

John 15:26-27, 16: 12-15 "Start of Something Big" Rev. Janet Chapman 5/20/18

"When the Advocate comes," Jesus began, having already laid a lot of heavy stuff on his followers the night before he died. He spoke about loving each other, being hated, and thrown out of synagogues. Some of it he had said before but that particular night, Jesus raised a topic they had heard very little about, the coming of the Advocate. He hadn't said much about it because he was physically with them, but now he was getting ready to leave and he wanted them to understand something big was about to happen. The night lent itself towards great anticipation as they knew something was coming, something big. During the dinner, the brothers James and John acted like they knew what glory was about to befall them and wanted to be executive assistants of the new royal venture to come. The disciples avoided the servant roles like washing of the feet before the meal, so Jesus had to model humility and servanthood by picking up the towel. Then Jesus says, "When the Advocate, the Spirit of Truth comes..." The disciples' actions have shown Jesus they can't handle the truth right then. So Jesus says to them, "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now."

There is an iconic scene in the movie "A Few Good Men" where Jack Nicholson says to Tom Cruise "You can't handle the truth." Jesus is saying the same but in a far more kinder, gentler way. The word "bear" in Greek means not simply to endure but to carry physically, like to bear a heavy weight. It is seen in such texts like when Jesus accepts and forgives the woman who anoints his feet, the truth of God's grace is too heavy for Simon and his guests to carry in their hearts. When Jesus heals the demoniac, the truth of his healing power is too heavy for the community to bear. But when the Spirit of Truth comes, we will be gently guided into all the truth, we will be led to the start of something big. Before we judge the disciples too harshly for their failure to bear the truth, we need to consider ourselves. We have often encountered

truth we weren't ready to bear. If we are white and raised in a racist society, our first reaction to civil rights would probably be to dismiss the movement; if we are straight and raised in a homophobic society, our first reaction might be to explain it away as curable. If we are male and imbued with a sense of privilege over women, our first response to the glass ceiling might be defensiveness. Again and again in life there is truth, there are the beginnings of new understandings, that are too hard to bear.

The followers of Jesus who gathered in that upper room in Jerusalem over 2000 years ago struggled with what they were experiencing – gusts of wind, tongues like fire, hearing the Word spoken in their own dialect. They blamed the wine, saying people just had too much to drink the night before. Like them, we can't handle the truth – too scary, too outside of our own reality and most importantly, outside of our own control. The community of Santa Fe, TX can't believe it is their school this time that got shot up, their school where they are supposed to feel safe and protected. There were no blatant signs that something horrific was on the horizon. Yet Santa Fe student Paige Curry remarked, "It's been happening everywhere, I always kind of felt like it was going to happen here too, so I wasn't surprised, just scared." Here we have an advocate of Truth speaking out that unless dramatic changes occur, the narrative for every American student will not be **if** such horror happens, but **when**. Can we bear the truth? Jesus says I have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. If not now, then when, O God, will we be able to handle the truth?

On that day of Pentecost, something bigger and better was started which led the followers on a pilgrimage of discovery. The Holy Spirit infused and changed the hearts of those present – the Spirit of truth began to guide Jesus' followers after he left them. When the

author used the word “guide,” the message seems to indicate that bearing the truth, living in truth, is a process which takes time. It requires the grace of patience with ourselves and others as the Spirit conducts us, like a maestro conductor, to those places at first we would not go, and helps us bear what we earlier would not be capable of bearing. For years and years in our nation’s history, we had a specific understanding concerning the right to bear arms, but what if the Spirit of Truth is trying to guide us into a wider understanding for the sake of our children? Can we bear the truth?

American Baptist Preacher Tony Campolo tells a story of bearing the truth at the right time. One day, he was the guest speaker at a small Pentecostal college in the deep south and several of the faculty members gathered around him in a side room to pray for him prior to the service. He knelt down and they all placed their hands on his head and started praying – as they prayed, they leaned on his head for balance. The longer they prayed, the harder they leaned, and one kept saying, “Can you feel the Spirit? Lord, I can feel the Spirit now.” Tony tried not to roll his eyes, thinking to himself that he did feel something right at the base of his neck, but he wasn’t sure it was the Spirit. Then one of the faculty started praying at length about this student named Charlie Stephens. That kind of ticked Tony off as he thought, “If you’re going to lean on my head, the least you can do is pray for me.” The guy started calling out, “Lord, don’t let Charlie leave his wife and children. Send an angel to bring that man back to his family. Don’t let that family be destroyed. You know who I’m talking about, Lord... Charlie Stephens. He lives right down the road about a mile on the right-hand side in a silver house trailer.” At this point, Tony thought, with some degree of exasperation, God knows where he lives... What do you think God’s doing, sitting in heaven saying, “Now give me that

address again”? Finally the prayer ended, Tony did his chapel talk, and headed home. As he was getting on the turnpike, he saw a hitchhiker, looked him square in the eyes as passed by and thought, “That looks like a nice young man; I need to help him.” So he came back around and rolled his window down. “Hi,” he said, “I’m Tony Campolo. What’s your name?” He responded, “Hi, my name’s Charlie Stephens. I’m looking for a ride.” Tony nearly convulsed on the spot. He said, “Get in.” Tony didn’t say another word but drove down the turnpike, got off at the next exit, turned around, and headed back. Charlie looked at him and said, “Hey mister, where are you taking me?” “I’m taking you home,” Tony said. “Why?” he said. “Because you just left your wife and 3 children, right?” Charlie responded, “How’d you know that?” Tony kept going until he drove him straight up to his house trailer. Charlie warily leaned far away saying, “How did you know I lived here?” “God told me!” Tony said, figuring that was pretty close to the truth. He went on, “You are coming with me into that trailer because I want to talk to you and your wife.” Charlie scrambled out of the car and ran in the house, told his wife what just happened, and they listened like they had never listened before. The truth hit them square in the eye and they committed to give it another try – been married now for about 20 years and Charlie became a Pentecost preacher.

When the Spirit of truth comes, Jesus says, you will be guided into all the truth. It is the start of something big, it is the beginning of a process which will take time, patience, and a willingness to be used by the ultimate mystery which is the Holy Spirit of God. Something’s coming; something big. Can you bear the truth for the sake of all God’s children? How will the Spirit of Truth which came at Pentecost and comes today work within you?