

If you're on the internet much, you may eventually see what's called a de-conversion story. A de-conversion story is the opposite of a faith story. Instead of someone professing their faith in Jesus (as Confirmation students are doing today), a person does the opposite. Someone will post to social media that they used to believe, but couldn't quite get their head around it, so they walk away from Jesus and faith in him. It's become something of a phenomenon. But it unsettles me and makes me sad.

If you have ever felt like you could waver and walk away from Jesus, that feeling is what Jesus addresses in John 15 and 16. Of course we can all breathe easy because he's going to offer us the help we need. And we all need help. But let's back up just for a second. In the month of May we are entirely in the Gospel of John for a short sermon series I've called "Rabbi Jesus" because in the four Gospels Jesus is addressed as "Rabbi" 16 times—8 of them (or one half) are found here in John's gospel. Next week we will hear the familiar story of Jesus' encounter with the Pharisee Nicodemus who went to see Jesus at night, and who upon meeting Jesus calls him "Rabbi." In John chapter 3, Jesus invites Nicodemus to be in a relationship with him that Jesus describes as being "born again." This brings about a change in how a person lives. And one change that comes as a result of our relationship with Christ is that the world will hate us. Jesus met with Nicodemus one-on-one, but the day before Jesus died, he met with his disciples in private and opened his heart to them. It's an amazing look at who Rabbi Jesus is and what he wants for his people. Jesus says in John 15:20: *"Remember what I told you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also."*

The world has been in a state of rebellion against God since Adam and Eve. There are spiritual forces around us that are opposed to God's rule and reign. Jesus came to bring rebellious people back into his kingdom, but many still remain enslaved to sin and darkness. Spiritually speaking, we are at war. Charles Spurgeon once said: "When you sleep, think that you are resting on the

battlefield; when you walk, suspect an ambush in every hedge.” Expect opposition from the forces of evil when you follow Jesus. No one likes to be at war! Do you like what Jesus says in 16:2? *“In fact, the time is coming when anyone who kills you will think they are offering a service to God.”*

It’s possible we may be ostracized, canceled, even killed! Anyone here interested in signing up for that? Schutt Sports, a major supplier of football helmets for the National Football League, issues the following warning label on all their helmets and on their website: “WARNING: NO HELMET SYSTEM CAN PREVENT CONCUSSIONS OR ELIMINATE THE RISK OF SERIOUS HEAD OR NECK INJURIES WHILE PLAYING FOOTBALL.” In a way, that is what Jesus is telling us too. WARNING: “Nothing can prevent or eliminate the risk of opposition *when you follow me.*” To avoid the risk of being hated and persecuted, DO NOT follow Jesus. In fact, following Jesus may mean being hated and persecuted just as Jesus was. Your faith in him probably will not go unopposed. Jesus doesn’t pull any punches. He tells us we’re going to be hated. He doesn’t invite us to a life of comfort or pleasure. He invites us to a life that involves suffering *because* we follow him. The rampant antisemitism and hatred of Jews in this country and around the world may be a preview of what we Christians can expect too.

Why do you suppose some people de-convert or walk away from Jesus? I know many people think that since Jesus lived so long ago, he is no longer relevant. But the life of Jesus is not locked into one period of history. His words are timeless and true. What he taught and most importantly how he lived are as significant to us now as they were to his first century audience. When we think of the “truth” we generally think of saying the right words or not telling a lie. The word “truth” in Hebrew, however, means to sustain, to support. It means being firm, solid and reliable. We must remember that in Jesus’ day he was competing with mythology, philosophy, and mysticism. The truth, according to Jesus means not only *telling* the truth but *living* it—doing the will of God.

Some of us may be tempted to de-convert or “fall away,” as Jesus puts it in 16:1: *“All this I have told you so that you will not fall away.”* Jesus knows what we’re made of. He knows that we’re not made of sturdy stuff. He knows that when we confront opposition, or face difficult circumstances, we’re probably going to feel like giving up our faith. We may be tempted to choose an easier path, but Jesus wants us to be aware of several things. In his teaching, he’s trying to give us the answer to the problem of “falling away.” Jesus’ solution is this: A Person. A Helper who will stand with us when we face trials and testing. Jesus says in John 15 verses 26-27: *“When the Advocate 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 then in 16 verse 7: *“But very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.”* When we’re attacked, we won’t stand alone. The Holy Spirit himself stands with us. In fact, the Holy Spirit will do most of the work. He is the primary witness.

A young mother asked her husband to take their one-year-old baby girl out for a walk. The husband was busy with a project, but after a deep sigh, he got the baby carriage and started walking around the block in the hot sun. “Honey,” called his wife from the window. “Leave me alone!” he shouted. “We’re fine.” After 15 minutes more his wife once again shouted, “Honey.” “Well, what is it this time?” he answered gruffly. “Is there a problem in the house you need me to handle?” “Nothing honey,” replied his wife. “But you’ve been wheeling little Jennifer’s doll for half an hour. Don’t you think it’s time for the baby to have a turn? Like that husband many of us think we know the truth, so when the “Spirit of truth” speaks to us, we just keep on pushing our own truth. If we would only listen, God would reveal truth to us through the Holy Spirit.

When Jesus left his disciples, the “Spirit of truth” came to do two important things. **First: the Holy Spirit is on the move in this world.** Jesus says in verse 8 *“When he comes, he will prove the world to be in the wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment.”* Jesus entered this messy world to rescue it from

sin. He didn't keep his distance from sinful people. He called outcasts and sinners to follow him. It may seem that the world is against us, but the Holy Spirit is on the move. And nothing can stop him. The Holy Spirit brings conviction of sin, and conviction leads to faith and healing. Some people think all this sounds too negative. But French mathematician and philosopher, Blaise Pascal argued that the consciousness of sin brings *healing*, not *harm*. Pascal you may remember is most famous for "Pascal's Wager," that is, his argument that humans should bet on the existence of God. He said it was worth taking the chance: "If you win, you win everything; if you lose, you lose nothing." But people today hate moral absolutes and prefer to choose what is true for themselves. But they should pay attention to Pascal. Many people in society see Christians as dangerous and intolerant. But Jesus reminds us that God the Holy Spirit is active in this rebellious world, changing people's hearts, convicting them of sin, and drawing them to the truth. And nothing can stop him.

Second, the Holy Spirit guides the Church. Verse 13 says "*But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth.*" The surprise is that before this could happen, Jesus himself would go away. Call it a kind of Trinitarian tag-team master plan. The Father dispatches the Son to this world to teach, to suffer, to die, and to rise again. Then the Son returns to the Father so that they could send the Holy Spirit to Jesus' followers on earth. Jesus makes clear that the Holy Spirit would become the conduit through which will flow all the energy and riches of God. The Spirit would become the jumper cables to re-infuse us with the Father's energy whenever the Church's batteries run down. The Spirit would become the cosmic water main through which the cleansing tide of baptism would flow to wash away our sin.

The third person of the Trinity has been the Church's living connection to God the Father and Jesus the Son since the very first Day of Pentecost. The "Spirit of truth" is on the move and is guiding us. Eight Confirmation students stand today to *confirm* what they know is true. It's a day for every one of us to do the same thing! The Lord bless us as we *confirm* what we all know is true! Amen.