



SERMONS THAT WORK

Day of Pentecost (B)

The Advocate

Acts 2:1-21 or Ezekiel 37:1-14; Psalm 104:25-35, 37; Romans 8:22-27 or Acts 2:1-21; John 15:26-27; 16:4b-15

Let us pray: Most Gracious God, we are very grateful for the gifts that you give us, and in particular, we are grateful for the gift of the Advocate, the truth-teller. Give us courage to tell our truths, Lord Christ, that will lead to a world filled with justice and love. Amen.

The Wizard of Oz is a classic movie that was released in 1939. For years, it was presented as an annual television event, so many people have seen the film more than once. For those who have no connection to the Land of Oz, the basic premise is that a tornado touches down in Kansas and the main character, Dorothy, gets trapped in her house while the family takes cover in the basement. The house is knocked off its foundation and ends up in the mythical land of Oz. The young girl's only desire is to find her way back home to her family. Her search for a solution leads her to make three new friends: The Cowardly Lion, the Scarecrow, and the Tin Woodman.

Their adventures lead them to the Emerald City, in search of a wizard who will grant them their wishes. The lion is seeking courage, the scarecrow wants a brain, and the woodman is pleading for a heart. It is a fantastical tale with a very important message: Sometimes, you already possess the very things for which you are searching.

In Jesus' final visit with the disciples, he once again reminds them of his imminent departure. He has been preparing the group for his return to his Father since he initially gathered them. Some may call it denial, while others are genuinely curious as to why the disciples never seem to understand what their rabbi is imparting to them.

In the text from John, Jesus also announces that they are not going to be alone when he leaves because he is sending the Advocate, the Spirit of Truth from the Father to guide them in their continuing ministry. None of the disciples speak during Jesus' last discourse, and he acknowledges that their hearts are filled with sorrow. Jesus, the omniscient Messiah knows that the disciples do not understand what he is saying, nor do they want to hear any more about his leaving. After all, it has been a tough season for all of them; they are still processing all that they have seen and experienced since Good Friday. They were overwhelmed by his disappearance from the tomb and his reappearance in the Upper Room where they

were holed up out of great fear. God, in his infinite wisdom, will not leave them cowering and hiding indefinitely. Indeed, the Advocate is coming to provide them with the courage to speak the truth about the life and ministry of Jesus.

We are living in a time in which truth-telling is as critical as ever. The Spirit of Truth is a gift that has been given to every Christian disciple. The Advocate continues to live and dwell among us, and yet many of us act as though we do not recognize the Advocate and we do not know the Savior.

Certainly, the last year-and-a-half has been very difficult. The country has been battling dual pandemics that were deadly and extremely stressful. COVID-19 swept through the world and impacted us in dramatic ways. At certain points, the nation was divided on the appropriate response to treatments and cures. There were lockdowns and we were asked to shelter at home for weeks and then months. Some protested the closing of businesses and life as usual. Churchgoers became increasingly frustrated as in-person services were suspended. People protested that going to church ought not to be denied even in the face of a highly contagious virus. On the other hand, some pastors and theologians urged us to consider what God was trying to say to the world in a time in which we were being urged to slow down, sit down, and wait for the still voice of God to give us new direction.

At the same time, the other pandemic, the roaring sin of racism swirled through the country like the cyclone in the Wizard of Oz. The death of George Floyd was monumental, and the response was passionate and massive. The Advocate, the Spirit of Truth, gave many the courage to speak up and to demand that the world be better. There was admonition that the status quo was no longer acceptable. The Advocate, Jesus said, was sent by the Father to help all disciples – including you and me – to speak truth to the world. Wherever we see injustice, we are duty-bound to address it.

Jesus, before he was taken to the cross, called his followers “friends” and released all from the second-class role of servant, thus creating a pathway for a society that is equitable. Additionally, we are all equal and Jesus wanted that message delivered to the world so that we might love one another.

In many churches and dioceses in The Episcopal Church, we have been given a charge by the presiding bishop to work toward becoming Beloved Community. The Beloved Community is the place where God-loving people have been trying to arrive since Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt. From time to time, it seems to be in view, but somehow, humanity falls short of the goal, steps backward, and then lurches forward again toward the destination. Social injustice and racial inequity keep us all from getting to the Promised Land.

Our faith in God gives us three magnificent gifts. God promises us the gift of eternal life if we will believe and follow. At funerals, you will often hear it said, “Though he were dead, yet shall he live.” Jesus gives us the gift of love. He modeled love and urged us to love each other as he loves us. Beyond human love and intimacy, Jesus gave us *agape* love, unconditional love that can only come from God. The Holy Spirit then descended to forever tie us to the love of God and the presence of the Lord. The advocate came to

encourage us to devoutly and unapologetically speak the truth to a world desperately in need of truth-telling. The truth is we are all divinely created in the image of God. People of color have an equal right to live in the world without fear of loss of life at the hands of those who have a perception that they are less than equal. If we are ever to get to the Beloved Community, we must reckon with the sin of racism and eradicate it from our lands. This pandemic tears at the fabric of the world God calls us to. Let us embrace the Advocate, and with great courage proclaim the good news that God is love and that we all have an invitation to share in the beauty and wonder of God's enormous capacity to hold us close.

When we feel innately loved, we are much more likely to extend that love to others, including strangers, our neighbors, and especially those who do not look like us. Whenever it becomes difficult to determine how to share the love of Christ with others, go back to the basics, the parables, and review the lessons that Jesus shared with us. Think of the Good Samaritan who showed such compassion for the injured stranger in the road. Think of the woman at the well, who went to get a jug of water for cooking and feeding the animals and instead received the gift of grace that washed away her sins and cleansed her soul. Think of the love of the resurrected Jesus, who loved us so much he was willing to die for us and take away our sins forever.

My siblings in Christ, on this Feast of Pentecost, let us with gladness receive the holy and everlasting gift of the Advocate, who guides us to be our very best selves. We can exude the light of God because the Advocate strengthens us. So, proclaim the truth from the rooftops and the mountaintops and down in the valleys where people are hurting – proclaim that Jesus Christ is alive and lives in us. Help those who do not yet know Christ discover that he loves them and will never abandon them.

In the end, we will never need a wizard or a magician to trick us into believing what we already know in our hearts and minds: We are loved by God and our mission is to go out and spread that love in our communities and across the world. When we are unsure where we are going or how we will be received, we are led to lean on the Advocate who will provide the strength that we need to heal a broken world. Amen.

***The Rev. Kathleen Walker** is the missioner for black ministries in the Diocese of North Carolina. She works from the diocesan house in downtown Raleigh. She joined the bishop's staff in 2020 to focus on the vitality of historically Black congregations by helping to weave their diversity into a closer bond of inclusion with other parishes and the diocese. The goal is to ensure all predominantly Black congregations have the best opportunity to make the fullest use of the resources of their parishes, partnerships, and the diocese. Rev. Kathy graduated from Virginia Theological Seminary in 2018 and shortly thereafter joined the clergy team at St. John's Episcopal Church in Tallahassee, Florida, as associate rector for pastoral care and parish life. She is originally from South Florida and was an active layperson in that diocese prior to discerning the call to ordained ministry.*