### “The Advocate” Steve Finlan for The First Church, June 8, 2025

**John 14:15–17, 26–27**

15 “If you love me, you will keep my commandments. 16 And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. 17 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 with you, and he will be in you. . .

26“The Advocate,the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and remind you of all that I have said to you. 27 Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.”

**Acts 2:1–4, 14–18**

1When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. 2 And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. 3 Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. 4 All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability. . .

14Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, “Fellow Jews and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. 15 Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o’clock in the morning. 16 No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel: ‘In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. 18 Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy.’”

Do you have any celebrations this month? Graduations, anniversaries? Of course, West Bridgewater will be celebrating the 375th birthday of The First Church next year. But we celebrate the birth of the *worldwide* church *every* year, on Pentecost. It is not the birthday of the Jesus movement, which existed for several years before Pentecost, nor of Jesus’ public ministry, which began when he was baptized in the Jordan. But Pentecost *is* the birthday of the church and of its being guided by the Spirit. Jesus had to leave our world for the Spirit to come. Later in John he says: “it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Advocate will not come to you” (16:7).

Pentecost was a Jewish festival of the wheat harvest, also commemorating the giving of the Torah on Sinai, celebrated fifty days after Passover. On the Pentecost in question, all the leaders in the Jesus movement, the apostles, the seventy evangelists, the Samaritan and Greek followers of Jesus, and the women, that is, the four Marys, Susanna, Joanna, and other leaders, received the Spirit of Truth, as John calls it, or the Holy Spirit, as Luke calls it. Such a gathering!

This is when the disciples no longer had Jesus personally present to lead them, but did receive this wonderful and astounding spiritual force, the Spirit, poured out on Pentecost, to lead them. Peter says it is the fulfillment of a prophecy from Joel about young men and women, old folks, even male and female slaves seeing visions and prophesying. It was promised four or five centuries earlier, and now finally the day had come.

This spirit is only available to those who love the truth. It helps to make truth a personal possession, an inalienable part of the believer’s experience. In fact, *we* nowcan experience truth in a deeper way. The Spirit provides a feeling of companionship with Jesus, since it is a spirit that stands for Jesus, and it helped the apostles to recall his words. The Spirit draws attention to the *life* of Jesus, to everything he said and did. The Spirit of Truth is really a Jesus spirit, drawing attention to Jesus and not to itself. We can be thankful to the Spirit of Truth for facilitating our understanding of Jesus’ message.

Now, it is true that our translation refers to the Spirit as “him,” but the Greek, at least in most manuscripts, uses the neuter pronoun, “it” (*auto*). Apparently it was a point of debate among the early Christians, because *some* of the manuscripts that have been preserved have changed the pronoun to the masculine form, “he” (*autos*). Apparently that group of copyists was thinking of the Trinity, and wanting to affirm that the Third Person of the Trinity, the Spirit, is indeed a *person*. But the passages on the pouring out of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost don’t speak of the Trinity; they are just describing the Spirit that Jesus sent, which was sent to testify of Jesus, and to lead us into truth.

As Jesus says, God “will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever” (John 14:16). The Spirit can be called another Advocate or “another Comforter” (as in the American Standard Version). The Advocate or the Comforter helps personalize truth for us. It gives a flavor of surety, authenticity, and reality to our spiritual experience.

Thus, the Spirit affirms the sacredness of *our* personhood, the reality of *our* spiritual experience. The Spirit also signifies the freeing of religion from the control of a priestly caste or from ownership by any particular race or nation. People coming from many different lands were present in Jerusalem for Pentecost when the Spirit was poured out. The Spirit was bestowed on all these races, on men and women alike, and even upon slave and free. The Spirit signifies a new freedom from race, caste, gender, and class hierarchies. These are material categories. For Spirit, these worldly distinctions are unnecessary. It is spirit values and meanings that are important. “Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty” (2 Cor 3:17 ASV).

Now, liberty can be disconcerting. A truth seeker might find him- or herself to be alone much of the time, not conforming to the crowd but not yet finding a new crowd or finding the answers. A truth seeker can also be very self-critical. It’s not easy to be open to criticism and to new viewpoints. But it is invigorating, too, to be willing to discover new things, to be a perennial student, to value the quest, and not just an imagined destination. If you find truth in Jesus, then your seeking will indeed have a destination, as well as a home in the present moment.

In some ways, the Spirit of Truth is a mystery—some manuscripts provide a masculine pronoun, some give a neuter one. Some think that since this Spirit can be called the Advocate or the Comforter, and the gender of *that* noun is masculine, it must be personal. Others say that the only person that the Spirit focuses on is *Jesus*. In any case, the Spirit points to Jesus like a compass and helps to heighten our feeling for him. The life of Jesus—the *whole* life—is the most important thing that ever happened on this world. We need to pay attention to his whole life and to his person.

We gain knowledge of God in the face of Christ, Paul tells us (2 Cor 4:6), which means the *person* of Christ. We gain light from learning about his life. Somehow, the Spirit guides us into truth and knowledge of Jesus, like a truth-seeking magnet that guides us to truth and past the clutter and confusion of our worldly lives. The Spirit cultivates our *taste* for truth. It inclines our heart toward God.

So accept the Spirit into your heart, as did the men and women of the early church. Allow it to deepen your feeling for Jesus. Seek to broaden your own community of fellow seekers for the truth. And keep that GPS signal on, the one that points to your spiritual source.