

AND YOU ALSO MUST TESTIFY

John 15:18-16:4

Key Verse: 15:26-27

“When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me. And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning.”

On this Independence Day weekend, it is good to remember our forefathers who fought and died for freedom, including our freedom to worship God. Among them is John Paul Jones, father of the American Navy. During the Revolutionary War, Captain Jones was given the task of disrupting shipping off the coast of England. He engaged an English battleship, the Serapis. Captain Jones was at a disadvantage in every way. His ship was older and slower; it had fewer and smaller guns; his crew was not well trained, and easily discouraged. To make things worse, a fellow American captain in Jones' convoy turned against him as the battle began. After one hour, the captain of the Serapis confidently shouted, “Are you ready to surrender?” Jones replied, “Surrender? I have not yet begun to fight.” After three more hours of intensive fighting, Captain Jones won the victory and claimed the Serapis as his prize.

Jesus' disciples' situation in the world may have been worse than that of Captain Jones. But Jesus tells them that when the Holy Spirit comes, they can testify to Jesus and win the victory.

First, the world will hate and persecute Jesus' disciples (18-25; 16:1-4).

In verses 18-25 and 16:1-4, Jesus explains to his disciples what they could expect from the world. What is the world? Jesus refers to the world without God in which rebels organize for mutual benefit. This world system appears in Genesis when people built the Tower of Babel. They were effective and ambitious, wanting to rule the world. But God confused their language and ended the rebellion. Since then the world has been divided into nations which constantly rise and fall. The book of Daniel describes empires as mighty beasts that fight one another. The winner rules the world and the loser is trampled and destroyed. It is interesting that Daniel could foresee everything that would happen in advance. This tells us that God rules world history for his own purpose.

The world of Jesus' time was characterized by Jewish religion, Roman military power, and Greek culture. Jesus warned his disciples that this world would hate them. Jesus specifically mentions that they would be put out of the synagogue (16:2). This means they would be ex-communicated by the Jewish religious leaders. In addition, the Roman government would brand them as enemies for refusing to worship the emperor. However, behind the peoples and systems of the world, there is the devil. Jesus called him “the prince of this world” (Jn 14:30). The devil wields power against Jesus' people through different avenues. In our time, the devil has persecuted Christians through governments, the news media, and school administrations. Brothers and sisters nationwide and worldwide have suffered a great deal under such persecution.

Jesus did not paint a rosy picture of the world for the disciples. Jesus plainly told them that the world would hate them. Jesus told them this so they would not be surprised when it happened, and in shock, go astray. As the saying goes, “Forewarned is forearmed.” To help them further, Jesus explained why the world would hate them. One reason was that they did not belong to the world. When Jesus chose them, he chose them out of the world. Jesus elevated them from a miserable life of meaningless labor under the fear of death, where pleasure-seeking was the chief pursuit. Jesus chose them for glory and gave them a great purpose. The world would hate them out of jealousy, as Cain hated Abel. Another reason for the world's hatred is simply because the disciples bear the name of Jesus. As the world hates Jesus, it hates his disciples.

Look at verse 22. “If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not be guilty of sin. Now, however, they have no excuse for their sin.” And verse 24 says, “If I had not come and done among them what no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin. But now they have seen these miracles, and yet they have hated both me and my Father.” The world hates Jesus because he takes away its excuse for sin. For example, in John chapter 5, Jesus healed a man who had been paralyzed for 38 years with one word of his mouth, “Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.” The man got up and walked around. He was healed. He could live a new life. He could learn to work hard and establish a happy family. The Pharisees should have been happy about the man's healing. Instead, they began to criticize the man for carrying his mat on the Sabbath. Next they criticized Jesus for healing on the Sabbath. To Jesus, their serious sin was not lust, greed or laziness. Their serious sin was rejecting God's salvation in Jesus. Jesus wanted to

save them from sin, but they did not want to accept it. Jesus said in John 3:19, "This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil." People make many excuses for not believing in Jesus. But the bottom line is that they love to sin and don't want to stop. However, they don't admit this. Instead they persecute Jesus' people.

Second, Jesus tells his disciples how to live in the world (18-25).

Contained in verses 18-25 are Jesus' words of instruction to help his disciples. In verse 18, Jesus told them, "...keep in mind that it hated me first." We must not lose our minds when persecution comes. Instead we must keep something in mind. It is that Jesus was hated first. When the world hates us, it is not a personal matter; it is because of Jesus' name. As soldiers on a battlefield are hated simply because they belong to the opponent's camp, so Jesus' disciples are hated simply because they belong to Jesus. We must know that this world is a spiritual battle ground. We cannot relax and try to enjoy the world, ignoring this truth. We must be ever ready to fight spiritually, vigilant to watch and pray. We must also remember the example of Jesus. Hebrews 12:3 says, "Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart." Jesus bore the world's hatred to the end and emerged victorious. We can live victoriously in Jesus.

In verse 19 Jesus said, "...but I have chosen you out of the world." Jesus' choosing is his one-sided grace. There is a divine mystery in Jesus' choosing of his disciples. He called them, saying, "Follow me," and they left everything and followed him. It was the beginning of an eternal relationship which elevated them from the mundane world to be the children of God. For example, Simon was a very ordinary person. But Jesus gave him the name Peter, which means, "Rock," and trained him to be a spiritual leader. Jesus' choosing gave the disciples real meaning of life. Jesus also gave them a clear destination and the promise that they would go to the Father's house and live there forever with Jesus. This living hope in the kingdom of God would never perish, spoil or fade, no matter what happened in the world. Jesus' choosing was his one-sided grace and it was irrevocable (Ro 11:29). No matter how difficult things might become in the world, they could take solace in God's grace of choosing them as his people. The early Christians were scattered all over the Roman Empire by persecutions. Peter wrote to encourage them. He did not say, "I am sorry that you are suffering so much." He said, "you are a chosen people" (1 Pe 2:9). By remembering God's deep grace of choosing them, they could rejoice even in persecutions.

In verse 20 Jesus said, "Remember the words I spoke to you." When the world's hatred is swirling around us, it is time to listen to Jesus' words in the Bible. The world wants to distract Jesus' people with its controversy. Jesus' disciples must not live in the flow of the world. We must live by Jesus' word. Jesus' disciples must remember his word, "'No servant is greater than his master.' If they persecuted me they will persecute you also" (20). Jesus' word brings us back to our senses; we realize that we are not helpless victims in an evil world. We are participating in the sufferings of Christ. We are following the footsteps of our Lord and Savior Jesus. When we remember the word of Jesus, we can find God's purpose in persecution. We can accept it as divine discipline and God's love for us. This realization gives us a shout of joy, even in the midst of persecution (1 Pe 4:13; Mt 5:10).

In verse 25 Jesus says, "But this is to fulfill what is written in their Law: 'They hated me without reason.'" Jesus quotes Psalm 69:4, a psalm of David. King David was in the midst of a national rebellion. David had done nothing to incite it. David had been a good shepherd and a magnanimous king. The rebellion was motivated by the evil in the hearts of the rebels. So it was in Jesus' case. Jesus had done only what God wanted him to do. Jesus had expressed God's love and saving grace through his words and deeds. Jesus never hurt anyone or did anything wrong. Jesus was hated without reason. What did Jesus do with this hatred? Jesus bore it without retaliation or complaint. This hatred put Jesus on the cross. This hatred pierced Jesus' hands and side. Yet Jesus accepted it according to God's will and prayed, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Lk 23:34a).

Third, the Spirit will testify and you also must testify (26-27).

The greatest help that Jesus gives his disciples is mentioned in verse 26. Jesus says, "When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me." Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit to help his disciples. The Holy Spirit is called "the Counselor." In order to navigate through a college curriculum, students need a guidance counselor. When we are just freshmen who do not know what we are doing, this guidance counselor helps us to see the big picture and advises us specifically so that we can graduate. Similarly, the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, would help the disciples to see everything from God's

point of view and give them wisdom for daily living. The Counselor is wiser than any devil-inspired leader. King Herod tried to use the Magi to find out where the baby Jesus was. Guided by the wisdom of God, the Magi avoided Herod's trap. St. Stephen was a man full of the Holy Spirit. When he boldly proclaimed the gospel, members of the Synagogue of the Freedmen opposed him strongly. But they could not stand up against his wisdom or the Spirit by which he spoke (Ac 6:10).

The Counselor is also called the "Spirit of truth." What do you think of when you hear the word "spirit?" For those who have been inundated with materialism, it may leave our minds blank. We only know it is something invisible. In both Greek and Hebrew, the words translated "Spirit" come from the same words as "wind" or "breath." In chapter 3, Jesus compared the Spirit to the wind that blows. When the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost, there was the blowing of a mighty wind. The Holy Spirit is powerful; he is God Almighty. The Holy Spirit is more powerful than evil spirits. He uses his power and wisdom to reveal the truth. His main work is to testify to the truth about Jesus. The world would brand Jesus as a criminal; the religious leaders would do their best to deceive people about Jesus. But the Holy Spirit would testify that Jesus came from God. The Holy Spirit would testify that Jesus died for our sins. The Holy Spirit would testify that God raised Jesus to give us eternal life. The Holy Spirit's testimony was given through the disciples.

Before the coming of the Holy Spirit, Peter was confident that he could lay down his life for Jesus. But he did not know the depth of his sin and selfishness. When the time came, he denied Jesus three times. With bitter tears he repented his sin. At last, he could understand the meaning of Jesus' cross and accepted Jesus' death for him personally. Then on the day of Pentecost, the ascended Risen Christ poured out the Holy Spirit on Peter. Peter was filled with courage and wisdom. Peter began to preach the gospel of Jesus' death and resurrection to the people who had crucified Jesus. Peter said, "This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge, and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him" (Ac 2:23-24). Peter also said, "Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ" (Ac 2:36). Finally Peter said, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call" (Ac 2:38-39).

There was a man named Saul. He hated the early Christians and persecuted the church ruthlessly. But on the road to Damascus he met the Risen Christ and was changed. Then the Holy Spirit used him to testify about Jesus throughout Asia Minor, the Greek peninsula, and even to Rome. The Holy Spirit used many unknown people as well. Finally the Holy Spirit conquered the Roman Empire with the gospel.

The Holy Spirit makes the death and resurrection of Jesus real in our hearts. Romans 8:16 says, "The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children." In other words, the Holy Spirit says to each of us personally, "Jesus died for you. Jesus rose again for you. You are a child of God in Jesus Christ." We need the Holy Spirit's testimony in our hearts. At one time John Wesley did not have this testimony, though he preached the gospel diligently. So he suffered from inner fear and uncertainty. Then, one day, as he was listening to someone read Martin Luther's Romans lectures, the Holy Spirit worked in his heart. He knew without a doubt that Christ died for him, even for him. Some of us may feel like him. We have heard the gospel many times and understand it in our heads, but it does not seem real to us. Then we must pray for the Holy Spirit. The Spirit testifies in our hearts that Christ died and rose for us. The Spirit testifies that God loves us and we are his children.

In testifying, the Holy Spirit has no language problem. The Holy Spirit understands any language and any culture. When he comes into a postmodern youngster, the Holy Spirit understands perfectly how to communicate the truth about sin and the love of God. On the other hand, we often have a language problem or a culture problem. So we must study hard to understand and communicate with each other. But the Holy Spirit does not have this problem. The Holy Spirit communicates the love of God fully and understandably. It is most important to have the Holy Spirit in our Bible studies.

Look at verse 27. "And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning." Jesus commanded his disciples to testify about him. They were the ones who knew him best. They had heard his teaching. They had seen his miracles. When they simply told what Jesus had said and done, the Holy Spirit revealed Jesus to those who heard. The Apostle John proclaimed Jesus in word and deed by the power of the Holy Spirit. He also wrote John's

gospel. It was his testimony (Jn 21:24). He says in John 20:31, “But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” John’s testimony, combined with that of the other apostles, produced the New Testament.

Look at verse 27 again. It begins, “And you also must testify....” “You” does not refer only to the immediate disciples of Jesus. It refers to each one of us as well. How can we testify? The best way is to teach the gospel of Jesus to others through sincere Bible study. When we are about to study the Bible we must first pray for the help of the Holy Spirit. We can also testify by sharing with others what Jesus has done for us. And we can testify by giving a good and godly influence to the people around us that reveals Jesus’ image to them.

From August 4-7, we will have ten summer Bible conferences by fellowship groups from the Chicago center. We must pray earnestly for each of the conference messengers to receive the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit will make Jesus real in their hearts. The Holy Spirit will enable them to testify about Jesus powerfully. As we pray for them, we must also visit our Bible students and share the word of Jesus with them. Many of them are part of the postmodern generation. This does not mean that they are bad. It does mean that they are looking for more than sound reason as a basis for their faith. They want to feel the reality of Christ. They want to taste his love in their souls and feel his joy in their hearts. If they can experience Christ personally they will accept him. Who can make Christ real to them? The Holy Spirit can. So we must pray for the work of the Holy Spirit in their hearts. May the Holy Spirit move the hearts of 750 people, including 250 newcomers, to meet Jesus personally through the summer Bible conferences.

In today’s passage Jesus teaches us about the reality of the world. The world without God hates Jesus and his people. Its power is formidable. But Jesus does not take us out of the world. Nor does he allow us to shrink back from the challenge. Jesus wants us to depend on the work of the Holy Spirit and testify boldly about him. Let’s read verses 26-27 again. “When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me. And you also must testify, because you have been with me from the beginning.” May God grant us the Holy Spirit and use us to testify about Jesus to the students on Chicago area campuses through one-to-one Bible study and our summer Bible conferences.