

## “THE KING OF TRUTH”

John 18:33-38

November 24, 2024

An article cited an interview with one Randall Prince, a local electrician. According to the story, this man had been doing some work in a warehouse and stumbled upon a back room filled with stacked-up plastic tubs, each of them clearly labeled “ballot box” in block letters. Inside, he declared, were all those fraudulent ballots.

The election hadn’t happened yet. Those ballots were ready to be quietly slipped into the stream of legitimate ballots, in order to throw the Ohio electoral votes to one candidate. The article included a photo of middle-aged Mr. Prince, standing behind his stack of pre-stuffed ballot boxes.

The article went viral on social media, causing all sorts of outrage. But then someone did a little research, scouring the Internet for the image. Turned out, the photo wasn’t from Ohio at all. It was from England, from several years before. It belonged to a legitimate local news story about a parliamentary election. The man in the photo wasn’t an Ohio electrician, but a British government clerk.

Eventually, the story was traced to a 23-year-old Maryland man named Cameron Harris, an aspiring “**political consultant.**” When *The New York Times* reporters contacted him, he readily admitted to making the story up. The *Times* reporter sensed that Mr. Harris was of a divided mind: a bit sheepish to have been found out, but also proud of his handiwork. His little fiction had been reposted hundreds of thousands

of times on social media, generating more than six million visits to his website, which was just as fake as the news article. It still earned him several thousand dollars.

More and more people are like this ethically challenged “**political consultant**”: they regard truth as pliant and changeable, ever ready to be manipulated for purposes of expediency, to get elected, or make a quick buck. But it raises questions. How do we know the truth? Who do we trust? Who is telling the stories with any integrity and accountability? Perhaps Pilate’s cynical first century question, “**What is truth?**” is just as alive and well in 21st century American society. Deception aside, discovering the truth is not necessarily easy because we don’t always want to know the truth. Like Jack Nicolson’s character in the movie **A Few Good Men**, who shouts under court examination, “**You can’t handle the truth!**”

**Neither does Pilate.** Did he want to know the truth? He realizes Jesus is innocent, these are trumped up charges that don’t deserve death, but he still goes through with a trial. Maybe that is why Jesus appears oddly obstinate, calm, and somewhat evasive. Pilate asks Jesus some direct, basic questions. “**Are you the King of the Jews?**” “**What have you done?**” “**Why have your own people sent you to me?**” He gets back from Jesus only the most oblique of answers. First, Jesus questions Pilate’s intelligence and integrity. Jesus then offers an unsolicited description of the nature of his kingdom -- that it is “not from this world”

and so of no political concern to Pilate. Finally, when Pilate confronts Jesus with a question-accusation that would seem to demand either a "yea" or a "nay", "**So you are a king?**", Jesus once again sidesteps Pilate's question in order to introduce a new subject -- the topic of "**truth.**"

Can't you imagine Pilate's frustration? Here he is trying to douse a political flash-fire and all Jesus wants to do is fan the flames by spouting theological jargon. Doesn't this Jesus know his life is on the line? Doesn't he want me to save his life? What does truth have to do with anything? The truth didn't matter to Pilate, but the question is, does it matter to us? And if it does, are we willing to live our lives based on that truth?

## **I. TRUTH AND FACTS**

The first step in embracing the truth is to realize that the truth and the facts are not necessarily the same thing. Facts usually involve the scientific method of observable, repeatable, quantifiable, verifiable collection of data. This method is great if you want to prove the **boiling point of water**, the stress load of a bridge, or discover the time it takes for a vehicle to stop while traveling at 60 mph.

However, eternal truths are not so easily validated. What's the scientific method for proving loving others is the best way to live, the existence of God, the movement of the Holy Spirit, what is morally right and wrong, that Jesus was the Son of God, or that there is a divine mind behind creation? Although there is evidence for each of these truths, they are not so easy to prove as the truth.

**Lamp broken in living room** – The only fact known is the lamp is broken. But who did it is a mystery. Was it the cat, was it the child, was it the wind through the window. What is the truth? While a lamp may be of little consequence, there are estimates that at least 22,000 people have been convicted of crimes in which they are innocent. There may be facts in the case but not the truth.

Truth has something to do with worldviews, views of reality, and belief systems. We tell the truth as we know it, usually based on our experience or a trusted other's experience of life. This is why everyone holds a different view of reality and truth and why we have such problems living together. Why else does Hamas launch rockets at Israel and Israel conducts airstrikes over Gaza; why bipartisanship is so difficult in Congress, why the divorce rate is so high, and so on. We believe our truth is the right one based on the facts we know. When nations believe in a conflicting aggregation of facts, they're sitting on a potential powder keg. **H.L. Mencken noted, "There's no more dangerous person than one with the calm assurance that he is in possession of the truth."** It is not until we realize that people have different truths, and we are willing to listen to each other's truths, and learn from those truths that we can work towards peace for all. But truth and facts are not necessarily the same thing.

## **II. KNOW OUR OWN TRUTH**

Perhaps we need to begin examining what our own truth is. *The truth in which Christians believe* is articulated in Holy Scriptures and through the many witnesses who have lived according to that truth. But understand, Biblical truth is not verifiable in an empirical sense, unless you argue that faith is a sort of sixth sense. For it is *sola fide, faith alone*, as Martin Luther so eloquently insisted, that allows us to grasp and belong to the truth about which Jesus is talking. That truth is the truth *about* God, that God *is* the truth, and that truth calls us to live in a particular way in harmony with each other and the world.

To get a handle on this truth about God, faithful men and women have worked hard to understand what the witness of scripture is telling us and to summarize this truth in our creeds and confessions. *I believe in God the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth; and in Jesus Christ, his only Son Our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried ...*

We can't prove all these truths, but we're simply affirming that we believe in these truths, and that it is around them that we order our lives. The only way we know this Judeo-Christian truth is real is by living it out. We experience God as we love God, love neighbor, walk humbly, love mercy, act justly, make peace, worship, and give generously. When we step out in faith, trusting God we experience strength, wisdom, peace, joy,

fruitfulness, clarity, wholeness, and transformation. The truth becomes truth for us when we live it.

### **III. INTEGRITY TO THE TRUTH**

**Rev. Dr. Munther Isaac** wrote, “The irony for us Palestinian Christians is that evangelicals, with their overemphasis on prophecy, have lost the capacity of being prophetic. You want to prove that the Bible is right? You don’t do this by pointing to self-fulfilling prophecy or by pointing to world events a prophecy.

This is not how you prove the Bible is right. We prove that the Bible is right by radical obedience to the teachings of Jesus, by proving that Jesus’ teachings actually work and that they can make the world a better place. Let us love our enemies. Forgive those who sin against us. Let us feed the poor. Care for the oppressed. Walk the extra mile, Be inclusive, not exclusive. Turn the other cheek. And maybe, and only maybe then, the world will start to take us seriously and believing in our Bible.”

Jesus said to Pilate, **“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”** The critical question this morning is not a matter of understanding all truth. Only God has that option. The question is do we belong to the truth of our faith? Are we listening to Christ’s voice? Do our lives show it?

### **IV. WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BELONG TO THE TRUTH?**

It seems fitting to respond to this question by asking more questions. For example: Do we belong to our truth or God's truth? Many Christians think they belong to God's truth when they're in church one day of the week. They recite the creed, they say the Lord's Prayer, sing a hymn or mumble a praise and worship tune, and transfer a few dollars to the church's general fund, and call it good.

The rest of the week they live according to their own truth. So apparently, it's okay to be rude to the wait staff, ignore the needy, watch porn, be unfaithful to your marriage vows, destroy the environment, or ignore your kids. People who fit this description clearly belong to their own truth, not God's truth.

A similar question: Do we belong to the truth, or do we live and act as if the truth belongs to us? In the words of **Fr. Michael Marsh** "how we answer that question will determine ... the choices we make, the priorities we establish, the words we speak, and the actions we take." If we believe the truth belongs to us, then we're truth-shifters, those who shape the truth to make it fit their version of reality or to justify their ungodly or anti-social behavior.

To whom do you listen? Jesus said those who belong to the truth listen to his voice, sort of like the sheep who know the voice of the shepherd, or a child who can distinguish the voice of her mother out of a crowd of mothers. When we're off doing whatever we want to, to whose voice are we listening? Sometimes we are like many adolescents. They

insist they know what they're doing, that they really love mom and dad, but they listen to their own counsel or to the advice of their peers sometimes with tragic results rather than the voice of their parents.

“When we make ourselves custodians of the truth,” Marsh says, “when we believe that the truth belongs to us, we listen to our own voice and the voices of those who think and act like us. We listen to the voice of our political party, our country, our religion, our faction. We listen to the voice of our prejudice, our individual needs and desires, our experience.

Are we seriously willing to conform our lifestyle (our behavior, ethics, values) to the teachings of the Bible? It is always a good thing to ask this question. Sometimes we are like a satellite or spaceship slips out of orbit, and it needs a boost to return to the correct orbital pathway. Sometimes, wellness requires regular, if not frequent, checkups. So, you visit your health care professional. She tells you that you need to modify your lifestyle. You need to turn over a new leaf.

**Christ the King** Sunday is our spiritual checkup. Is Jesus Lord, or isn't he? Do we listen to his voice, or our own? Do we belong to God's truth, or our own? Are we demonstrating a life that is so true, so full, so blessed, so beautiful that others are drawn to it. What is the truth? **Amen.**



## **First Presbyterian Church in Hawley Sunday, November 24, 2024 Second Scripture Lesson**

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### **John 18:33-37**

<sup>33</sup>Then Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?"

<sup>34</sup>Jesus answered, "Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?"

<sup>35</sup>Pilate replied, "I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?"

<sup>36</sup>Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here."

<sup>37</sup>Pilate asked him, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "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."

**This is the Word of the Lord.  
Thanks be To God.**