

John 15:26-27 and 16:4b-15,

Year B, Pentecost Sunday

Read the passage: [The Message](#) or [The New Revised Standard Version \(NRSV\)](#).

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Sigh. The "job" of testifying / proclaiming / preaching would be a lot easier if only John were a little more linear and a lot less associative in his testimony about Jesus.

Chapters 13 to 17 have emotional intensity and forcefulness because of the direct, personal, immediate language. No where else does Jesus speak so directly of himself as "I." No where else does Jesus speak so directly to his followers as "you." And we the readers - even at this distance in time and place - hear that "you" as "me / us."

And just as there is an intensity to the bonding between Jesus and his followers (i.e., you and I), there is also an intensifying of the distance / separation between "us" and "them." "Them" being "the world," i.e., everyone else who isn't "us," and sometimes, more specifically, "them" being "the Jews," i.e., the Jewish authorities and possibly even family and friends who are now persecuting "us" because of our loyalty to and bonding with Jesus.

Whereas Chapter 15 began with a beautiful description of Jesus' relationship with his followers - "I am the vine, you are the branches," and "I do not call you servants any longer ... I have called you friends;" - and of their relationship to one another - "love one another as I have loved you," - this text shifts to describe how it will be for his followers to be "in the world" without Jesus.

First, is the assurance that when Jesus leaves, his followers will not be left without a "pipeline" to God. However, this "pipeline" will no longer be through the priests and Temple. Rather the Spirit will come directly to Jesus' followers. The Spirit will testify on Jesus' behalf to his followers, and we in turn will testify to the world.

Just as the new commandment in Chapter 15 may have been a key in what set the early followers of Jesus apart as a radically transforming community:

"I call you friends" + "love one another as I have loved you" = "love one another as friends" --> a new community where social boundaries of class, blood kinship, master-slave, male-female, insider-outsider were transformed into a community of friends who looked out for each others' good.

So too, the Advocate's proving the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment (Verse 8) may have been a key in what set the early followers of Jesus apart as a radically transforming faith:

- The world is wrong about sin.
Sin is not genetic; it is not inherited; it does not alienate us from God - does not create a chasm between us and God.
- The world is wrong about righteousness.
Righteousness (being in right relationship with God) is not about paying debts owed to God; it is not about fulfilling obligations to God.
- The world is wrong about judgment.
Judgment is not about being condemned eternally; it is not about being forever cut off from God.

Frankly, in my not so humble opinion, the world - and the Christian church - is still pretty much wrong about sin, righteousness, and judgment.

In John, the frame for understanding sin, righteousness and judgment is shifted from seeing God as King and ourselves as subjects, to loving one another as friends.

How do friends understand sin, righteousness, and judgment?

Well, for the followers of Jesus, friendship is not inherited: it is not tied to blood kinships; no one is "born into" the church. Nor is it tied to social class; nor gender; nor "pride of place," - being the oldest, the first, etc., etc.

- Friendship is personal, direct, and immediate.
- It is chosen. It is voluntary.
- It is mutual and egalitarian.
- It is a bond of trust and loyalty.
- It is based in truth that gives life.
- It is open. It lives in the light.
- It must be professed and testified to and lived. (Since it is inwardly voluntary, it doesn't exist in the world unless / until it is expressed outwardly through profession and testimony and actions.)
- It is committed to seek the good of the friend - whether the friend is a neighbour, or a stranger, or an enemy.

So if we shift our frame from thinking of God as a Ruler / King to God as a friend, what is the truth about sin, righteousness, and judgment?

- The truth about sin is that God is unshakeably, constantly, eternally our friend. Nothing, not even our sin breaks Gods bond and loyalty to us.
- The truth about being in right relationship with God (i.e., "righteousness) is that while nothing ever breaks God's bond with us sometimes even the best of friends have to apologize and make up.

Holy Textures

Understanding the Bible in its own time and in ours

- The truth about judgment is that living in the light means bringing faults and failures out into the open where they can be healed. Judgment is not about condemnation; it is about telling the truth, healing and reconciliation.

Whatever else we may want to say on this day of Pentecost about the Spirit, it is important to notice that Jesus **always** refers to the Spirit as the **Spirit of truth**. And in John truth is always the way, the life, the light, the joy, the friendship.

David Ewart,
www.davidewart.ca