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The Church of the Good Shepherd
The Sixth Sunday in Easter – May 17 & 19, 2020
John 14:15-21

Today's Gospel brings some bad news and some good news. But the bad isn't really *so* bad... and the Good News is *amazing*!

At this point in the Easter season, we're nearing the end of Jesus' post-resurrection appearances to his disciples. Soon Jesus will leave the physical world a final time. The disciples are in a challenging, sometimes *confusing* in-between moment. Much like our lives right now. They, like us, are caught between a remembered former life and an unknown future.

In today's recap of the Last Supper, Jesus tries to prepare his disciples for the difficult days to come: "I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you."

Jesus assures them that he will continue to be with them, but in a different way: "I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate..." in Greek, *parakletos*... "to be with you forever."

"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 in you, and will be with you."

We have many names for God's Holy Spirit: Teacher; Guide; Comforter; Companion. But the *literal* meaning of the Greek *parakletos* is instructive: it means *called to my side*. Coming *alongside* to help and guide and strengthen. (Think of a term we use all the time, "para-medical.")

Receiving the gift of the Spirit depends on two things: first, that we keep Jesus' commandment to love one another as Jesus loves us. That's challenging enough, especially as we are cooped up at home, sometimes with restless children who need to be home-schooled *and* entertained; or trying to help a spouse or partner who requires special care.

The second requirement comes with Jesus' *description* of the Spirit: "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 in you, and will be with you."

Now here's the "bad" news that isn't really *so* bad... but it isn't easy.

Receiving God's Spirit of *truth* comes with a *cost*. When we align ourselves with *truth*, we separate ourselves from those who don't... the *rest* of the world.

It means separating ourselves from powers and systems that overlook or *disregard* real human need. Receiving God's Spirit marks our pledge to live, for the *sake* of truth, a life set *apart* from lying.

You may recall Pilate's question to Jesus, "What *is* truth?" He asks the question but doesn't really want to hear the answer. Pilate was a notoriously self-serving and sometimes brutal agent for Rome. Jesus, by contrast, represents a kingdom "not of this world."

Jesus lives and dies and rises again, not for his *own* sake, but to bring new life and hope to the marginalized, the oppressed... to *all* who listen to his voice and follow.

Following Jesus makes us, the 21st-century Christian community, and *all* who follow the way of love, somewhat *odd*. We're living *in* the world, but like Jesus, not *of* it. Even so, truth-telling can be incredibly difficult, on so many levels.

I'm not talking about being *hurtfully* honest, say if someone asks "Does this dress make me look fat?" We might answer, "The colors really *suit* you!" (This always reminds me of the ironic question, "Does my *body* make me look fat?") There will always be a place for little white lies.

But *never* for *big* ones: "The virus will just disappear." "This virus doesn't affect children." "The lockdown was an overreaction." "Wearing masks doesn't *do* anything." We're unfortunately familiar with lies denying science, facts and experience: "The climate *isn't* getting warmer, and even if it is, human behavior has nothing to do with it." And then there are *social* lies like "Immigrants are dirty; they're coming to take away our jobs." "They have nothing to offer us; they are a *danger* to our way of life."

Sometimes lies come in the form of *silence*. What we *don't* hear about racial/ethnic inequality; about unarmed young black people getting shot and killed. About social conditions that cause too many low-income people to suffer health issues like hypertension and diabetes, and then to become more vulnerable to COVID-19.

Following Jesus; receiving God's Spirit of truth means *we must not remain silent* in the face of these big lies. We need to face the truth, inconvenient as this may be, then speak up about the truth we know. Which is what it means to live out the promises we make whenever we renew our *Baptismal Covenant*.

But here's the good news that's really *amazing*! We won't be speaking up or stepping out *alone*: "I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you *forever*." God's Spirit of truth is coming, God's Spirit of truth is *here*, called to our side. Called to our side to hold us up and *embolden* us to *live the truth of God's love*.

Amen.