

Dear friends in Christ



“Keepin’ It Real”

Rev. Dr. John C. Forney
Day of Pentecost, May 23, 2021

Ezekiel 37:1-14; Psalm 104:25-35, 37;
Acts 2:1-21; John 15:26-27, 16:4b-15

When I took a church in Petersburg, Alaska, I had to head up there before my wife was able to leave California. She taught at a year-round school and her contract didn’t end until September. So, I and our preschool boys boarded Alaska Airlines and headed on up.

As I had already enrolled them in the day care center, I thought, “How hard can this be? Single parents do this all the time.” Was I in for a rude awakening -- and I even had child care covered!

I still remember that fateful Sunday morning when I was sitting at the breakfast table going over my sermon when I heard the rumble of feet coming up the hallway. Giggling and shouting, “Daddy, we made a chemical. We made a chemical!”

That I could see. It was all over their Sunday best. Did I ever pay for those brief moments of peace and quiet! They ushered me back to the bathroom – their laboratory – to see their creation.

The novel chemical was part red and green food coloring. Part toilet paper, part oregano, part tooth paste. At least, those were the identifiable components.

After I got them cleaned up, picked up my prayerbook and the pages of my sermon I bundled them up in their jackets and off to church we went. I then understood in the most real way why it was that so many harried parents came bursting through the church doors, a kid or two in tow - late. Sometimes very late.

Up until then, my judgmental self had thought as I saw these latecomers, "Why can't they get themselves to church on time?" Always the same several families. Every Sunday.

Now, after having tried single parenting, I'll forever banish that thought. I knew from experience that these families were lucky to have made it at all. Experience has a way of "keepin' it real," as we'd say in the hood.

In the age of pandemic, congresswomen, Republicans and Democrats alike, are totally insistent on including child care as part of Biden's proposed infrastructure package. Read Elizabeth Warren's new book, ***Persist***. When she would meet with exhausted nurses and ask them what they needed to do their jobs in the midst of COVID-19, it wasn't more PPP or shorter hours. Nothing like that. It was dependable, quality childcare.

Mitch McConnell, I suspect, never had to wrap up his morning's work and rush off to the floor of congress, only to be confronted by two boys with goop all over themselves. Chemical, I mean. No wonder most men just don't get it.

Today, we celebrate the gift of the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete – the One who keeps it real. Those who insist we keep it real are her agents.

"When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father, that one will testify on my behalf..."

"The Spirit of truth...will guide you into all truth..."

There is our grounding. There is our power. There is our guidance. Keepin' it Real.

Those nurses, speaking at that impromptu conference spoke the truth of their hearts. Elizabeth mentions that virtually every modern, industrial nation has state-supported childcare for women who want to, or need to, work outside the home. Listen to them, guys. The lion's share of childcare falls to women. Their stories help us keep it real – if we have the guts to hear them out. They are anointed agents of the Spirit of Truth. Especially in this era of a pandemic.

“When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth ...The Spirit of truth...will guide you into all truth...”

This very same Spirit spoke loudly through my own experience of those months of being a single parent. This Spirit spoke loudly through the voices of those exhausted nurses. And the truth of the matter is, we’ve simply got to do better for all when it comes to child care.

Let the Spirit of Truth speak with a firm, insistent voice – Keepin’ It Real.

There are a number of folks I absolutely depend on to “Keep it Real.” One I’ve come to rely on concerning the preservation of our democracy, is Liz Chaney and that group of Republicans who know that Joe Biden really, really, really is the President of these United States.

Though, on policy issues, I would most likely disagree with her on virtually everything, we do agree on one central core issue. Our democracy is at stake. It is being undermined by a pernicious lie that the election was stolen.

Liz Chaney is an agent of the Holy Spirit, insisting that this nation keep it real. The Spirit will lead us into all truth. Listen to her agent!

Yes, for some people, for some true believers in QAnon, this will not be easy. But our democracy, if we care about it all, depends on rational Republicans taking control of their party.

It’s said that the truth will set you free, but, as my friend Ed Bacon, would add: “First it will hurt like hell.” Cognitive dissonance can be very disconcerting. AND...it’s the work of the Holy Spirit. It’s Keepin’-It-Real territory. And Keepin’ it real can be painful.

The other day on the floor of Congress, Representative Tim Ryan, full of the Spirit of Truth, full of fury, spoke for Reality, the last and only hope for saving this republic -- the only hope for saving our own souls as citizens:

"Benghazi!" he shouted.

"You guys chase the former Secretary of State all over the country, spent millions of dollars, we have people scaling the Capitol, hitting the Capitol Police with lead pipes across the head, and we can't get bipartisanship!" Ryan screamed.

"What else has to happen in this country?"

"Cops. This is a slap in the face to every rank-and-file cop in the United States, if we're going to take on China, if we're going to rebuild the country, if we're going to reverse climate change, we need two political parties in this country that are both living in reality, and you ain't one of them."¹

You go, Spirit of Truth. Preach it! Our democracy urgently needs you.

At the end of May we come to the hundredth anniversary of the Greenwood Massacre in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Sometimes referred to as the Greenwood Race Riot. The Greenwood District has been known as the "Black Wall Street" of Tulsa.

On May 31, 2021 one of the few living survivors of this slaughter, at 107 years old, gave her testimony before Congress. If ever there was the incarnation of the Spirit of Truth, it was Viola Fletcher.

"On May 31, of '21, I went to bed in my family's home in Greenwood," she said. "The neighborhood I fell asleep in that night was rich, not just in terms of wealth, but in culture ... and heritage. My family had a beautiful home. We had great neighbors. I had friends to play with. I felt safe. I had everything a child could need. I had a bright future."

"Within a few hours," Fletcher said, "all of that was gone."

"The night of the massacre, I was awakened by my family. My parents and five siblings were there. I was told we had to leave and that was it. I will never forget the violence of the White mob when we left our home," she said, "I still see Black men being shot, Black bodies lying in the street. I still smell smoke and see fire. I still see Black businesses being burned. I still hear airplanes flying overhead. I hear the screams."

"I have lived through the massacre every day. Our country may forget this history, but I cannot. I will not. And other survivors do not. And our descendants do not."²

¹ <https://www.alternet.org/2021/05/tim-ryan-speech>

² DeNeen L. Brown, "One of the Last Survivors of the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre – 107 Years Old – Wants Justice, *Washington Post*, May 19, 2021.

This Black community was burnt to the ground, some forty blocks of businesses, homes, churches. Hundreds were killed, slaughtered in their homes, shot down in the streets. Only one of the several mass graves has so far been discovered.

The State National Guard joined the White mob in the killing and looting. “The city, sheriff, chamber, and county targeted Black community leaders and victims of the massacre—despite knowing who were truly responsible.”³

There are times that the Spirit of Truth morphs into the hysterically funny, comical, if the consequences weren’t so dire. But maybe a bit of humor is the only thing that will carry us through the farce. Trust the wisdom of the Spirit.

In Arizona the Republican senate has insisted on yet another recount. Amidst charges that part or all of the Maricopa County digital data base has been erased or gone missing, they have hired a Florida outfit to conduct one more recount. This time without Democratic participation. Florida? Election recount? What could possibly go wrong?

You’d better be sitting for what comes next—are you sitting? I don’t want you to hurt yourself laughing. The group hired – a group that has absolutely no, zero, none, experience in conducting a recount of anything – are you ready? – It’s called “Cyber Ninjas.”

No, I’m not making this up! They’ve never even done a recount of a piggy bank, let alone an entire cache of a couple million ballots from Maricopa County.

I keep looking for the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles. Where’s Donatello? Michelangelo? Has anyone here seen any terrapins with nunchucks?

This wackadoodle outfit – the Cyber Ninjas – has caused the entire state to be the laughing stock of several news cycles. So much so that, now, a lot of state Republicans have banded together to object. To shout, “STOP!”

Holy Moly! Does the Spirit of Truth ever have a raucous sense of humor! Descend upon us this Day of Pentecost. We’re in desperate need down here.

Elliot Hannon of *Slate* writes:

³ Ibid.

“No election fraud theory is too insane for the Cyber Ninjas, such that every cockamamie conspiracy is treated credulously. The team of voter fraud sleuths say they are using UV lights to investigate a far-right conspiracy theory that ballots—cast in the state of Arizona—were actually smuggled in from Asia ahead of the election and that these ballots are detectable by traces of bamboo in their composition. This is real stuff.”⁴

Laughable if not so tragic.

Descend, O please, descend now – were hurting here – Make haste, O Spirit of Truth. Make haste before we bust a gut rolling around on the floor with a terminal case of the giggles.

The county board that oversees elections, four of the five of whom are Republicans, is accusing the Arizona Republican senate of conducting a “sham recount” by a bunch of “grifters” who are just bilking the party faithful out of millions of dollars for this farcical exercise. These county commissioners are the few Keepin’ It Real in Arizona. Bonafide agents of the Spirit of Truth.

This is personal. It is up to each one of us to renew our allegiance to the common good. I say “good,” not “perfect.” “Perfect” may be beyond us, but “Better” surely is not.” Do it for George Floyd. Do it for t Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott and all those women who gathered at Seneica Falls in 1848. Do it for every decent officeholder who daily strives for “better,” strives to Keep It Real.

Come, Holy Spirit, Come. Anoint us with persistence. Anoint us with healing and reconciliation. Anoint us with a passionate concern for neighbor. Anoint us with Truth that burns white hot within our breasts until we get off the couch and do something.

Happy Pentecost. Amen.

⁴ Elliott Hannon, *Slate*, “Arizona Republican Officials Call State GOP Election Audit a “Sham” and a “Con,” May 18, 2021.