“***The Spirit of Truth***” by S. Finlan, at The First Church, June 9, 2019 (Pentecost)

**John 14:15–18**

15“If you love me, you will keep my commandments. 16And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you for ever.17This 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. 18I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you.”

**John 16:12–15**

12“I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. 13When 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. 14He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. 15All that the Father has is mine.”

In this month when we are celebrating our grads and dads, we are inclined to think of our membership in a family. The apostles to whom Jesus spoke in these passages had all become like a second family to each other. They had traveled together for three years through the Jewish territories, into Samaria, and even into the Gentile regions of Tyre, Sidon, and the Decapolis. They had faced many things together, and they knew they had a God-ordained mission. Now the father-figure of this second family is warning them that he will be leaving. But he stresses “I will not leave you orphaned” (John 14:18). Isn’t that typical of Jesus, to show such care and sensitivity to their feelings? He knows that they might feel orphaned, losing their beloved leader and teacher.

Actually, anybody can have this orphanhood experience, even if they don’t lose a parent or a parental figure. Think of the many people nowadays who feel lonely and distressed, ashamed or hurt. There are so many depressed people. If only they could experience the quiet confidence that one has when one is sure about God’s love, when one feels Jesus’ comforting influence. Jesus can even be our defender, in that he knows when we have persevered and done the right thing without any appreciation, or even with dire consequences for having done the right thing. Jesus knows about that, as he experienced it himself.

Jesus directly says the Spirit of Truth is the secret to overcoming the feeling of orphanhood, or abandonment. It is a spirit of comfort and an active reminder of Jesus himself. He says it will help them to remember his words. In chapter 15, he says the Spirit “will testify on my behalf” (15:26). Then, in chapter 16, “He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you” (16:14). So the Spirit of Truth is the channel of Jesus, transmitting his teachings, and resonating within us when we *hear* his teachings.

Only the Gospel of John and the First Letter of John (1 John 4:6) use this title, Spirit of Truth. The other authors use either “Holy Spirit,” or simply “the Spirit.” It may be that John knows something the others do not, and is making a distinction the others have failed to make. “Holy Spirit” is a phrase that occurs in the Old Testament, in Psalms and Isaiah (Ps 51:11; Isa 63:10–11). So the Holy Spirit existed on earth before Jesus poured out his *own* Spirit on Pentecost. Christian teaching has been confused on this subject, but it seems clear that the Holy Spirit of the Old Testament is a spirit that was always available to the human race, while Jesus says he will send *“another* Advocate.” The Spirit of Truth is specifically Jesus’ *own* spirit, and it only became available on Pentecost.

What John and First John call “The Spirit of Truth” is called simply “the Spirit” by Paul, and usually called the “Holy Spirit” by other authors and theologians. But really, the Spirit of Truth is specifically the Jesus spirit. We see in today’s passages that this spirit is all about Jesus, glorifying him, the Spirit not speaking of himself but passing on what he “hears” from Jesus, helping people recall his words.

What about its effect on you? This Spirit will “guide you into all the truth” (16:13). The Spirit is a truth magnet or a truth compass within you. Does that mean you don’t need any teachers, any books? Do you no longer need to learn by trial and error, but are able to just *know* the truth instantaneously? Probably not. But does it mean that, once you start learning spiritually, and loving Jesus, that this Spirit will somehow guide you further? It *does*. Then, do you stop making mistakes? Does error cease to be possible? Not at all. Even people who have lots of this Spirit can still make errors. That’s a *given*, when it comes to human beings. We are fallible, and we remain fallible even when we’ve become wise and mature. But if you are a serious follower, and a serious *student*, of Jesus, and you practice serving others, you will be led into truth and more truth. The Spirit becomes a force within you.

Really the Spirit of Truth is meant to strengthen us in our inward faith in the eventual triumph of truth. This spirit is a vigorous answer to any temptation to despair. It so often seems that lies, greed, and violence rule the world. But there is something mysterious that, in the short run, empowers a spiritual protest, and in the long run, fosters the emergence of truth which outruns these evils. The Spirit of Truth is the anti-cynical spirit. In fact it brings the joy and sociality of heaven into this world. It confounds the kings, outsmarts the advisors, and outlives the oppressors.

There were people who were imprisoned for their humanitarian activities for many years by oppressive governments, such as the playwright Vaclav Havel in Czechoslovakia and the advocate of religious freedom, Father Gleb Yakunin, in the Soviet Union, who were later released, who watched the collapse of those dictatorships, and were then able to resume their truth-telling, and contribute to human rights in Europe. Havel said “we are going through a transitional period. . . . Only a new spiritual vision—cosmic in its dimensions and global in scope—can rescue civilization” (*Religion Online*, “The Christian Church: Engaging the Future”).

I think that the Spirit of Truth will play the key role here. By affirming that truth will finally prevail in the world, the Spirit of Truth guarantees a spirituality of endless progress. It fosters a faith that need not be fanatical, since it is sure of its path of unending discovery of truth. And so the Spirit of Truth creates a new kind of human being, a person of forceful faith yet gentle character. The Spirit of Truth encourages a religiosity of love and openness.

Truth is something both intellectual and spiritual. You can become more learned and more loving, more knowledgeable while being more compassionate. Now, is it learning about God, or learning about right and wrong, wise and ethical living? Probably all these things. It says “*all* truth.”

Finally, Jesus says the Spirit of Truth will declare things to come. It seems to be a prophetic spirit, both in the sense of proclaiming divine things, and of foretelling. In summary, the Spirit of Truth is like a Jesus channel, proclaiming Jesus, “declaring” what he taught, affirming the triumph of truth, outlasting lies and rumors, foretelling spiritual change, and comforting believers. That last one is important. “He will be in you” (14:17), Jesus says. This Spirit is our inward strength.

We are not alone in the world. We were not abandoned. And we *do* matter to Jesus. If he were here he would say “take heart, daughter,” or “you, too, are a child of God.” Learn to draw upon your inner guide. Draw some joy from the future, and throw it down here in the present!