

Advocates of the Truth

John 14: 15-21

“If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. 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. “I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me, and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them.”

Yesterday was Jeanne Patterson’s memorial service. In typical Jeanne style she had instructions prepped ahead of time. The hymns and scriptures were prechosen. Wishes for her burial arranged. She even wrote her own obituary for the paper. Our final wishes are not fun to think about. But it is helpful to leave instructions behind for others to follow on our behalf for after we are gone. It is what we read about Jesus doing here. As he sits with his disciples, Jesus leaves them with instructions as he prepares for his departure. “If you love me, love one another. When I’m gone there will be an Advocate who will be with you and will be in you.”

As we start, notice that commandment, “If you love me, then you will love one another.” Jesus doesn’t separate our love for him from our love for each other. Seems simple enough. Except, we can all probably think of at least a few people these days who we have a difficult time loving. If we are honest, at the very least, we can probably think of a few others who we wonder to ourselves, “How can that person claim to love Jesus if they are supporting that way of thinking, or that policy, or that political party?” It is easy for me to judge how they don’t really love Jesus, all the while I’m letting God’s *agape* love slip through my fingers as well. I mean, loving people—honoring the image of God in someone who doesn’t honor the image of God in me or in others—is a lot more difficult than it sounds. But Jesus doesn’t separate our love for him from our love for others which makes it difficult to do, no doubt.

Which is probably why Jesus says we are not left to figuring it out by ourselves. He promises an Advocate—literally a defender of the accused or a defense attorney—who will be his presence with us when we aren’t sure we have what it takes. Remember the Miranda Law? It says, “You have a right to an attorney and if you cannot afford an attorney, one will be appointed for you.” God appoints us with the Spirit of truth, with a Spirit who empowers us to live in the truth together, and whose job is to bring what is false into the light. Jesus leaves behind the promise to do most of the heavy lifting for us, so we can shoulder up the strength to love each other as authentically as he loves us.

But here’s the rub: the truth is easily manipulated. It can be distorted and fabricated. What’s that old saying: “A lie will go around the world while the truth is still pulling its pants up.” We have politicians—no names mentioned—hosting a nationally televised town hall meeting, spewing more big lies about stolen elections, and declaring innocence after being convicted of sexual assault; all while the planted audience cheers and laughs. We have other politicians who have

lied about their profession and achievements just to get into office. And they are still in power! Others being elected as one party and then switching a couple months into their appointment. Truth isn't just being fabricated. It's being held in contempt.

I mean, after the latest mass shooting in Texas, after a neo-Nazi with SS tattoos killed five people, people on social media began arguing whether or not his tattoos really meant he was a white supremacist—*after he just shot a bunch of innocent people! Since when is this debatable!* If I have a “Mom” heart tattoo inked onto my chest you know who I sympathize with. How hard is this? Without truth, violence becomes normalized *and defended*. January 6th was only a tourist visit. The legislative violence against entire social groups are approved. Books are to be banned. Women are forced to give birth. The list goes on. I mean, truth is the glue which holds a society together. Without truth there is social collapse. Without truth, what was once insanity for the few becomes normalized for the many. And the violence we once abhorred becomes defended and affirmed.

So what do we do? Yes, we stand up for truth. Yes, we speak truth. Yes, we fight for truth. The question isn't whether we are obligated to fight for justice and fairness, but how we fight for it and how we sustain ourselves long enough to be effective and not burn out. You see, truth is the glue which holds a society together. Without truth there is social collapse. And what is our most basic and fundamental truth? *We are all human beings, created in the image of Love, who are all part of a deeper reality than the artificial one we often settle for.* Actually, the only way we can justify inflicting violence on someone else is to make them less than human or something other than human. If you were at the relational meeting training last Sunday, you heard Susan tell a story about meeting with someone who was physically shaking because she was nervous about meeting with someone who was gay. As they began to talk, and as Susan listened, the woman began to relax and even said at the end of their conversation, “You know, I've never spoken with a gay person before.” While that might not be true, something happened in that relational space: their humanity was shared—the truth was shared—and transformation became possible. Turns out, “truth” is deeper than a concept, or what we think of as a “fact.” Truth, for the gospel is who we are as human beings created in the image of love. Which is why Jesus says, “I am the truth!”

Now I understand, not everyone feels safe in doing this kind of work. But the reality is if those of us who can do the work, aren't doing the work, then nothing is going to change. The truth is, very rarely is someone's mind or heart changed because they are judged or shamed or told they are wrong, although we wish it were that simple. However, minds and hearts do have the possibility of changing when we know someone's stories and make room for each other's humanity. Being human is our most basic and fundamental truth, and as Sojourner Truth once said, “the truth has got to prevail.”

I know this work is anything but easy—these days it feels impossible. It's why Jesus leaves us with and Advocate for when we aren't sure we have what it takes. The truth is our glue: The truth of our humanity. The truth that we are created in the image of Love. The truth that we all belong to a deeper reality than the one we too often settle for. It's the truth, and with the power of God's Spirit, the truth has got to prevail. Amen.