

SERMON: "A BOLD SPIRIT OF TRUTH"

**TEXTS: NEW TESTAMENT ROMANS 5:1-5
NEW TESTAMENT JOHN 16:7-15**

**June 15, 2025
Trinity Sunday**

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INTRODUCTION

I began my ministry as an associate pastor for 7 years in Bowling Green, Kentucky Then moved to Reidsville. North Carolina, a town of about 14,000 near Greensboro as a solo pastor. I followed a pastor who served that church for 32 years and retired in that same town. He wrote an article in a major publication about how to retire and give the new pastor some space. I took comfort in that

He also very publicly handed over his keys and his robe on his last Sunday Told the congregation he would not do weddings or funerals. He would steer clear I appreciated his intentionality. Then Lucille, a prominent member from a large extended family got cancer. I called about every other week trying to set up a visit, was always told it wasn't a good time.

I just showed up a few times unannounced. She received me graciously But her family kept an awkward distance. She died after 6 months of fighting the good fight. That's when the family's anger came out saying I never visited Also when I found out her good friend, the former pastor, had been visiting her 'as a friend' about twice a week. Heard those comparisons.

I learned a lesson through that experience and have worked hard in my own ministry on giving the new person space and welcoming former pastors with graciousness and clear lines of communication. I've also done lots of work through presbytery, especially in Atlanta, when and where former pastors have done some meddling

I tell you that story and use the transition from old friend to new pastor to try and get at what Jesus is saying to his disciples in these verses from John. Scholars call these chapters, chapters 13-17, the Farewell Discourse Jesus is telling them he will no longer be with them, preparing them for that And he is introducing them to what's next, who is next – the Holy Spirit

I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. 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. He will glorify me because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

BACK AND FORTH

In introducing the Spirit, Jesus wants to make sure the disciples see the continuation
The Spirit will take what is Jesus' and declare it to them. And just before this,
he talks about the Spirit as an advocate that he will send to them.

The new Spirit is a continuation of the Jesus they know
They can follow this Spirit just as they have been following Jesus

You can understand the disciples' reluctance. They are worried about how
they will navigate the road ahead without Jesus, who they will follow
Worried about the mistakes they will make, the detours and dead ends
You can also understand why John spends several chapters with Jesus
preparing his followers for life and ministry after he is gone

Jesus needs to make this introduction, why they needed to know and trust the Spirit
Why we need to know and trust the Holy Spirit, who is the risen Christ present
with us, whose leadership is a continuation of Jesus' leadership.

We can trust in the continuity and connection between Jesus and the Spirit
We can step into the new trusting its connection to the old

Today is Trinity Sunday, a focus on God as three persons – Three in one, one in three
And that focus is on the continuity of the three. As a gospel writer, Matthew
wanted to argue that Jesus is the one promised from of old. He quotes the
Hebrew bible quite often to make that connection. John as a gospel writer
is doing the same here connecting Jesus and the Holy Spirit – looking forward

This passage from John shows the interconnection of the three persons of God
Follow along as I read again what Jesus said. See how much back
and forth there is between the three persons of the Trinity.

**I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now.
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. He will glorify me because he
will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine.
For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.**

Do you see the busyness in these few verses?

A writer from England, Meda Stamper, helped me see the back and forth
She wrote in her commentary for Working Preacher ...

*This text moves from Jesus through the Spirit to us and from Jesus back
to the one who sent him (Jesus—us—Spirit—us—Spirit—Jesus—Spirit—
us—Father—Jesus—Spirit—us) and paints a picture of the eternal love
flowing from the one who sends, to the sent one, to the Spirit who dwells
in us in abiding love*

INTO THE TRUTH

That's not just every person on the Trinity included – Father, Son and Spirit
That is us too. Every person of the Trinity and every person
All that back and forth between Jesus and the Father ...
“All the Father has is mine” is something John mentions many times
He wants us to see the connection between Father, Son, Spirit ... and us

In this farewell to the disciples Jesus wants us to see the connection
going forward through that Spirit ... going forward into the truth. Jesus tells us,
When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth,

So let's talk about that – the truth and how we know what is the truth
I'll try to tackle that with some humility and hopefulness by acknowledging
the disconnect and then trying to make some connections

First, the disconnect. We don't really know the truth
Or to admit the honest and familiar line from a movie ... we can't handle the truth
We approach the question with needed humility and rigorous honesty
First, we admit that we like the disciples of old worry about the future
We don't know the way. We're afraid of the mistakes we might make

We admit we need someone to lead us and that those leaders aren't always right
They will lead us down some detours, dead ends and even some ditches
That includes some paths that look good at first, some good intentions
And some short-sighted and even self-serving side trips

And that is true of all our leaders, those history will name as good
and those history will not. We travel an uncertain road and we learn as we go
Humility will serve us well as we journey. Learn by trial and error.
So too a rigorous honesty that will admit our definition of what is true
is biased by our bubbles, by what we take in and what we keep out

A filter we all too often use in determining what is true and what is not,
often the first filter we use is a partisan one. Sometimes so very partisan
that we find it all too easy to point out specks in other people's eyes
and become quite defensive about any splinters we might have in our own

From my place in this church that seeks to be a place for everyone
I bring up that bias because I think it's like going to the doctor
Tell the doctor the truth, don't tell them you've been exercising 2-3 times a week
when you haven't been. Tell them about candy drawer in your office.

Seeking the truth means telling ourselves the truth – humility, honesty
One tip about that bias ... watch out for adjectives. They're not necessarily
compass needles pointing to true north – more like neon flashing to get our attention
Our algorithms are full of adjectives to catch our eye. But the truth is not there
Look instead to the verbs – what was done and is being done
That is closer to the truth

SUMMARY

Now, about the connection – connecting to the truth. I still remember a sermon I heard in college. Charlie Hasty was my pastor at First church in Athens. It was based on the story of Jesus brought before Pilate in John, chapter 18.

Pilate asked him, “So you are a king?” Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.” Pilate asked him, “What is truth?”

Charlie ended his sermon about truth saying, “Jesus didn’t answer him. He just stood there as if to say ‘you’re looking at it.’”
Charlie makes a very good point. Jesus did also say (also in John)
“I am the way, the truth and the life.”

How about we define ‘truth’ first and foremost through a theological filter?
And, to be more specific, by understanding Jesus as the truth.
Let him be our true north, our compass, our guide into the truth

I think that is what is going on through this farewell in John 13-17 as Jesus introduces his followers to the Spirit by way of its connection to him by pointing to the connection and continuity ...
“he will take what is mine and declare it to you.”

The Spirit of truth guides into all truth by way of our connection to Jesus
So how do we do connect? For me that means leaning into my identity as a follower of Jesus Christ, following his lead, his teaching.

One of my regrets is being kind of uppity when I found out about red-print bibles, where Jesus’ words are printed in red so as to stand out. I was wrong
More and more as I see Christianity portrayed as something that seems quite distant from what I’ve read about Jesus of Nazareth, I need his words (not words about him, but his words) to know the truth

I need to connect to his words, his example
I need to let those red letters be my starting point, my ground
Let me share with you again an image from Brian McLaren about how best to read the bible, to see how it all fits together, how it connects

If you hold up a bible like this with the spine, the binding facing up
You can see how that holds the whole book together, that binding, that centerpiece
Then think of the gospels, the stories of Jesus and by Jesus – the red letters

They are what connect what has gone before, the Old Testament which points to Jesus and the New Testament letters that build on those stories of Jesus
It all connects through Jesus as he is known in the gospels
Looking to be led by the Spirit into all truth, this is where I will start and stay
With Jesus – not my adjectives about him ... but with his words