

Sunday 23rd June 2024 - That's The Spirit! : Truth

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Date: 23 June 2024

Preacher: Dave Moss

[0 : 00] Good morning. Morning Dave. We are continuing our series on looking at the work of the Holy Spirit.

And I don't know if you noticed that this week on Thursday we have what we call the longest day. Actually it's just 24 hours long just like any other day.

But what we actually mean is that it's got the longest daylight hours of course. The summer solstice. For some people it signifies the start of summer.

And for some it's the dawn celebration that's really important. And for others it has religious significance. But I say it must be the start of winter as the nights are drawing in now aren't they?

They are drawing in. But what date is it on? This year it's been on the 20th of June. But I actually thought it should be the 21st June.

[1 : 10] Yet sometimes it's on the 22nd of June. Well it depends as our calendar year doesn't quite match what the planets are all up to. And was Stonehenge really just built so we could admire the summer solstice?

You can never be certain. So what's the truth about Stonehenge and the summer solstice? Well it holds different truths for different people.

And when we come to the Holy Spirit. Today we're looking at the spirit of truth. And Pontius Pilate when Jesus was brought for trial before him.

Famously asked what is truth? A question that has resounded through the centuries. As peoples have grappled with the notion of what is true.

Jesus explains that when the spirit of truth comes. He will guide you into all truth. But what does this actually mean?

[2 : 22] These days it's fashionable to think there is no real truth. Truth is simply what feels right for you. People don't like to think that they're wrong.

Or indeed that others might think in a different way. And so we end up with truth is what feels right for you. It's rather bizarre if you think about it.

As we all end up with different truths. And it becomes very, very confusing. The other approach. Which is also very popular. Is that truth is only what you can test.

Or prove to be in existence. So for example. You need air to breathe. Or you'll die. Plants need water to grow.

The sun shines. Well we hope. So I need to put on sun cream. Otherwise my skin might get burnt. All true.

[3 : 23] Facts. It's measurable. And yet here's Jesus saying that the Holy Spirit will come and guide you into all truth.

That's clearly far more than just digesting a few facts. For people of faith. For people of faith. Understanding truth comes from a God in whom they trust.

A God who will guide you. A God who will lead you. And a God who will show you what is true. I am sure.

I am sure. Like me. You're really excited by the forthcoming general election.

We've got such a good choice of leaders this time. Their manifestos have become compulsory bedtime reading. And they're all promising so much.

[4 : 28] And every issue in this country. And consequently our daily lives will all be sorted out soon. And all we need to do is vote for them.

All will be well. And their promises will become true. Well dream on. In fact we've become full circle haven't we?

It seems. We don't know who to trust anymore. We don't know who can be relied upon to tell the truth. So perhaps it's easy just to shut them out.

Turn them off. Their truth often seems to be a lie. It will be interesting to see what voter turnout is like. As so many people try to count themselves out.

From what they seem to be an untrustworthy process. Politics seems to provide no certainties. On which we can live by.

[5 : 37] And in today's society it's considered all important to have our lives on track. On having things together and all sorted out. We like certainty.

Knowing what's coming. We buy pretty much the same things in the supermarket. We know the music we like. We know the TV programs we like to watch.

We know the places we like to visit. The people we want to be with. We yearn for a beautiful life where all is in order.

And we know where we're going. We have the perfect home. We have the perfect home. And live with our well behaved children. We have the perfect job where we're fully appreciated.

And the next promotion is just around the corner. We have fabulous holidays. and dine with the most sumptuous food on our tables.

[6 : 41] This is what advertising and all the social media channels project and what we buy into. The truth is that our lives are full of uncertainties.

Often, we're not sure whether we're coming or going. We're never quite sure what each day will bring and we're not sure what is reliable or what is true.

People ask, how are you? Well, I really don't know. I just don't know where to start. It's not an acceptable answer.

If we're honest, we're often lost and bewildered. We long for a certainty from day to day. And then we come to church.

The version of Christianity that many of us have grown up with has been the perfect antidote to all this uncertainty. The version of the Christian faith, this version of the Christian faith, is often presented as a definitive package of beliefs and certainties.

[7 : 53] Certainties like, believe and you will be saved. You're on the way to heaven. God answers prayer.

Worship God and you'll feel a better person. Do this and God will bless you. We like the routine and predictability of this sort of church life.

The same events week after week. A service that follows an orderly pattern. The same place to sit. The same songs to sing.

And the same coffee, tea and biscuits. It's like a comfy pair of slippers. I'm not suggesting there's anything particularly wrong with this.

But God often has other ideas. Again, during our lifetimes, we've seen many people turn away from the church as they perceive it to be false or hypocritical.

[9 : 03] Claims that all you need to do is believe and all will be well. Don't go very far. Trying to present the walk of Christian faith as the road to complete happiness and success will ultimately fall apart.

As indeed it often happens. Now someone is bound to come up to me and tell me, Dave, don't be so negative. Concentrate on the joy.

Some will simply tell me that I haven't got enough faith. And I'll say, Dave, if you had enough faith, all will be well. But deep down, we know that the glossy, happy and blessed all the time version just doesn't ring true.

The Christian life seems to hold as many uncertainties as our daily lives. There are questions that just won't go away. And like our politics, we can end up just shutting things off and concentrating on the comfortable and the familiar.

This is a statue of the Greek philosopher Plato, who lived from 427 to 348 BC.

[10 : 25] His writings and philosophical thought have influenced Western thinking ever since. He's essentially a dualist, dividing things into two.

So for instance, he separates out the spirit from the flesh, the body and the mind, ideas from things you can touch.

And such dualism lends itself easily to the popular mind. It's attractive as it deals with certainties and things that are easily identified.

And dualism has permeated Christian thought over the centuries, and it's very much still with us today. So fundamental truths are presented as being absolutes from which there's no escape.

It's a form of black and white thinking that can easily dominate our whole lives. And there's this sorting system, which is so often so ingrained that we don't know that we're doing it.

[11 : 36] There are containers in which every person or idea is to be placed. So for example, saved, not saved.

Good, evil. Us, not us. Holy, sinful. Bible-believing, heathen.

Test this out. Go back and listen to those party manifestos and hear how this is done. Our party has the best answers. The others haven't.

Our party will make your life great. The others won't. It's all very, very familiar. And it's hard to turn it off when that's how we've been taught.

And our fragmented minds only ever see in parts and never as the whole. This is what we do. We sort things out and separate things out.

[12 : 41] So this box is my work life. This box is my home life. This box is my life with my friends and this box is my life in church.

Let's listen to what Jesus has to say. If you love me, keep my commands.

And I will ask the Father and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever. The Spirit of Truth. The world cannot accept him because it neither sees him nor knows him.

But you know him. For he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans. I will come to you. Before long, the world will not see me anymore.

But you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. On that day, you will realize that I am in my Father and you are in me and I am in you.

[13 : 57] Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my Father and I too will love them and show myself to them.

Then Judas, not Judas Iscariot, said, But Lord, why do you intend to show yourself to us and not to the world?

Jesus replied, Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them and we will come to them and make our home with them. Anyone who does not love me will not obey my teaching.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. These words you hear are not my own.

They belong to the Father who sent me. All this I have spoken while still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.

[15 : 08] Peace I leave with you, my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

You heard me say, I am going away and I am coming back to you. If you loved me, you would be glad that I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I.

I have told you now, before it happens, so that when it does happen, you will believe. I will not say much more to you, for the Prince of this world is coming.

He has no hold over me, but he comes so that the world may learn that I love the Father and do exactly what my Father has commanded me.

Come now, let us leave. Jesus explains something the disciples find hard to understand.

[16 : 17] They cannot contemplate life without Jesus. Surely, he will be present with them for a long time yet. They see things as very black and white.

they have their own sorting system at work. Jesus will take charge and they'll be on the winning side. But no, Jesus says, he's going away so that spirit of truth can come to be an advocate.

What? Where's all this come from? That's what they're thinking. But this advocate, this spirit, will always stand by God's people.

The spirit will bring people to the truth of God. The spirit, who has been with Jesus, is to dwell in those who believe. The counselor, the Holy Spirit, will teach you all things and remind you of what Jesus has said and taught.

Jesus promises that this is life, this is peace, this is the love and grace of a working relationship with God.

[17 : 35] This is truth. The world has no hold on you if you rest in God. The spirit of truth, the advocate, or the paraclete, as it's sometimes, as he's sometimes called, is one called in to help, to come alongside, not intermittent help, but continuous help, always and forever.

The spirit brings the truth, the clarity, to the situation. The spirit highlights the truth of Jesus' words and teaching.

The spirit's help is ongoing. Jesus, at this time, is more than aware of the powers and the forces stacked up against him, most especially the Pharisees.

Yet, despite all of this, he knows that the Father is with him always. That is his promise. The Holy Spirit will be with you always.

Emmanuel, God with us. Notice where this teaching takes place. It's in the upper room, a place they often meet, part of their day-to-day.

[19 : 01] The advocate, the paraclete, comes alongside us, guides us in our day-to-day. For those caught up in the life of the world, well, they're busy sorting, putting things in their boxes, trying to bring about certainty and order.

And for others, they say, yes, I believe in Jesus and that he saved them. But then that sort of stops at the cross.

cross. But for those who believe, they see beyond the cross. They understand that Jesus is very much alive and the spirit of truth helps us to see Jesus as he is now.

Jesus promises a peace which nothing in the present world can provide, a peace which comes from and points to God.

God himself comes to be at home with us in our very hearts, at home with us in our Christian community, at home with us in our home, our job, our family, our eating, our sleeping and whatever state that we're in.

[20 : 33] If we seek him, God will be at home with us in our society, in our politics, in our thirst for justice and fairness. If the Holy Spirit is at work, there is no black and white, no in or out.

All is sacred ground. All is sacred ground. The Holy Spirit breaks into our plans and our possibilities.

We, if we accept God in every part of our lives, we will be working with the Spirit of Truth alongside. The Spirit will work with us to show us the world, the truth of Jesus' words, and the total love of a Father for his whole creation.

God is inviting us into his presence all the time to put off all that's false and through his Holy Spirit to know the truth.

God is God is to God is to remain in us if we remain in him. The Spirit holds and surrounds our uncertainties because the Spirit is all around us and dwells in us.

[22 : 00] and then the Spirit is at the heart of our uncertainties. The Spirit in you allows you to trust there is a reason for everything.

God is even in this, we can say, even though I don't fully understand it. this very God, this very Jesus, this very Spirit comes alongside you.

You can trust. If things change, if things are desperate, then you can still trust. The Celtic symbol for the Holy Spirit is the wild goose.

And on the screen are some of the beautiful illustrations from Celtic manuscripts of the Gospels. Our lives are often plagued by the need for too much certainty.

But this idea of the wild goose shows us that life can be far from certain. The wild goose flies with purpose and determination, but at the same time is totally unpredictable.

[23 : 17] Wild. The wild goose reveals a spirit which is passionate, noisy, and courageous. This symbol reminds us that God's spirit cannot be tamed or contained.

In our search for comfort and certainty, are we prepared for God to be wild? God is good and God is actively involved in my life.

That is truth. God is sacred.

God is sacred. God is sacred. God's love and love and love and windows is sacred.

Sorry, I'll say all that again. We are not sorting out things into boxes, but seeing that for God everything is sacred. We are not called to believe in things, but to live and behave in a way that changes us.

[24 : 29] God's truth is love. The Spirit helps us to understand that love that he has for us. And the Spirit shows us our true identity. God is investing in us in a loving relationship, in a relationship with you as a person and with us all as a society. This is a scene from the play Gideon by Paddy Chayefsky. Gideon, Old Testament character, is trying to work out if God is really calling him. Gideon is out in the desert in his tent a thousand miles from nowhere, feeling deserted and rejected by God. One night God breaks into the tent and Gideon is seduced, ravished, hurt, overcome and burnt by the wildfire of God's love. He's up all night, pacing back and forth in his tent. Finally dawn comes and Gideon, in his Jewish accent, cries out, God, oh God, all night long I've been thought of nothing but you, nothing but you. I'm caught up in the raptures of love. God, I want to take you into my tent, wrap you up and keep you all to myself. God, hey God, tell me that you love me. And God answers, I love you Gideon.

Yeah, tell me again God, I love you Gideon. Gideon scratches his head, I don't understand, why, why, why do you love me? And God scratches his head and answers, I really don't know. Sometimes my Gideon, passion is unreasonable. This is the God of Jesus and the God revealed in Jesus, the God revealed to us by his spirit. Have we sorted God into the wrong box?

often we're presented with a God of religion who is said to love us but threatens us with punishment if we don't comply. The spirit of truth reveals a God who cherishes and graces all people without qualification, a God whose whole and only desire is our happiness and fulfillment, a God who draws alongside us every step of the way. Here's a prayer. I'm going to say it and then I'm going to ask you to join in with it please if you'd like to. Great spirit, wild goose of the almighty, I'll say it first.

Great spirit, wild goose of the almighty, be my eye in the dark places, be my flight in the trap places, be my host in the wild places, be my brood in the barren places, and be my formation in the lost places.

Let's say it together. Great spirit, wild goose of the almighty, be my eye in the dark places, be my flight in the trap places, be my host in the wild places, be my brood in the barren places, be my formation in the lost places. Amen.