

"Truth"

Rev. Jeff Bacon

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Let's join our hearts together in prayer. Let us pray: **Gracious and loving God, open our hearts to truth. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.**

I came across a fun little limerick about truth:

There was a young lady named Ruth

Who had a great passion for truth

She said she would die

Before she would lie

And she died in the prime of her youth

It's funny because we have difficulty with truth from a very young age.

Pilate asks Jesus, "What is truth?" It's a good question.

To please his father, a freshman went out for the track team. He had no athletic ability, though his father had been a good miler in his day. The freshman's first race was a two-man race that he ran against the leading school miler. He was badly beaten. Not wanting to disappoint his father, the boy wrote home: "Father, you will be happy to know that I ran against Bill Williams, the best miler in school. He came in next to last, while I came in second." We can hear the truth, and not understand it.

If you ask a rocket scientist how a rocket works, they might describe the need for a certain amount of thrust to break free of gravity, the trajectory, the effect of the gravitational pull of the sun and the moon, and lots more. You'd likely end up saying, "I'll just take your word for it." Just because we don't understand something, doesn't mean it isn't the truth.

Our scripture reading this morning from the gospel according to John is the last reading of the church year; the culmination of our year of Jesus' teaching. Next week is the beginning of Advent and the lead-up to the birth

of Jesus on Christmas morning. But on this last Sunday of the church year, we enter Pilate's headquarters and witness the initial interrogation of Jesus by Pilate that will lead us to Good Friday and to Easter.

From the years 26 to 36, Pontius Pilate was the Roman governor of Judea, a province of Rome. He was responsible for the collection of taxes and some limited judicial functions. The image that emerges from Jewish and Roman writings about Pilate is of a mean-spirited, hard ruler who is antagonistic toward his Jewish subjects. Pilate is driven by political expedience and is unconcerned with questions of truth. Sedition fell under the jurisdiction of the Roman courts and it's believed that Pilate's initial question to Jesus that's quoted in all four gospels, "Are you the king of the Jews?" is an attempt to have Jesus incriminate himself.

Our behaviour is motivated by what we believe to be the truth. However, sometimes we only find the truth that we're looking for. Jim Smith went to church on Sunday morning. He heard the organist miss a note during the prelude, and he winced. Some children ran into church late and it annoyed him. He saw a teenager talking when everybody was supposed to be bowed in silent prayer. He felt like the usher was watching to see what he put in the offering plate and it made him boil. He caught the preacher making a slip of the tongue five times in the sermon, by actual count. As he slipped out through the side door during the closing hymn, he muttered to himself, "Never again, what a bunch of clods and hypocrites!"

Ron Jones went to church one Sunday morning. He heard the organist play an arrangement of *A Mighty Fortress* and he thrilled at the majesty of it. He was glad to see that the church was taking a special offering for the hungry children of Nigeria. He especially appreciated the sermon that Sunday – it touched his heart. He thought as he walked out the doors of the church, "How can a person come here and not feel the presence of God?"

Both men went to the same church, on the same Sunday morning. Each one found the truth that he was looking for.

Jesus is often referred to as "King." It's a royal role that one is born into. So, there's considerable irony in Jesus' trial before Pilate. Jesus was born into his role, as king in the kingdom of God. But ironically, Pilate is trying to trap Jesus into confessing to being king, a crime that warrants death by crucifixion.

Pilate asks the Jewish leaders, "What accusation do you bring against this man ... Take him yourself and judge him according to your law." Pilate, who is responsible for maintaining Roman rule in Judea, doesn't consider Jesus a threat to that rule. But Pilate is trapped. The Jewish leaders want Jesus to be crucified and the Jewish leaders do threaten Pilate's control. Does Pilate have enough troops to quell the troubles that these leaders might stir up? How will a Jewish uprising be perceived back in Rome? The question, "Are you the King of the Jews?" is seeking a confession to condemn Jesus and placate the Jewish leaders.

Jesus graciously tries to give Pilate a way out, when he tells Pilate, "You say that I am a king. 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." It makes us think of Jesus as the good shepherd whose sheep listen to his voice and who lays down his life for his sheep. Pilate simply responds, "What is truth?" Pilate doesn't recognize the truth, or Jesus' invitation to the truth; he's not one of Jesus' sheep. Jesus and his followers belong to a heavenly kingdom – God's kingdom. The truth originates with God. Jesus came to earth to testify to the truth.

When Rosina Hernandez was in college, she attended a rock concert at which a young man was brutally beaten by another. No one made an attempt to stop the beating. The next day she was horrified to learn that the

youth had died as a result of the beating. Yet neither she nor anyone else had tried to help him. She could never forget the incident or her failure to help the young man.

Some years later, Rosina saw a car driving in the rain ahead of her suddenly skid and plunge off the causeway into Biscayne Bay. The car landed head down in the water with only the tail end showing. In a moment a woman appeared on the surface, shouting for help and saying her husband was stuck inside.

This time Rosina waited for no one. She plunged into the water, tried unsuccessfully to open the car door, then pounded on the back window as other bystanders stood on the causeway and watched. First, she screamed at them, begging for help; then cursed them, telling them there was a man dying in the car.

First one man, then another, came to help. Together they broke the safety glass and dragged the man out. They were just in time - a few minutes later and it would have been all over.

The woman thanked Rosina for saving her husband, and Rosina was elated, riding an emotional high that lasted for weeks. She had promised herself that she would never again fail to do anything she could to save a human life. She had made good on her promise. For Rosina, it was a simple truth about loving her neighbour.

What is truth? Good question. The truth is that God is revealed to us in Jesus. The truth is that God loves us more than we can imagine. The truth is that God is here with us – now. The truth is Jesus' core message to love God and to love our neighbour as our self. That's the truth. Amen.