

Reflection

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Having grown up in Marine City, Mich., along the shores of the St. Clair River, and having attended Holy Cross Catholic Church seated on the banks of that river, I have a deep appreciation for the apostles going to the river to find a place of prayer. Rivers, oceans and water in general lend themselves to prayer.

Granted, the river in this story is much smaller. It isn't the glorious blue of the St. Clair River, but it is where Paul found a woman called Lydia. A woman presumed to be a businesswoman, perhaps dealing in purple cloth or the dye that makes it. A worshiper of God, who, as she listened to Paul, had her heart opened by God "to pay attention," after which she was baptized, along with her household.

Then we are told that Lydia invited the apostles into her home and because of her faith, she "prevails upon them." A profound series of events on the shores of this tiny river. The river served as the location for the transforming connection between Paul and Lydia and her household resulting in baptism and hospitality. All of this rooted in the power of the testimony given about Jesus.

This demonstrates what Jesus spoke to in John's Gospel. The gift of the Spirit of truth, promised by Jesus and given by God, to testify to Jesus and his life and his works. Empowered, the apostles could bear witness. But the spirit also opened hearts to be able to hear and "pay attention" to the testimony.

Testimony is a complex reality. It is supposed to be about the truth. In general, when one renders testimony, usually under oath, what is revealed is based upon what was directly seen, heard and experienced so as to give a clear depiction of what happened – a way of determining the truth. Jesus charged his disciples to testify because they had been "with him from the beginning." They had the direct experience of Jesus and they would also be empowered by the Spirit of Truth. This gift of the Spirit is given so they will not stumble, because the truth that they will testify to will cause them to be excommunicated, persecuted and killed, and these actions will be committed by those who believe they are acting in God's name.

In order to be sustained in those realities, Jesus knew they would need support and help. To beckon God to grant the Spirit of truth be instilled in them was clearly important to Jesus. It is a deep need and prayer for our times. I cannot recall a time in my life when the truth has been under so much of a daily threat and constant manipulation.

Most people of faith, integrity, justice and honesty are horrified by the unrelenting flow of misinformation, distortion and its chaotic impact. We see daily scripting of newscasts showing polarizing examples of the same reality. We desperately need the Spirit of truth

to open hearts and minds. How do we testify to the life of Jesus right now in these crazy times of crazy behaviors and distortions of truth? How can we, who cannot gather at the river to pray, bear powerful testimony to the life and works of Jesus who is our truth? It is as important today as in Jesus' time.

I suggest that we find our voices rooted in the power of the Spirit of Truth given to us and live it moment by moment. In doing so, we express that oneness in God as assured by Jesus to the disciples and handed down through the ages. The "Word became flesh and dwelt among us" and dwells among us still. May that Word be always "on our minds, on our lips, and in our hearts."

May we trust in the promise of Jesus that Spirit of truth is with us and in us and thus so empowered, we live in the enduring presence of God who alone sustains us.