



**“PROVING THE WORLD WRONG”**  
**SCRIPTURE: ACTS 2: 1-21; JOHN 15: 26-27, 16: 4B-15**  
**GRACE COVENANT PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, ASHEVILLE, NC**  
**May 20, 2017, Pentecost**  
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**John 15:26-27; 16:4b-15**

15:26 "When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father, he will testify on my behalf.

15:27 You also are to testify because you have been with me from the beginning.

16:4b "I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you.

16:5 But now I am going to him who sent me; yet none of you asks me, 'Where are you going?'

16:6 But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your hearts.

16:7 Nevertheless I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.

16:8 And when he comes, he will prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment:

16:9 about sin, because they do not believe in me;

16:10 about righteousness, because I am going to the Father and you will see me no longer;

16:11 about judgment, because the ruler of this world has been condemned.

16:12 "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now.

16:13 When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come.

16:14 He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

16:15 All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

The Word of the LORD

**Thanks be to God.**

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What do you know about your birth?

Do you know the time and the date? Do you know the place?

What you don't know is as important as what you do know.

It is a common answer in American culture for people to say they don't know their birth story—that they never asked or it was never shared.

Often when we don't know something so foundational to who we are, it is because there is some reason to avoid it, and most often we avoid things that are painful, that are hard for us to make sense of, or that make us feel like something might be wrong with us.

So we avoid, we defend, we try to forget, and we tell ourselves it's not important to remember. It might not feel like a willful secret, but it is the kind of destructive secrecy we learn in American culture—we learn to get along without the whole story, we learn to accept dissonance and disequilibrium, we learn to think it's not important to know what we come from—what's most important is where we end up, what we produce, and the impact that we make.

But secrets can make us sick.

It's not that everyone needs to know everything about us, but there are some secrets that do harm—the ones that enable and allow destructive behavior to continue, the kind of secrets that erode trust and our sense of self and the integrity of our relationships.

Truth is a pathway to freedom. Our faith tells us that. And truth is how we build trust and trust is how we build connection with each other.

The world needs more truth—truth that we can trust, truth that builds trust, trust that builds connection, connections that make us, that makes the whole world, healthier.

What is it about the cultures that have formed us in America that teach us to withhold, to avoid, and to keep secrets?

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What do you know about the birth of this country?

Do you know how many Native Americans died with this country's birth? It's hard to say how many Native people were living in this country before European contact.

Estimates range from 10 million to 75 million. And percentages of death from contact are as high as 90% of the population died from European violence, disease, and forced migration.

Secrets can make us sick, the kinds of secrets that allow destructive behavior to continue, the kinds of secrets that make us distrust each other, the kinds of secrets that allow us to keep hurting each other.

How vividly can you tell the story of chattel slavery—that uniquely American manifestation of slavery that built this country’s economy?

Again, numbers are hard to come by because of all the generations of secrets. Estimates are that half of those people who were captured for transport never made it to this country alive. If they made it through the forced marches to the slave ships in Africa and they made it through the weeks at sea in conditions that we cannot fathom, then they had to face the brutality of being enslaved.

Estimates are that about 11 million people of African origin died during those years of capture, transport, and enslavement of African people for chattel slavery in America.

Think of all the pain we have omitted, all the patterns of abuse and violence we have avoided, the philosophies and practices of conquest we have white washed, and the ways we repeat those behaviors as a society.

School history books today are taking slavery out and replacing it with language of “workers.” That is happening today, in America. If we don’t tell the truth, can we ever be a country of freedom—the purpose we have claimed to be the impulse of our country’s founding.

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Dr. Joy DeGruy’s goal in telling the full story of this country’s history is healing. “You can’t heal the wound if you don’t know the wound.”

She has generated ground-breaking work on what she calls “Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome.” She explores and describes the contemporary impacts of generational trauma that began in slavery for communities of color.

Some of these adaptive behaviors are positive and have helped to cultivate resilience in communities of color. Others have been negative and created patterns like suspicion, distorted self-concept, and “aversion for things associated with one’s social group.”

I had the privilege of meeting Dr. DeGruy last week at the Lakeshore Equity and Diversity Alliance Summit in Michigan. She was the keynote speaker and I was a workshop leader. She and I talked about some of the ways white-dominant communities are also carriers of generational trauma, the trauma of having secrets, of being perpetrators, observers, enablers, witnesses, those who have benefitted, those who have not known what to do or been able to speak about the violence that shaped our families and our communities.

She and I talked about the legacy of white supremacy in this country and the way it has told us lies about who we are.

Did you know that the original Statue of Liberty was holding broken chains in her left hand, but America said, “No! We don’t want the broken chains.” The sculptor insisted on the chains, but instead of the chains being visible in her hands, they are at her feet where no one can see them. America chose not to tell the true story of liberty and freedom and immigration in this country, making her more a symbol of our dissonance as a country than a symbol of freedom.

When you don’t know your beginnings, if you don’t even know what the secrets are, then it is hard to get well from the sickness that continues to harm. It is easy to settle into destructive patterns of behavior, it is easy to feel disconnected and disoriented and afraid.

White supremacy has marked us all—and we are seeing it play out every day in America in white dominant communities in things like moral numbness, discomfort with difficult emotions, discomfort with any emotions, defensiveness, avoidance of conflict, an assumption of a right to comfort, perfectionism, a preference for power that dominates, paternalism, blindness to racialized disadvantage, the normalization of enforced conformity and assimilation, normalizing violence, normalizing the silencing and incarceration and deportation of the voices of those who are most impacted by injustice, racism, and violence.

We are all caught in these patterns, captive to the systems and cultures and broken relationships they have formed.

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How much do we know about the church’s beginnings?

Pentecost is about birth—the birth of the church. That first Pentecost, that day in Jerusalem—the disciples were doing as Jesus had told them. They were there, together, praying for what they needed.

It was an especially intense time in Jerusalem—it was the Jewish feast of Weeks that they held 50 days after Passover. That meant that the nations were there in Jerusalem—Jews from far ranging geography.

The ones who loved Jesus knew they needed help, they were grieving, they were confused, and they were afraid. And then, a violent wind and tongues of fire—and the ones who had been on their knees, confused, asking for what they needed—began to speak in languages they had never known—and those Jesus followers spilled out into the streets of Jerusalem.

And the church was born and learned its purpose—to meet people where they are, to speak Christ's good news into all different cultures. The church was born to heal broken relationships not through enforced conformity, not to erase cultural differences but to honor and even empower them.

The music of the church's birth was a glorious cacophony of language and strangers coming together to share the good news of how the truth can set us free.

It is hard to imagine the power of this moment.

Scripture tells us this powerful moment was met with denial—while all were astonished and many were transformed, others sneered—“they must be drunk, they must be crazy.”

The Spirit's movements can be threatening.

This is not a delightful breeze that blows through, it is a powerful wind that changes things—and there will always be those who try and fight the Spirit's movement.

While denial and hostility were in the room when the church was born, the Spirit birthed freedom that day, freedom from the things that had those grieving, confused, and disparate people in chains.

The church was born from together in one place—from understanding, trust, and connection.

The church's purpose has always been to bring a disparate and divided world together with a powerful love.

The Church is supposed to be about love, the kind of love that speaks truth, the kind of love that sets us free.

The Gospel writer of John tells us our purpose, church! Our purpose is to prove the world wrong!

But somehow Christians of many stripes forgot our beginnings. The church has more often proved the world right than it has proved the world wrong.

If the church was out proving the world wrong, there would not have been a church standing at the center of the Ghana Slave Castle during the slave trade, where soldiers worshipped while human beings piled on top of each other were tortured to prepare them to be shipped to America to be slaves.

If the church were about proving the world wrong, the Presbyterian Church would not have had boarding schools in New Mexico that took Pueblo children away from their families and forced them to cut their hair and stop speaking their language.

If the church were about proving the world wrong it would not have been one of the most effective instruments of judgment and shame Western culture has had at its disposal when it comes to sexuality and gender.

If the church were about proving the world wrong, it would not have been full of ministers and theologians during the Civil Rights Movement who told people of color to slow down and be patient, who, as James Cone describes in his book, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*, failed to connect the cross of Jesus' crucifixion to the lynching tree that terrorized black and brown people for generations.

Learning the story of the church's beginnings is some of the most important work we can do today, Grace Covenant. Our beginnings help us know who we are called to be, and what healing could look like for us.

The Spirit was there when the church was born—in tongues of fire, in wounded human beings finding the courage to try a new way of being together. The church was born of the courage to prove the world wrong about the things that seek to divide us.

The church was born when the truth spilled out into the streets –and people that hadn't previously been able to hear each other and see each other—those people who had been taught to fear and to be suspicious of each other—those disparate and weary and wary people—became a family of faith that day—that is who was there when we were born—an unlikely gathering of people ready to build something new together.

Our birth story is calling us back to the Spirit of that day, Grace Covenant—to reclaim our God-given, Christ-driven purpose to prove the world wrong and to believe and share the Good News—that the truth will set us all free!

Happy Pentecost!

Thanks be to God.