

**THAT INNER VOICE; JOHN15:26-27; 16:4b-15; MAY 31, 2009;
THOMAS H. YORTY, WESTMINSTER PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

Pentecost is depicted in Acts as a day of great excitement when a loud, rushing wind descended upon Jesus' followers. They began speaking in the languages of all of those who were in Jerusalem that day which was the day of a great festival and people from all the known world were there.

More than a few people wondered how this could be because the ones doing the speaking were simple Galileans...not PhD students in Semitic languages. They were illiterate men. People couldn't figure it out.

In the world of biblical metaphor this event which is the birth of the church, the community of God's people, reminds us the Spirit of God enables the church to communicate with all people everywhere.

But today's story for Pentecost is not such a public affair. It is a quiet meeting between Jesus and his disciples. They are frightened because they *know*, they can *feel* the mood in the streets and among the political and religious authorities and it is not friendly to Jesus.

They fear for him. They fear for themselves should anything happen to him. This is the setting for today's reading and Jesus seeks to comfort them.

He tells them in today's story nothing will prevent his departure; but his leaving them will trigger the coming of what he calls the Advocate, the Comforter, the Holy Spirit.

What does Jesus mean by this Advocate/Comforter/Holy Spirit? One thing he means is that this is not our own voice. Unlike when someone asks you do you want to do A or B and you say let me think about it – and you choose what *you* want to do – that's your voice.

But what the Advocate Jesus talks about is the indwelling presence of God in our lives. Usually the best place for listening to this Advocate/Inner Voice is in our hearts. But sometimes we can't hear the Advocate unless we use our heads and think through the issues or talk to other people and discern what their thinking is.

Then we can turn to our hearts to process the information – especially if we are seeking to discern the answer for a difficult situation – and listen for that Voice that comes from beyond us. Then, more often than not, we recognize what the true and right thing is. This is what Jesus means when he says “the Spirit of truth will testify on my behalf.”

But there's a second step. Jesus says, “you also are to testify.” Knowing the truth but keeping it to ourselves, not testifying to the truth in our families, work places, here at church or school does not advance Jesus' cause of justice and peace.

The point of having the Advocate after Jesus was crucified, buried and raised was to be able to go on living as his followers as if he were by our side.

The disciples were worried about having him to teach them the Scriptures, teach them how to live their lives, how to find abundant life. Jesus came because the religious authorities weren't making the connection between the bible and everyday living.

Religion had become a set of rules that didn't relate to where people spent their daily time and energy.

So the rubber meets the road when *we* testify to the truth. What good does it do if we hear some comment or witness some action and know in our hearts that it isn't true and right but we don't say or do anything?

And here you could say if we've listened for that Inner Voice and we say or do something, testify in some way, it's not just us, it's Jesus who is testifying through us.

This is not unlike a parent raising their child according to certain principles and beliefs. Then the child becomes an adult and the parent has to let go and trust that the person who was a child but is now an adult will be able to make good decisions for himself or herself.

If our parents never let us go, if they are always advising, deciding for, telling us what to do we'll never grow up. If we never let our parents go, if we fall back upon, turn to and rely upon them when life throws a curve ball we'll never find our independence.

That's what Jesus says to his disciples, "you need to make your way without me but with the Advocate who will live in your heart and remind you of all that I taught you."

Anyway you slice it what's happening on Pentecost is the maturation, the growth of Jesus' followers. He's not there anymore so he can't tell them what to do, but he did promise not to abandon them. He said that a power from beyond them would descend upon their hearts and give them clarity and recall and courage and ingenuity and wisdom and direction – all the things he gave them when he was with them. But they have to make the transition from having him right there in the flesh to having him right here in their hearts. They have to tune in to that Inner Voice.

I spend a little time talking about this today because we will be confirming young people in a moment. What we're doing is saying they've listened and they've heard that Inner Voice calling them to follow a First Century Carpenter.

So as their parents and teachers and mentors and pastor our role is to let them stand on their own spiritual feet. Not abandon them, but welcome them as fellow believers, share *our struggle* to discern that Inner Voice and testify to it.

Pentecost is a poignant day to confirm young people because it gets to the core of what it means to be a responsible, spiritual adult and to be a responsible spiritually vital congregation.

And just as when we baptize a child or infant we are also asked to remember our own baptismal vows so today we might remember our own confirmation vows – that is, our own pledge to follow Jesus and learn to listen for His Inner Voice in our daily living.

It's good to remember that, because in our busy world with all the other demands, to follow so many other gods and listen to so many other voices, we sometimes forget that we made a pledge once upon a time to journey the Way of Jesus.

And the Way of Jesus as the Gospel of John makes clear on nearly every other page is *not* the way of the world. No one can journey that Way alone. If it takes a village

to raise a child it takes a congregation to keep a follower faithful to Jesus. The world is just too cunning and cold.

There's another reason I urge us to remember our own confirmation vows today: there is a popular and pernicious view in the mainline church that once you've been confirmed you've arrived spiritually.

It is true that for some their spiritual growth and development is like a clock that stopped on the day they were confirmed. This is why that book of a generation ago "Your God Is Too Small" was so popular. The author said that if your God is the God of your childhood Sunday School experience then your God is too small.

Such a God is fine for a child but lacks the intellectual and spiritual horsepower needed for adult decision-making and living.

So confirming young people today is cause for thanksgiving and celebration but it also begs the question – how is it with our own personal and congregational spiritual growth and development?

Are we individually and together cultivating an ability to discern that Inner Voice? Are we willing to stand on our own spiritual feet at school and in our homes and work places to testify to the principles of our faith when the world says or demands that we abdicate our Christian principles?

Are we willing to invest the kind of personal time and energy it takes to grow up in our faith – which would require surely as much effort as it takes to learn how to swing a golf club or read the latest popular novel or build a house with other volunteers for Habitat for Humanity?

These are remarkably challenging times for a young person to come of age and a congregation to live out the Gospel. The nation is at war; American icons of industry are teetering; technology is transforming the landscape of human relations and commercial enterprise; the religions of the world are sprouting extremist factions bent on destruction.

Jesus didn't say "I never promised you a rose garden," but he could have said it because following him in the world in which we live tends to get people into trouble. You find his faithful taking on the status quo of a family or school or workplace, you find them challenging apathy in their towns and neighborhoods, and you surely find them taking on the insidious pre-meditated and institutional barriers to a just and inclusive world.

The good news today is that he did say, 'Nevertheless, I'll send you the Advocate who will help you mature in your faith, testify to God's truth and live an honorable life.' Amen.