

2016_03_25 Good Friday
Ascension Lutheran Church, Batavia IL
Pastor David Pfeiffer

THE TRUTH
John 18:36-38
INI

O Lord, sanctify us by your truth, your word is truth. Amen.

John 18:36–38

³⁶ Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here.”

³⁷ Pilate therefore said to Him, “Are You a king then?”

Jesus answered, “You say *rightly* that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.”

³⁸ Pilate said to Him, “What is truth?” And when he had said this, he went out again to the Jews, and said to them, “I find no fault in Him at all.

This Word of the Lord is spoken for you today.

In the name of him who was made to be sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God in him, dear fellow brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus,

His dream for the future is what he calls “success.” “Well-off, provide for my family,” he says, “travel a bit, go camping, visit places, hang out with family, go to the park, stuff like that.” Brad is 21 years old and was among the 300+ people interviewed in a national survey on the religious lives of emerging adults conducted by UNC-Chapel Hill. What Brad would for his future is basically a materially satisfying life; as he says, a nice house, reliable vehicles, nice, reliable cars, and maybe a four-wheeler or something like that.

However, when the conversation turns to the topic of morality and God, Brad ties himself into knots; he says, “I would say I’m kind of confused on the question, I guess.” For Brad, right and wrong boil down to two basic ideas: firstly, he says, “I’m sure it has to do with religion, maybe that plays a role in it. I don’t know if I could go so far as to say it’s a God thing, I don’t know, I’m not sure what really decides that. ... [it’s] kind of everyone’s perception of right and wrong, a group consensus or idea, kind

of just a majority.” And secondly, he goes on, “I think everyone knows, for the most part, has a sense of right and wrong, and it’s just part of who you are, feeling that something is wrong.”

Brad sees truth as the intersection of two things: 1) society’s popular opinion; and 2) the individual’s personal feelings about it. Perhaps, surprisingly or not, this is the basic outlook of many young people Brad’s age. Many of the interviews conducted revealed this basic perception of right and wrong: 1) you should obey the laws and go along with the majority, and 2) you should listen to what you know to be right within yourself. So truth is relegated to an ongoing struggle: a struggle for the popular opinion and a struggle for self-security. Not so much different than the conversation had between Pilate and the people. Brad is not so much different than Pilate, confused by the statement of Jesus, dismissive of it even; after all, “what is truth?”

A significant philosopher of our time, put it this way, “every interpretation of reality is an assertion of power.” What he meant was, if there is no absolute truth, if there is no universal right and wrong, then all we’re left with is a struggle for power. Its your word against mine. Its about can raise their voice the loudest, who can hold the majority view. Its a struggle within our very beings, trying to maintain control of ourselves and our lives. Its a struggle for power.

So “the Jews,” as John calls them, are the world. Whose voice will be the loudest? The assertion of power comes from the people in this cry: “He ought to die.” What truth do they have? What right do they possess to declare Jesus worthy of death? They have but one accusation, “He made Himself the Son of God.” Is this his fault? And it is. The very truth of who Jesus is is the very truth for which he must die.

And they are the majority. They are the voice that cries the loudest. So the power is their’s. As so many today teach, if truth does not rise above the community, if there is no universal, all supreme truth, then who can argue with the consensus? As Brad said, “[it’s] kind of everyone’s perception of right and wrong, a group consensus or idea, kind of just a majority.”

This is the struggle for truth we see in the world around us. Competition for the popular opinion. Just look at our recent political campaigns. Its not about truth, or ideas, or evidence and reasoning – it is about raw emotion. Whose voice will be the loudest? Its as if we’ve tapped into this animal instinct for what we want and what we want is basically Brad’s success story. So they shout louder and louder: “Crucify Him! And we know if we speak up we will be at risk, we will be the ones singled out as different.

This is the struggle that Pilate must reckon with. The crowds are shouting and Jesus is silent. Pilate is struggling to maintain his power, his control of the situation. This is what matters to him. So he says, "Are You not speaking to me? Do you not know that I have power to crucify You and power to release You?"

Pilate has already said repeatedly there is no fault in him, and yet he still acts as if the power as to what is right, is his to decide. They force his hand. A choice between us and Jesus. Make a choice between Jesus and Caesar. It is a struggle for self-security, to remain in control, keep things under his own power, to keep himself and his life as it should be. This is, in the end, Pilate's answer about truth. Truth ends up being whatever works for Pilate, even if it means putting the Son of God to death. Not so much different than Brad's statement: "I think everyone knows, for the most part, has a sense of right and wrong, and it's just part of who you are, feeling that something is wrong."

So each of us faces the struggle within. Like Pilate, we want to maintain our self-security. We like to have power in our lives. Power to decide what is right and wrong. Power to decide what should happen, and what should not happen. And so we reason why this or that exception should be granted. Why this or that sin is ok. Why ignoring this or that issue we should be dealing with is the only choice. They have forced our hand. Forcing us to choose: Jesus or the world? Jesus or Caesar? To stand up against the voice of the crowds will mean putting our own self on the line. As so often happens, we fade into the crowds with Peter, we wash our hands with Pilate.

And Jesus is left alone. They all deserted him. He is left alone to do what no one else could: to relinquish all power. All power was his, truth was his to possess and wield as a club against all the world, but he would not. He would not speak up in his defense. He would only say this,

"My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here. ... For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice."

The struggle for Jesus is not to claim power, but to give it up. This is why his kingdom makes no sense to us and his truth has no place in this world. His kingdom is not of this world and neither is this truth. That is what makes it objective. That is what

makes it universal. He has come into the world for this reason, to bear witness to the truth; yet only those who are born of the truth can hear it, can see it.

For it is a hidden truth. The point of our whole series on “Truth, Youth, and Postmodernism,” is found here in this text. You can’t prove to anyone the truth about God, or right and wrong. It is merely your word against their’s. You can’t point to a Bible passage like, “My word is truth,” because it is nothing more than a claim from a book written by humans. What gives the word of God power is not that you can prove it to be true; that is the kingdom of the world, that is not the way of faith.

But faith is what it is all about. For here we must see what cannot be seen. And the only way is to simply witness it. Watch, listen, observe what is happening. The word of God brings a witness and what makes that word powerful is that it witnesses to the truth. Jesus must die.

Truth is hidden in the cross and resurrection. That is the source of all truth. Right, wrong, God, man, sin, death, salvation, and heaven, are hidden in the cross and grave of Christ. This is why Isaiah writes, “Who has believed our report?”

In Isaiah chapter 53, he reports on what this all means; the suffering, shame, pain, and death of this servant. But he knows it is a report that few will believe. For we believe what we see and feel. What feels right, what seems right, these are the truths of the world. Even what can be reasoned to be right, does not fit with this report.

For he grows up, humble, no beauty that we should value him. There is nothing about him that is particularly winsome. He is scorned by his people; he is condemned by his government; he is rejected by his God. He valued him not. For we imagined that righteousness was something under our power and we became our own gods.

But this king has become our servant. He has born our sicknesses, our sorrows, our sins; he has been abused for our iniquities and the wrath of God for sin has been placed on him. It was the Lord’s choice and will to bruise him. To offer him to hell; forsaken and alone on that cross, this was God’s doing. Who will believe it? Isaiah cannot be sure any will believe it.

For he has given up his power and this is where his kingdom is found. The letters INRI do not merely suggest that Jesus said he was the king of the Jews, but that he truly is the king of the Jews. In the cross, Jesus bears witness to the truth. In the thorns that drip with holy blood, in the purple robe that covers his naked body, he bears witness to his kingship; in the crowing of the rooster, in the shouts of the crowd, he

bears witness to our sins; in the prayers, in the silence, he bears witness to the truth of God, the God who has given him the cup to drink and the suffering to carry; and in the promise of his resurrection he bears witness to the truth of our salvation; the overthrow of our power, of our opinions, of our self-security.

It all runs contrary to our nature, and it is hidden from us by nature, from the Jews and the world in its popularity contest, from Pilate and each of us in our self-centered security. Who is God to tell us what is true? Only in the kingdom which gives up all power on earth, can all power in heaven be known. And this is how God's kingdom comes. It overthrows us. It dethrones the devil from his place of power and through its witness, takes up a new rule in us, which works repentance, and bestows forgiveness, and grants salvation, and raises up life. Only by witnessing Jesus and his word, does the Holy Spirit bring us into this universal truth.

For "Everyone who is of the truth, hears His voice." Amen.