



May 20, 2018 - The Spirit of Truth

Given by Rev. Mattei

How can you tell if someone is telling you the truth?

Nathan Zohner, a 14-year-old student at Eagle Rock - Junior High School won first prize at the Greater Idaho Falls Science Fair with his project on Dihydrogen Monoxide. Nathan urged 50 of his peers to sign a petition demanding strict control or the total elimination of the chemical Dihydrogen Monoxide because:

- It can cause excessive sweating and vomiting.
- It is a major component of acid rain.
- It can cause severe burns in its gaseous state.
- Accidental inhalation can kill you.
- It contributes to the erosion of our natural landscape.
- It decreases the effectiveness of automobile brakes.

43 of his peers said yes and signed the petition. 6 were undecided. And one knew that the so-called dangerous chemical is H₂O... **water!**

It turns out what Nathan was really testing was how gullible we all can be to what we call today “fake news”. 86% of Nathan’s classmates just accepted what Nathan was saying and believed that “water” was a threat to humankind.

Prior to being a Christian feast Pentecost was a Jewish Festival. In fact, we are at harvest time and Jews from all over the region are in Jerusalem to offer sacrifices in the Temple. The Festival of Weeks (Shavuot), which they were celebrating, was originally a harvest festival where the first fruits of the land were offered to God (Exod 23:16). It was celebrated fifty days after the Passover (Lev. 23:16), hence the name in Greek, Pentecost, the fiftieth day¹. With the passing of time Jews used this festival to also celebrate the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai and God’s covenantal love.

Luke has recorded this event in his second book, the Acts of Apostles. The context is that the people gathered in Jerusalem are already primed to celebrate the God who saves and

¹ More precisely, pentekoste hemera, the fiftieth day. It was one of the three prescribed pilgrimages (the others being Pesach/Passover and Sukkot/Feast of Booths or Tabernacles, celebrating respectively liberation from Egypt and the wandering in the desert and the first harvest.)

who has entered into a loving, covenantal relationship with Israel. While the disciples are at prayer and probably wrestling with the significance of Jesus' appearances, a dramatic and extraordinary event happens: a powerful wind rushes through the room and tongues of fire rest on each disciple.

Sound and wind remind us of the creative Word and Breath of God (Gen. 1) and the blazes of fire call to mind the summoning of Moses by Yahweh through the burning bush where God is revealed as the God of life and salvation (Ex. 3:14.) The coming of the Spirit on the disciples gives birth to the Church with power, direction and authority for mission just as the Spirit gave power, direction and authority to Jesus at the beginning of his earthly ministry (Lk 4:1-5.14-21.)

The Israelites who had come to Jerusalem for Shavuot, that important annual celebration of God's faithfulness and love didn't know they were in for a treat and a challenge. They heard and saw something totally amazing and incomprehensible: polyglot Galileans (capable of speaking multiple languages) witnessing to God! The arrogant, divisive and confusing experience of Babel (Gen. 11), where people had expressed their subversive desire to reach heaven and be their own gods, had been finally reverted: a new age of the Spirit of Truth as predicted by Jesus and by the prophets before him is available for those who embrace it: the "*last days*" (Acts 2:17), are now! The miracle of hearing beyond a language barrier is magnified by the fact that it was *simple Galileans* speaking: in people's minds, Galileans were not the smartest or the most articulated, eloquent or even trustworthy in matters of God's speech. Yet, they all heard what the disciples were saying.

But they needed interpretation: Peter, at risk of his and his friends' life, boldly explained that what was happening was the work of the Spirit now poured on all flesh. He didn't seem to care that he was mixing politics with religion, just like the prophets of old who stood unmoved before the powers-that-be and denounced their evil ways.

We at times forget that songs of freedom and arousing sermons were the powerful engines of social change: from the drum-circle of plantation camps to choir lofts, to church pulpits the message of Sojourner Truth, Martin Luther King, Jr., Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Bishop Oscar Romero have brought consolation, affirmation, and inspiration for resistance.

Peter interpreted the action of the Spirit moving freely "upon all flesh" with the words of the prophet Joel (Acts 2:17). When the Spirit breaks through, men and women, young and old, slave and free are freed from generational restrictions, sexual boundaries and socio-political definitions and enabled to prophesy, see new visions and dream new dreams. This understanding of the work of the Spirit gets expanded in the realization

that all people are now able to receive the gifts of the Spirit and are not limited to their social status, ethnic background, gender identification, religious affiliation. The Spirit moves freely with no restrictions through Greeks and Jews alike, circumcised and uncircumcised, those in authority and those in servitude, rich and poor. And to include current social divisions, the Spirit moves freely through gay and straight, Republicans and Democrats, citizens and immigrants, and even Christian and non-Christian.

All those open to really hear will know the Truth and will speak the Truth; a Truth that makes people free (both those who speak it and those who hear it spoken), and a Truth that does not demean or degrade, confuse or conceal. A prophetic Truth that opens people's eyes and reveals people's intentions. A Spirit of Truth that exposes lies, and thus on one side darkens what seems to be bright and evident like the shining sun, and on the other gives power to what seems weak and fragile and powerless. Then all those "who call on the name of the Lord will be saved" (Acts 2:21) and will see heaven and earth, spirit and matter, religious and profane redeemed, reconciled and restored.

The crowd heard Peter's proclamation of a new salvific act of God through Jesus, which they failed to acknowledge, the exposure of their criminal act by executing an innocent man and the urgent plea to change their life. However, some were ready to listen, learn more and possibly mend their ways. Others shrugged it off, not wanting to admit their responsibility and heed the call to conversion (when we don't want to hear a truth spoken to us we look for excuses and blame others: "*they* are drunk" - Acts 2:13). Peter was prophetically revealing to the Israelites that they had not listened to Yahweh as the ancient "Shema" had directed (Dt. 6:4) but had rejected the anointed one. They had chosen to follow corrupted ways and a life of lies which only bring divisions and a failure to communicate.

But Jesus is Lord and the first fruit of a new creation (see 1 Cor 15:20; 2 Cor 5:17) and in a world where there seem to be such a confusion between what is fact and what is fake, between objective reality and subjective opinion, Jesus and what he represents (i.e. God's rules) are the measuring stick and the framework for a new life. Bowing to God alone results in freedom and salvation: if God is Lord, then nobody else is. This is good news and the world needs to hear it.

Christians have the power of Christ and the means in the Spirit to move beyond easy labels and the creation of enemy images of those we disagree with. How about next time you hear something offensive or incorrect, instead of reacting you commit to stop, breathe, think, take it in and check it against the kingdom values? This should give you an opportunity to respond in a charitable way, contribute to more understanding or even change your own opinion.

We need to remember that our purpose as the Lord's church is not to focus on ourselves and our own happiness. Our purpose is to spread the knowledge of God to all the nations, beginning here in our own "Jerusalem." If we lose our outward focus, with the overall purpose of God's glory, we have lost our reason for existence. All of us are called to the task of bringing the life and light of Christ to the world. The Spirit moves freely through us.

Let us give thanks and praise to God for blessing us with such an opportunity; for calling us to a closer walk with Jesus; And for sharing with us the Spirit of Truth that gives us the freedom of the children of God. Amen