

# The Day of Pentecost, Gospel, Year B

IN NEED OF AN ADVOCATE

John 15:26-27, 16:4b-15

The Day of Pentecost

Analysis by Mark Marius

[Jesus said,] 26“When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father, he will testify on my behalf. 27You also are to testify because you have been with me from the beginning.

...

16:4b“I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you. 5But now I am going to him who sent me; yet none of you asks me, ‘Where are you going?’ 6But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your hearts. 7Nevertheless I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. 8And having come, the Advocate will prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: 9about sin, because they do not believe in me; 10about righteousness, because I am going to the Father and you will see me no longer; 11about judgment, because the ruler of this world has been condemned.

12“I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. 13When the Spirit of truth comes, you will be guided into all the truth; for the Spirit will not speak on the Spirit’s own authority, but will speak whatever the Spirit hears, and will declare to you the things that are to come. 14The Spirit will glorify me, taking what is mine and declaring it to you. 15All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that the Spirit will take what is mine and declare it to you.”

## Diagnosis: Our Truth Hurts

### Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem): Wrong about Sin

Everyone in the world gets sin wrong. We are good at identifying the sin of others and often feel the need to punish them for it. But, we also are very adept at hiding our own sin to avoid such punishment. That is our worldly human condition. The consequence is that we live with our hidden pain and do whatever we can to avoid having it exposed.

### Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem): Wrong about Righteousness

Because we carry our sin, we are in deep need of righteousness. Our sin torments us with a desire to be made righteous. That's why we turn to what is available to us and in plain sight—the law, because it is what we have been given to follow. We evaluate ourselves by how well we keep the law and how poorly others do, and call that righteousness. Sometimes we feel pretty good with our results, other times we conceded that we must work harder. But true righteousness can only be given by the One who lives with God and it seems that he is nowhere to be found.

### Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem): Wrong about Judgment

Judgment is God's alone. But the ruler of this world seduces us to think that our own judgment, peer judgment, worldly judgment should matter most to us. And we believe it. We fear being held accountable for all our sins and fail to trust that God will act with mercy. So we seek to avoid God's rule in favor of a rule that has been defeated. The only place that will lead us is to our own defeat.

## PROGNOSIS: The Truth Heals

### Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution): Pardon Me

Jesus reveals the truth to us by his unwavering obedience to God. His light reveals to us the darkness of the world and

penetrates its very depths on the cross. He confronted the ruler of the world through suffering and dying, and was made a conqueror through God raising Jesus to new life. And the Advocate he gives guides us as we face the very things that we think will kill us, and instead shows us God's truth that gives life.

#### Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution): Holy

The truth about righteousness is that Christ gives it to us. We recognize this through the Holy Sacraments. Instead of working for our own righteousness we embrace the water and the Word of our Baptism, and Christ's own body and blood in Communion. The Advocate declares these things to us, revealing that our lives are not separated from God, but joined in the community of Jesus with the Father—the body of Christ.

#### Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution): Testimony

Finally, with the Advocate testifying to all that Christ has done for us we offer our own testimony to others. Our best testimony comes when we act as advocates for others. Those who get tripped up by the lie that suffering, pain and death are stronger than the hope of Christ. Those who are told that God's love is not for them or their lifestyle. Those who preach punishment for sin without the grace of forgiveness. Those who suffer for the color of their skin, the place of their birth, the understanding of their sexuality... the list goes on. The truth of the Spirit declares God's love and life to all these others. Because what is God's is Christ's and what is Christ's is now ours to share.

#### Tracking

The NY Times recently had an article announcing the opening of The National Memorial for Peace and Justice in Montgomery, Alabama. As the name of the nonprofit organization behind this museum indicates, the Equal Justice Initiative is about exposing

the injustice of our nation's past in order heal and ensure justice for our future. This nonprofit is an advocacy group for the economically powerless and for victims of systemic racism.

One of the centerpieces of the museum is the exhibit dedicated to the almost 4,400 racial terror lynchings that happened throughout the South—injustice at its very worst. Bryan Stevenson, author of *Just Mercy*, and founder of the nonprofit, offers some telling quotes in the article:

“People do not want to admit wrongdoing in America, Mr. Stevenson said, because they expect only punishment.”

This is a dire diagnosis for a nation that likes to flaunt its founding on Christian principles. It suggests that we are a nation that is in desperate need for God's grace and forgiveness—the principles that Jesus not only taught but embodied. (See Steps 1-3 above.)

“I'm not interested in talking about America's history because I want to punish America,” Mr. Stevenson continued. “I want to liberate America. And I think it's important for us to do this as an organization that has created an identity that is as disassociated from punishment as possible.”

That sounds like the Spirit of truth speaking. And it is when the Spirit leads us to the Truth that liberation and redemption can be experienced—offering forgiveness for our historical sins is what we are guided to do by the Spirit of truth. (See Step 4.)

“If I believe that each of us is more than the worst thing he's ever done,” he said, “I have to believe that for everybody.”

If that is not the gospel truth, I don't know what is. That is the prodigal grace God gives to us through Christ. This is the

truth told to us in Baptism and Holy Communion. (See Step 5.)

The museum highlights the many cases of wrongly convicted victims of racial injustice and the lengthy process it takes in liberating them. Anthony Ray Hinton, who spent 28 years on Alabama's death row, before receiving the justice he deserved refused to give in to despair:

"I refuse to believe that [advocacy for justice] is hopeless, because I am a product of what can happen when you fight," he said. "If we don't fight, who's going to fight?"

We too can fight for or testify to the truth for people like Mr. Hinton because the Advocate guides us in advocacy. (See Step 6.)

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