

Within the 14th chapter of John we see the author working to find the right words to express the experience the newly emerging Christian community had with God in the first century. He uses the words Spirit, Truth, Advocate, and Counselor. When John wrote his gospel it had been 50 to 60 years since Jesus was physically with them. Yet, the Christian community felt the powerful presence of the Christ-spirit in their midst. John was struggling with the words to describe their experience. Within this passage we see the developmental elements that later church leaders will utilize in the fourth century theological councils to produce the doctrine of the Trinity, that is, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The *Spirit of Truth* is one of John’s references to the divine presence that they were experiencing. It is a definition that I believe can speak to us as much as it did to believers in the first century church. As humanity embraces truth, in any aspect of life, we are embracing God. As we share the truth, on any topic, we are expressing a divine message.

I believe the *Spirit of Truth* is located in every facet of life. Jesus touched upon some of those facets in his actions and in his teachings. The truth Jesus demonstrated and shared revealed the divine in a unique manner and this led to the folk referring to him as Son of God. Yet, the truth that Jesus shared is part of an ever evolving perception of truth that humanity gains as time, experience and discovery unfold from generation to generation. This might be a bit of what Jesus meant a few verses earlier in the 14th chapter of John when he stated we will do “even more” than he did. Our 21st century understanding of truth covers a far greater scope and depth. Yet, oftentimes a fuller understanding of truth is difficult to embrace because prior understandings of truth can block our embrace of new insights. This is true for us as it was for prior generations.

It was hard for humanity to embrace the concept that the world is round when everyone knew the truth that “it is flat.” It was hard for humanity to embrace the concept that the earth revolves around the sun when everyone knew the truth that “the sun revolves around the earth.” It was hard for our many citizens in this country to embrace that slavery was wrong and needed to be repealed when so many slave owners knew emancipation dead wrong. It was hard for men early in the 20th century to embrace the concept that women should have the right to vote. A fuller understanding of truth in the present day can be difficult for us to embrace as it for our ancestors to embrace truths new to them.

The *Spirit of Truth* challenges us with what we call the hot button issues. Two of the hot button issues today are the human impact or contribution to climate change on the one hand and the rights of lesbian/gay/bi-sexual/transgender persons on the other hand. These are topics that will be hotly debated and prayed about in the General Conference our United Methodist Church in the next two weeks. Discerning truth on each issues and the follow up policy brings forth many different perspectives.

What are we called to do as a community of faith regarding these and other hot-button issues of our day? The *Spirit of Truth* invites us to explore the possibility of a new truth emerging in our midst before we reject any new understanding outright without examination.

The Methodist Church in the 1850’s split in half because the Methodist Church in the South would not even consider that slavery might be wrong. It took the Methodist Episcopal Church, South and the Methodist Episcopal Church, North 90 years before reuniting in 1939. Discerning emerging truth is a difficult process. The *Spirit of Truth* is oftentimes rejected when it initially reveals itself. That makes sense as we saw that Jesus and his new truths initially rejected by the political and religious leaders of his day.

For decades in the 19th and then 20th century the *Spirit of Truth* provided the insight that women had the intelligence and the right to cast a vote for elected officials. That new idea was rejected in many fashions for decades until consensus embraced it with the 19th Amendment here in the United States. Emancipation and voting rights seem are obvious truths to us today. Yet, initially new insights of truth are hard for us to wrap our minds.

Therefore, individually and as a community of faith we need to first and foremost consider the possibly that the *Spirit of Truth* is emerging in a new fashion on the hot button issues of our day before we reject a new understanding outright and without examination. With hearts of love we are to carefully think about the health our planet and how our actions impact it now and for future generations. With hearts of love we can carefully listen to the voices of people from all sexual orientations and their request/demand for full inclusion in all aspects of life in America.

The *Spirit of Truth* not only nudges us to consider new thoughts and actions on the big issues of life but the *Spirit of Truth* also nudges us to consider new thoughts and actions in our daily encounters. Please hear this ageless story.

My alarm went off, it was Sunday again.
I was sleepy and tired, my one day to sleep in.

But the guilt I would feel the rest of the day
Would be too much, so I'd go and I'd pray.

I showered and shaved, I adjusted my tie,
I got there and sat in a pew just in time.

Bowing my head in prayer as I closed my eyes, I saw the
shoe of the man next to me, touching my own, I sighed.

With plenty of room on either side, I thought,
"Why must our soles touch?"
It bothered me, his shoe touching mine, but it didn't bother him much.

A prayer began: "Our Father," I thought, "This man with the shoes has no pride. They're dusty, worn, and scratched, even worse, there are holes on the side!

"Thank you for blessings," the prayer went on. The shoe man said a quiet "Amen."

I tried to focus on the prayer, but my thoughts were on his shoes again. Aren't we supposed to look our best when walking through the door? "Well, this certainly isn't it," I thought, glancing toward the floor.

Then the prayer was ended and songs of praise began. The shoe man was certainly loud, sounding proud as he sang. His voice lifted the rafters, his hands were raised high, the Lord could surely hear the shoe man's voice from the sky.

It was time for the offering and what I threw in was steep.
I watched as the shoe man reached into his pockets so deep.

I saw what was pulled out, what the shoe man put in,
Then I heard a soft "clink" as when silver hits tin.

The sermon really bored me to tears, and that's no lie.
It was the same for the shoe man, for tears fell from his eyes.

At the end of the service, as is the custom,
We must greet new visitors and show them all good cheer.

But I felt moved somehow and wanted to meet the shoe man.
So after the closing prayer, I reached over and shook his hand.

He was old and his skin was dark and his hair was truly a mess. But I thanked him for coming and being our guest.

He said, "My name is Charlie, I'm glad to meet you, my friend." There were tears in his eyes but he had a large, wide grin.

"Let me explain." He said, wiping tears from his eyes.
I've been coming here for a few months, and you're the first to say "Hi."

"I know that my appearance is not like all the rest, but I really do try to always look my best."

"I always clean and polish my shoes before my very long walk, but by the time I get here, they're dirty and dusty, like chalk."

My heart filled with pain and I swallowed to hide my tears as he continued to apologize for daring to sit so near.

He said, "When I get here, I know I must look a sight. But I thought if I could touch you, then maybe our souls might unite."

I was silent for a moment, knowing whatever was said would pale in comparison. I spoke from my heart, not my head.

"Oh, you've touched me," I said, "And taught me, in part, that the best of any man is what is found in his heart."

The rest, I thought this shoe man will never know...like just how thankful I really am that his dirty shoe touched my soul

Good story as it reveals a truth for each and every age, folk tend to rush to judgment with those that are different and those with less wherewithal. We really miss out when we judge.

The *Spirit of Truth*, one of John's references to the divine presence in life, is a definition that can speak to us in 2016 as much as it did to folk in the first century. As each of us embraces the truth, in whatever facet of life, we embrace God, the depth of our being. As we share the truth, regarding any topic, we find ourselves expressing the divine message. As person of faith, let us have the courage to embrace the *Spirit of Truth* and let it give direction to our living. Amen.