know where to turn, we certainly don't need another burden to bear.

So, Jesus holds back the truth, for now.

But, that does not mean the disciples will never understand this hard truth.

In fact, the day is coming soon when the disciples will understand the truth.

The meaning of the cross, the resurrection and the challenge of following Jesus will become a lived reality.

They will proclaim that truth in the public square.

They will even preach that truth to the ones who were directly responsible for the crucifixion.

## THE SPIRIT OF TRUTH IN A SKEPTICAL WORLD

But, for now they wait.

They wait for the coming of the Spirit.

And when the Spirit will instruct them in the truth.

In fact, in today's lesson the Spirit is described as the "Spirit of truth".

Today the role of truth has been diminished by the power of social media. If it's trending it's true.

Of course they didn't have Twitter in Jesus' day, but they did have a similar attitude toward truth.

They thought truth was an an illusion.

For example, when Pilate questioned Jesus before he had him crucified, he had a very cynical attitude worthy of the most vicious Twitter troll.

Jesus said that he was born to testify to the truth.

And Pilate mocked Jesus when he asked rhetorically, "What is truth?"

The essence of truth, the one who was born to testify to the deepest truth of all was standing right before Pilate ... and yet Pilate, was not able to see that truth.

Why couldn't Pilate see the truth?

Because in Pilate's day people thought that might meant right.

As long as you were able to win, you were right.

Money and soldiers were all that mattered.

Making Rome great was all that he cared about.

Pilate worshipped the Empire.  
And that blinded Pilate to the truth.

But, Pilate wasn't the only one who was blind to the truth. The religious leaders, the crowds that followed Jesus, and even Jesus' own disciples were blind to the truth.

All of them were unable to bear what Jesus had to say. They distorted his message through the filter of their own prejudices and desires.

Pilate was afraid that Jesus wanted to be king.  
The crowds and Jesus' disciples wanted to make Jesus a king. They wanted a political messiah who would bring in the kingdom by force.

All of them had it wrong.  
They were looking for truth in all the wrong places.

Jesus was a king, but as he told Pilate, his kingdom was not of this world.  
His kingdom came from above.

Jesus came to proclaim more than just the restoration of a nation.  
Jesus came to proclaim the coming of a new creation.

But, let's not just criticize people who lived long ago.

Today Jesus has many things to tell us, but we cannot bear them either.  
Why?  
Because the truth revealed in Jesus is still at odds with what the world believes.

The modern world is different in many ways from the ancient world.

But, one thing has not changed ... human nature.  
We still pin our hopes on what we can do on our own.  
We build empires based upon greed, military force, and even religion.

We are afraid of those who would challenge us in any way.  
And, if we believe in truth, we believe in our own version of the truth.

That truth does not set us free.

That truth makes us a slave.

So, how can we avoid this?

How can we learn to bear the truth that we do not want to hear?

## WAITING ON THE SPIRIT

Like the disciples of old we still need to wait.

We need to wait upon the coming of the Spirit.

We need to wait upon the One who will guide us into all truth.

Most Christians would agree with this (in theory).

We should wait upon the coming of the Spirit.

We should trust in God.

But, most Christians (myself included) find it very hard to put this into practice.

In practice, we often do not wait for the Spirit.

We speak and act upon our own version of the truth.

And often this is what separates us from God, and from God's people.

God is truth.

Jesus is the way, the truth and the life.

The Spirit guides us into all truth.

But, we cannot know Truth with a capital "T," this eternal Truth, unless the Spirit reveals it to us.

You may have noticed that this is Trinity Sunday.

On this Sunday we think about the nature of God.

On this Sunday we talk about Truth with a capital "T."

And you can readily see why this passage has been chosen by those who have created the Lectionary.

The Spirit enables us to hear the truth of the Father as revealed in the Son.

It's a very practical example of this fundamental doctrine.

Now some folks get a bit nervous when we talk about the Spirit guiding disciples into all truth.

They've had experience with people who invoke the guidance of the Spirit, and then suggest a course of action that is out of step with the teachings of Jesus and Scripture.

Notice that the work of the Spirit is also the work of the Son and the work of the Father.

In this way the Son and the Father are glorified by the work of the Spirit.

The Spirit does not bring a new and improved message.

The Spirit does not bring a message that is more palatable to those that want their own version of the truth confirmed.

Instead, the Spirit enables us to understand the old, old story in new and vital ways.

The Spirit makes the words of Revelation understandable and bearable.

The Spirit makes sure that the words we speak to the world are not our own words, but the Word of God.

All of us need to be guided by the Spirit.

And that means that we need to learn how to wait on the Spirit.

Following Jesus is often a matter of patience.

We cannot understand everything right now.

We're not ready for the whole truth right now.

Instead, we are on a journey guided by the Spirit.

And the goal of that journey is to obtain a right knowledge of God.

This is the Truth that we seek.

## THE ONE TRUE GOD

Some people might say,

"What difference does it make?

We all worship the same God. Right?"

Well, actually, that's not right.

The one true God revealed in Jesus is quite different from the other gods this world has come up with. And what we believe about God makes a big difference in how we live.

Now don't misunderstand.

I'm not saying that we should be intolerant of those who have a different religion or no religion.

I'm not saying that we should use our faith as a way to divide and condemn others.

But, the Christian view of God is quite distinctive.

When Jesus told his disciples that he was "the way, the truth and the life" he was saying that the essence of God was revealed in Him.

In the life death and resurrection of Jesus we find Truth with a capital "T".

So, What is so different about the Truth as revealed in Jesus and confirmed to us by the work of the Spirit?

## THE IMAGE OF GOD

First, God as revealed in the Bible is a God who establishes and seeks out human relationships. Notice that this is quite different from those who describe God as aloof and unknowable. The God of the Bible wants to be known and this knowledge is a part of the very fabric of the world.

Why did God create the world?

The book of Genesis tells us that God's creation is an expression of a desire to create not only the universe but also some creatures who reflect his loving nature.

The Bible says that human beings were created in the image of God.

What does it mean to be created in the image of God?

What is it about human beings that reflect God?

Down through the years theologians have speculated quite a bit about this.

Perhaps we reflect the image of God in our ability to reason.

We can figure things out.

Perhaps we reflect the image of God in our ability to make moral choices.

We can know right from wrong and choose the right.

All of those are important abilities.

But, I would suggest that the truth about how God's image is reflected in human beings can be derived from the Genesis text itself.

In Genesis 1:27 we read that God created human beings in his image ... "male and female he created them." So if you want to talk about the image of God, the analogy that you use the relationship between a man and a woman.

We were made for each other.  
We were made for relationship.  
And this relationship ... at its best ... can reflect the very nature of God.

Now a word of caution is needed here.  
Anything we say about the nature of God is an analogy.  
The point of an analogy is to clarify a point by comparing two things that are similar.

But, of course the two things compared are never the same.  
All analogies break down at some point.  
And this is especially true when it comes to the nature of God.

Yes, our relationships can mirror the image of God.  
But, our relationships are not God.

As Paul put it, now we see through a glass darkly.  
Our understanding of the truth is dimmed by our sinfulness.

Often our relationships do not reflect the image of God.  
Instead, they are a reflection of our brokenness.

If that's true how can we understand what it means to be created in the image of God?  
All our relationships are flawed, and some of our relationships are deeply flawed.

For example, when we say that God is our Father some people are deeply troubled by that statement.  
Their relationship with their father was destructive and so they rebel against that image. That analogy is not helpful them.

## A PERFECT IMAGE AND RELATIONSHIPS RESTORED

Fortunately, we have a perfect example of what it means to reflect the image of God.

God was in Christ.  
 Jesus told the disciples in our lesson for today,  
 "All that the Father has is mine."

In Jesus the image of God is not distorted in any way.

We proclaim this truth in many ways.

Jesus is God's Son.  
 The very presence of God came to earth and lived among us.  
 The Word became flesh.

Jesus is the human face of God.

What does that face look like?  
 How did Jesus' relationships with others reflect the image of God?

In the New Testament we get a clear picture.  
 We get a clear picture of what it means to be human.  
 And we get a clear picture of what it means to be Divine.

I like the way A Brief Statement of Faith summarizes the life of Christ.  
 We read,

"Jesus proclaimed the reign of God:  
 preaching good news to the poor and release to the captives,  
 teaching by word and deed and blessing the children,  
 healing the sick and binding up the brokenhearted,  
 eating with outcasts, forgiving sinners,  
 and calling all to repent and believe the gospel."

In other words Christ sought to restore relationships that were broken.  
 The image of God was and is defaced by our sinfulness.  
 The ministry of Jesus made it possible to restore that image.

How did the world respond to the One who was the perfect image of God?  
 The world could not bear that truth.  
 In fact the world crucified that truth.

In a sense, when we reject ministry of Jesus, ministry that seeks to bring justice, healing, hope and forgiveness to a broken world,

... when we do that, we crucify Christ anew.  
 We fight against God and suppress God's image in us.

Fortunately, Jesus understands that sometimes even his disciples cannot bear the truth.

And, unlike us Jesus is patient and forgiving.  
 Jesus still strives to seek and save the lost.

Jesus forgave his enemies even as they crucified him, and God raised Jesus from the dead as a sign of his vindication. You see, God's Truth cannot be killed, even on a cross.

## THE SPIRIT AND THE FUTURE

And that Truth still speaks to us today through the work of the Spirit.  
 In our lesson for today we read that the Spirit will declare to the disciples "the things that are to come."

The Spirit leads the disciples of Jesus into the future.  
 The Truth of God does not change.  
 The Bible tells us, "Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever." (Hebrews 13:8)

But, though the Truth of God does not change, the Truth of God does not quit either.

The Spirit of God in Christ is still at work guiding disciples into the truth.

One of the neat things about the Book of Acts, the Acts of the Apostles is that it doesn't have a proper ending. When you read that last verse, you wonder if part of the story was left out. Maybe a manuscript got lost along the way.

But, there is another interpretation.

Perhaps the Acts of the Apostles continue.  
This story is not over.

The Spirit is still helping us understand the truth that we formerly could not bear.

The Spirit is still helping us restore broken relationships.

The Spirit is helping us apply God's truth to new times and new situations.  
The Spirit is still seeking and saving the lost.

God has not finished with us yet.

We who were made in God's image still have more to learn.

The will of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit are being revealed to us each and every day. The Word of Truth still becomes flesh and dwells among us. God give us the strength to bear that truth.

Amen.