

**What is Truth?**

"I have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes he will guide you into all truth." Throughout human history people have asked, "What is truth?" Competing claims to truth is nothing new. Today's postmodern crowd says there are many truths, each particular to the one who holds that truth, and that no one truth holds over all. But reason quickly sees through this fallacy. In the first century A.D. the Gospel of John was written amidst competing claims to the truth. Challenges to Christian faith were there from the beginning and are as old as the faith.

**Jesus and Pilate**

Despite the many truths put forth these days, we still live in a world that craves precise definitions: 10 steps to a flatter stomach; 5 steps to trimmer thighs; 10 spiritual laws, 10 steps to salvation; read any contract or agreement and it's full of "legalese" in minute detail to cover all contingencies. Litigation abounds... cases often turning on precise definitions. It's the world of Pontius Pilate. John 18: 33-38 has the scene where Pilate meets Jesus. He asks the messiah from Nazareth the eternal question: What is truth? Jesus gives him no answer, not a blessed word. Why, he answered the other questions? Because Pilate is so locked into his world-view that he'll never see Jesus'? Because if you have to ask the question you'll never perceive or accept the answer? Because Jesus' life speaks for itself? Because silence is the only meaningful answer?.....

**Spirit of Truth**

Jesus had said to his disciples, "I have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes he will guide you into all truth." Jesus is talking about the truth he carries. Where we cannot comprehend the Spirit will apprehend for us those things beyond that make the here and now worthwhile. Christians acknowledge the Spirit's help in understanding the world, life, God. The book of Acts describes Pentecost, the outpouring of the H.S. on the disciples. It was on this day, 50 days after Easter, that the dis-spirited disciples received the Holy Spirit, giving them resurrection power and guiding them into all truth.

**Truth is Sublime**

One dictionary defines truth as "conformity to knowledge, fact, actuality or logic." That's the generally accepted meaning of truth. In the same dictionary another definition gets a little closer when it says truth is "Actuality, reality." So what is "real?" We tend to relate "real" and "truth" to measurable, quantifiable, material. This is understandable when we look at ourselves and at creation. But finding truth means looking beyond our selves, *through* creation, to the Creator. There we enter into the "sublime," which is the very presence and experience of the living God. Those first disciples ordered their lives around the sublime experience they had had in Jesus and the continuing presence of the Holy Spirit. Stunned by their experiences and moved by God to be maladjusted to the world, they became creative and eloquent beyond dream.

Through ordinary and extraordinary happenings in daily life, a window of grace may be opened to us, giving us a glimpse of the sublime. Where the sublime is locked out of daily activity God becomes inaccessible and the truth will become rare. Then we will never understand David's urging to "Seek the face of God continually;" we will never see the burning bush, or hear the still small voice of God. When I become quiet, very, very

quiet, I stop hearing myself and start hearing the world outside me. Then I begin to hear something very great. The Scriptures remind us, "Be still and know that I am God."

Self-willed truth just keeps us within the orbit of self. But true Truth comes through that sublime moment with God, a time of grace wherein the Spirit of truth reveals God's nature and will. The Spirit of truth gives strength to refuse the cultural or ecclesiastical dominance of humanly constructed truth and even question their presuppositions ("shaking the foundations").

The purpose of organized religion, of our church gatherings, is to bring us closer to the sublime truth of God. The proximate questions: how do we do things, and what should be done?, are not nearly as important as the ultimate questions: who are we? and why are we here? Who calls us and for what purpose? As soon as we move into the world of ultimate questions we begin to stumble upon the realm of the sublime. You will know the presence of God before you perceive God's essence. The Spirit of truth comes to help us apprehend God among us.

[Religious experience is communicated through empirical means - history, language, music, and definitions - but the means are not it! Religious experience, meeting God, is prior and deeper than its subsequent description. First the meeting, then the joyous discourse about it. But the discourse is not it!]

God is not an objective phenomenon but a living experience. It is the purpose of our organized religion to lead us into the living wonder of God.

One has to be sort of maladjusted to many aspects of human society to live in wonder. We still live within our culture but with a counter-cultural voice against all that is ungodly. If you read the Bible carefully you will see that God's word is often counter-cultural. You could be stunned by the witness of Scripture; stunned out of a living stupor and plunged into a living wonder of God's power and majesty.

### **Youth Confirmation**

Our youth confirmation this morning is the culmination of their preparation church membership. They will be committing themselves to the fellowship of Christ and the truth found in Him. They are the next generation of Christians. They face an ever more confusing array of worldviews and lifestyle choices. Those who call themselves Christian may face ridicule, even hostility, especially if they live by their convictions.

One of the lessons we want to impart to the youth is courage; the courage found in God to resist a sell-out to society's conventional wisdom! We pray they will seek God's wisdom and see the world as food for delight, filled with the possibility of encountering the Almighty. There is astonishment and miracle in meeting God in unlikely events and places. Sublime truth is not reached solely by logic and study. It is free of our control. Only in wonder can we really point to God when others ask. Our pointing to God must be windows not mirrors, windows of grace.

### **Truth and Telling the Truth, Values & Character**

One last note: I believe that truth with a capital "T," ultimate truth, is connected to telling and doing the truth. You know, being honest, not deceitful, cunning and manipulative.

As one's life becomes connected to God and the sense of wonder grows, knowing the truth will deepen. The resulting life will be one lived with integrity and truth-telling. One Tongan author pokes fun at his own people's way of telling the truth: 50%, 40% maybe is okay. But 10% or less is really questionable (from Epeli Hau'foa, *Tales of the Tikongs*).

## **The Great Need in Our Nation Today**

Funny, but is it? We have our jokes about used-car salesmen and politicians. Have you heard about the political dog? It has absolutely no principals but is loyal to its friends.

Telling the truth in everyday life is a way of bearing witness to ultimate truth. Ultimate truth - that which leads us to God - is found in Christ. It makes a difference, in the long run. It all adds up in time. Perhaps it has to do with which time frame you're living in. If you see your life as three score and some years then maybe truth doesn't matter that much or it is really only relative. But if you see your life connected to something - or I should say someone - beyond; if your life is on the eternal time-line; if you are living an eternal life, then truth does make a difference. It is important because truth is a prime ingredient of creation. God always operates on truth.

Just like at the first Pentecost, Christ still grants the Spirit of truth to His church - to guide us into all truth.