


# THE HOPE JOURNAL

LEARNING TO LOVE, TOGETHER



May 19, 2024

## WITNESS

*is a participatory word*

by Drew Downs

For a lot of church people, the word *witness* evokes two things: court rooms and evangelicals. Which makes it a word we aren't keen to use. But it is an important word in the gospel of John.

Over several chapters, Jesus calls his disciples witnesses of the grace of God through him. And that their job is to be witnesses of these things, sharing with others what they have seen.

While our associations with courts and evangelism color our response, we ought to set that aside to hear what Jesus is trying to say here. Namely that we are to participate in the divine project. We have a place in it. We see things. And therefore, we have a responsibility to share with others what we have seen. Not to win them or that otherwise we might burn. But because this is the nature of our relationship. With Jesus and the world. And with our own faith.

# EASTER

2024

## WHAT'S GOING ON

*"You know we've got to find a way  
To bring some loving here today".*

-Marvin Gaye

Disciples, Apostles, and Saints!

### **The Advocate**

In John's gospel, Jesus refers to the Holy Spirit as "the Advocate;" a word with legal implications, just like the word *witness*. This isn't an accident. But I don't think we need to go so far as to see it in litigious terms, but in terms of social order.

Persuading people, solving disputes, connecting over common interests, needing support: these are all things people need when dealing with other people. And especially with systems and groups, like governments, corporations, or organizations.

There is a tendency to think of the Holy Spirit as ephemeral—inspiring us or connecting us. But not as something terribly substantive.

But to think of her as the Advocate has a different connotation. Especially when we are ones in need of help. When we don't have a way into a difficult conversation or a voice within an organization.

Common examples of places where advocates are increasingly necessary are in hospitals, schools, and immigration courts where patients, students, and immigrants need help in getting the care, information, and support they need.

There is an obvious correlation between our need for help and systems in our world which make it so people *can't* help themselves. And that one of God's personas is to be an Advocate for those in need is an important guide for our collective ministry.

With love,  
Drew

# EASTER

2024

## FOR SUNDAY

*The Day of Pentecost*

May 19, 2024

### **Collect**

Almighty God, on this day you opened the way of eternal life to every race and nation by the promised gift of your Holy Spirit: Shed abroad this gift throughout the world by the preaching of the Gospel, that it may reach to the ends of the earth; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

**Amen.**

### **Reading**

John 15:26-27; 16:4b-15

Jesus said to his disciples, "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. You also are to testify because you have been with me from the beginning. "I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you. But now I am going to him who sent me; yet none of you asks me, 'Where are you going?' But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your hearts.

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. And when he comes, he will prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: about sin, because they do not believe in me; about righteousness, because I am going to the Father and you will see me no longer; about judgment, because the ruler of this world has been condemned.

"I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. 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. He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

# EASTER

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## Reflection

For most of the last ten years, a dove has nested in the cloister and in the trefoil above the front door into the church. It arrives write around Pentecost and each time, I marvel at this beautiful symbol of grace. The trefoil, a symbol of three interlocking circles, is a common symbol of the trinity. And the dove: the Holy Spirit. Together, it is so perfect.

I've been looking for her this year. It's time. There is a nest in the cloister, but not one in the trefoil.

I'll confess that it has left me more than a little disappointed. Even as I understand that we aren't the apostles waiting for the Advocate. Nor are we supposed to get a parallel sign to theirs—especially as an annual occurrence.

What Jesus tells the apostles is that they are witnesses—because they have and do experience things. And it is because of the experience of witnessing, they are able to share with others.

The dynamic heart of witnessing grace is not seeing alone. It involves processing what we've seen and sharing it as a testimony to it. We see a thing, figure out what we've seen, and tell somebody about it in a way that they might understand it.

Perhaps the point, therefore, isn't for us to see the Holy Spirit nest in our trefoil every year. But that her presence with us was for us to see, process, and share. That we might be *active* witnesses of grace—not mere observers or recipients of cool stuff.

As we gather to celebrate the Day of Pentecost, let us do so with gratitude and eagerness. To be thankful for what we have seen and eager to make sense of it and share it. That others may know the generous grace of a loving and faithful God.

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