

## **Sermon Draft**

**Text: John 15:26–27; 16:4b–15**

**Sermon: “Truth”**

Many of us fear the truth when it comes to revealing something about ourselves. We all know things about ourselves we just don't want to face. All of us have things to which we refuse to admit. We eat too much, we're poor housekeepers, we have poor study habits, we're disorganized, we're going nowhere in business, and the list goes on, but don't let anybody try to tell us any of this “ugly truth!”

Today we celebrate the coming of the Spirit of truth—the Holy Spirit promised by our Lord. Jesus' promise made manifest by the rushing wind, the tongues of fire, and the apostles' ability to preach in languages they'd never learned. But what exactly does this Spirit of truth mean for us? It must be pretty important, since John refers to the “Spirit of truth” many times throughout his gospel. We tend to approach truth with fear and trembling, and we're supposed to be happy about this Spirit's appearing?

In fact, our fear of truth has pretty much put its meaning up for grabs in today's world. The assertion that there is an absolute truth by which we measure ourselves and others guarantees we'll be branded as "mean." Yet we're likely comfortable using that measuring stick on someone else and resent its use against ourselves.

That's how King David in the Old Testament felt. Giving in to his own lustful thoughts, David has an affair with Bathsheba. She becomes pregnant. David worries about his reputation and what people will think of him, not about the evil he's committed. Quickly, he has Uriah killed. Then, in a noble gesture, David takes this grieving war-widow in as one of his wives. No one, David hopes, suspects or is the wiser—but God knows. God sends his prophet Nathan to David. Nathan appears before the king seeking advice.

The problem, as Nathan narrates it, is that a rich man with a large flock had a banquet to prepare for a guest. Instead of taking one of his many lambs for the feast, he snatches instead the single ewe lamb of his poor neighbor.

Upon hearing this, David, the former shepherd, is enraged. He demands justice.

Full of indignation, David proclaims, *“As the Lord lives, the man who has done this deserves to die.”* Here things take a dramatic turn. *Looking his king in the eye, Nathan exclaims, “You are the man!”* (2 Samuel 12:5, 7). Nathan, speaking prophetically, announces the Ugly Truth about David.

The Ugly Truth is hard to swallow when it’s applied to us. David found it easy to deal in abstract justice, or justice as it applied to somebody else, that didn’t touch him. In dealing with truth, he was still avoiding truth, for David didn’t allow truth to address him. David was so blind to the truth that he didn’t see himself mirrored in the description of the rich shepherd. But then, through the power of the Spirit, those words cut through, *“you are the man.”*

David knew the Ugly Truth. He knew it not merely because his ears heard it. His heart heard it and accepted it. He accepted it as God’s verdict.

God's indictment led him to the truth from which he was hiding, which he had committed murder to cover. Suddenly, with his sham exposed, David stood before God. "*I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me,*" he says in Psalm 51:3.

People have a hard time believing there is truth. We're stung by government: from Watergate to Benghazi. Stung by scandals in the church: from adultery to misuse of funds. Stung by business: from profiteering to money laundering. Stung by education: from sexual abuse to ignoring deficiencies. We have become cynical and not surprised when people or institutions fail.

It's no wonder that the masses today believe that truth is what you feel is right for you, and we are taught to "create your own reality." We can well understand Pilate's cynicism in his question to Jesus, "*What is truth?*" But the "**Spirit of truth**" that Jesus describes is sent not merely to get us to say, "I'm telling the truth" or "honestly, it happened this way."

The Spirit testifies and points to the Word, revealing that God is truth, Jesus is truth, the Spirit is truth. God not only knows truth in a way that is beyond us; God embodies all that is real, for God is truth, and he is true to his Word. He speaks his Word, and it is.

Truth, when identified with Jesus, means reality—the reality of God. This is the reality that confronted King David. This is the reality that exposes the ugliness of our soul when it's turned away from the goodness of God. The Spirit worked through Nathan the prophet, and David repented.

Now, this same Spirit of truth comes to us in the way it was promised, convicting the *“world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment”* (John 16:8–9).

We can really identify with David. We would prefer that the ugly reality of our sin remain comfortably hidden. We devise some story to ward off suspicion so that we keep our reputation. We consider ourselves better than the average unbelieving sinner and, in doing so, exchange *“the truth about God for a lie”* (Romans 1:25).

Sure, we may accept the truth that God lives in heaven, that he created all things. That doesn't hurt. But the truth that exposes us and makes us vulnerable before the Holy One—we don't address it to ourselves. We go out of our way to make up for it, thinking, "Well, there are so many others who do worse than me. Surely if I make up for it with some great work of kindness or generosity, God will let it go."

But the Spirit of truth pierces our darkness and brings the hidden things to light. The Spirit comes just as Jesus promised: ***"I will send him to you. And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment"*** (John 16:7–8).

The Spirit pierces our hearts and opens them to reality. He comes and says, "You! You are the man"—not somebody who's on the late-night news. It's not about some great evil "out there" or the evil in my brother or in the world—but ourselves. We have been convicted. It's the Ugly Truth.

And yet there is another truth—a Beautiful Truth—that is revealed by the Spirit. This is something for which we can truly praise God! Jesus promises, ***“When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me”*** (John 15:26). Just as the reality of God’s Word convicts us concerning sin and judgment, the Spirit will convict us of righteousness (16:10).

The Spirit delivers to us the righteousness that our Savior has won for us by shedding his blood on the cross. Where the truth of the Law convicts us of the Ugly Truth of our own sin, the Gospel delivers the Beautiful Truth that, despite our sin, God is for us. This is God’s reality. God is true to his Word.

We can celebrate the coming of the Spirit without fear of the truth that it brings. This Jesus died for us, rose for us, reigns for us, prays for us (Romans 8:34). The Spirit of truth continues to bear witness, that because of Christ’s redemption nothing ***“will be able to separate us from the love of God”*** (Romans 8:38–39).

The Spirit causes us to believe the miracle that when we confess our sins, God ***“is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness”*** (1 John 1:9).

God did not reject David, confessed sinner, adulterer, and murderer. Neither does he reject us. ***“And the blood of Jesus . . . cleanses us from all sin”*** (1 John 1:7). God loves you. God loves me. We can live with this reality! God welcomes us into fellowship with him. It is to this Beautiful Truth, this Gospel truth, that his Spirit bears witness!

On Pentecost Sunday, we rejoice at the creation of the Church, the Spirit guiding us into all truth (16:13). We rejoice that the Spirit will glorify Christ, take what is his, and give it to us, for ***“all that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you”*** (16:15). That is the reality of God’s Word!

In Ezekiel 37, the Spirit of the Lord brings the prophet to the valley of the dry bones. And speaking by the Spirit, Ezekiel prophesied as commanded that the breath of life enter into those dry bones, which consisted of the house of Israel.

By the power of God's Spirit, the bones rose up, came together, bound together with sinews and were covered with skin. Breath came into them, and the Spirit was placed in them, and they lived. That same Spirit has entered us.

We who were dead in trespasses and sin were brought to life so that we could be children of God and part of his household.

The Spirit of truth gives faith so that we may receive the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation through the gifts of God's Word and Sacraments. As the ugly, dry bones came together with sinews and flesh, our old Adam is put to death and we rise as beautiful new creatures in Christ through the waters of Baptism.

We are absolved from our sins as we hear God's Word of forgiveness. We stand in fellowship around the Lord's Table in the presence of *"angels and archangels and with all the company of heaven"* to have Christ's own body and blood placed in our mouths, the sign and seal of the forgiveness purchased on the cross.

In God's household, there is life. It's the life of Jesus Christ for the death of this world—for all those who struggle with the ugly truth of pain and suffering in this world, for all those who demand to have their own choice and make the wrong choice, and for all those who see their sin and repent of it.

For each and every one of us who bears a load of deep guilt, the Holy Spirit gives this beautiful truth, righteousness in exchange for guilt, forgiveness in exchange for shame, and life in exchange for death.

And that's what we need. That's what the Spirit of truth has come to testify about. The Helper has come. He has revealed the truth, the truth that is reality. The truth that brings us life.

Amen