

“What Is Truth?”

Psalm 15

John 18:33-38

“What is Truth?” Our old “friend” Pontius Pilate asks a very telling question in our reading for today, doesn’t he? In this passage out of John, Jesus is on trial for his life, after having been accused by the church leaders of sedition and blasphemy. Those leaders see Jesus as a threat to everything they understand as the truth, everything they believe in, BUT—since they are under Roman occupation, they cannot condemn someone to death for a crime—only the Roman leaders can do that. So, they have to convince Pilot, the Governor of Judea, that Jesus deserves to die. In this scene, Pilot is interviewing Jesus to determine just what he has done that is worthy of death----and in this process of questioning he finds “no case against him.” I want you to think of the impact of that for a moment. Pilate is a cruel, evil man. He has no qualm about brutally murdering anyone. But in this instance, he can’t find a reason to condemn Jesus. Later he states that they are condemning an innocent man, but to keep the peace he authorizes the execution, and then washes his hands of the guilt. But when Jesus tells him *“For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice,”* Pilate responds, “Truth. What is truth?” You can almost hear the jaded resignation in his voice. Who knows what the truth really is? The truth is relative to people like Pilate. But is there an ultimate truth?

This question seems especially pertinent in today’s time of “alternative facts.” In reality it is not an uncommon tactic for persons who wish to gain power to spread so many lies that no one can tell what the truth is anymore, and thus they stop believing in anything. They think EVERYTHING is a lie and give up. But that ***isn’t*** the truth! As followers of Jesus, we must defend the truth—once we figure out what it is! As we go into this election, and the unsettled times ahead of us, I think it is extremely important that we do figure this out, so that we can stand up for the Truth.

Others feel this way as well. Recently, the Bishops of the Evangelical Lutheran Church put out a statement in defense of the Truth that reads:

"In a perfect garden, created by God for the sake of humanity, evil entered in the form of deception and lies. Christians refer to this story, found in the biblical book of Genesis, as the fall of humanity. This foray into human sin began when Adam and Eve, the first humans created in the image of God, were deceived.

Humans have contended with the powers of deception ever since.

Yet we are a people who know and proclaim the power of God at work in the world. We proclaim the power of Jesus Christ, God in the flesh, the one who said, "I am the way, the truth and the life" (John 14:6).

We know that the power of truth is greater than the power of deceit.

We, the members of the Conference of Bishops of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, speak with one voice to condemn the hateful, deceptive, violent speech that has too readily found a place in our national discourse. We lament the ways this language has led to hate-fueled action.

We refuse to accept the ongoing normalization of lies and deceit.

We recommit ourselves to speaking the truth and pointing to the One who is Truth. We find courage in our collegiality and implore the members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, as well as our partners and friends, to join us as we:

- *Pledge to be vigilant guardians of truth, refusing to perpetuate lies or half-truths that further corrode the fabric of our society.*
- *Commit to rigorous fact-checking, honoring God's command to "test everything; hold fast to what is good" (1 Thessalonians 5:21).*
- *Reject the use of humor that normalizes falsehood, remembering that our speech should "always be gracious" (Colossians 4:6).*
- *Boldly advocate for the marginalized and oppressed, emulating Christ's love for the least among us.*
- *Courageously interrupt hate speech, standing firm in the knowledge that all are created in God's image.*
- *Lean in with curiosity, engage with those who think differently and "put the best construction on our neighbor's action"*
- *Amplify voices of truth.*

Emboldened by the Holy Spirit, may we resist deception and lift up the truth that all members of humanity are created in the image of God.

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all as we respond to the Spirit's invitation into this intentional commitment against deception and for truth.

In Christ,

The Conference of Bishops of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

The minute I saw this statement, I knew that we needed to embrace it as well. Let's think about Truth a little further though. Just what is it? Well, it's one of those annoying words where the definition is the word: "*Truth is the quality or state of being true.*" Hmm. We are back with Pilate, still asking, "what is truth?" aren't we. So, we have to define truth using metaphors. One of my favorite books of prayer is by Jerry Webber, entitled "*Footprints on Every Moment.*" In it he compares God to Truth by saying that God is "*True North.*" In geographical terms, True North is the direction that points to the geographic North Pole—a fixed point on earth that never changes. This is as opposed to magnetic north, which is determined by the magnetic field of the earth and as such can vary in location. But what if we think of God/Jesus/Spirit as our metaphorical true north—the one direction that never wavers and that we must always orient ourselves towards, no matter what is going on around us? To me that is a concept we can hold on to. In our reading for today, Jesus is basically saying that he is the true north we must hold on to. "*Everyone who belongs to the Truth listens to my voice.*" And what does that voice say? You know the answer to that question. Love God, Love Neighbor (the ones in need!) Love Self. Love your enemies. All that.

Luke tells us that Jesus, at the beginning of his ministry, said
*"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to set free those who are oppressed,
¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."*

In Matthew 25 Jesus tells the parable of the Judgement of the Nations and says, in part:

When the Son of Man comes in his glory and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. ³² All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, ³³ and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. ³⁴ Then the king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world, ³⁵ for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave

me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, ³⁶ I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’ ³⁷ Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food or thirsty and gave you something to drink? ³⁸ And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you or naked and gave you clothing? ³⁹ And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’ ⁴⁰ And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it to me.’”

I honestly don't know how any reading of the gospel accounts come away with anything but this truth. If you hear a different truth in the gospels, please show me where it is, because I want to do it right! But I think this is True North--this lifestyle that Jesus both lived and preached in the gospels. That's what you can weigh any "truth" against.

Jesus is True North. Jesus is Truth.

And so, armed with this knowledge, you can go forth into the crazy times that are ahead of us. You can judge for yourself what is the Truth and defend it accordingly.

I think God is relying on us to do our part in keeping the kingdom safe for all people. May we have the strength, wisdom and courage to do just that—and when we don't, Jesus will. Praise the Lord, and Amen.