

Jesus answered "...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."

John 18: 37

Seek the Truth...

Those who chose the readings for today left out a very important verse when they decided to end the Gospel at verse 37. The scene is Jesus before Pilate. Pilate has been asked by the religious leaders to find Jesus guilty of treason – a crime punishable by death. They are willing to sacrifice the one to save their positions of power and their way of life.

Jesus was arrested in the garden and taken before the high priest, Caiaphas. And from there Jesus was taken to Pilate for trial. Pilate tries to give Jesus back to the religious authorities but they said no. And so Pilate begins to question Jesus to find out the truth about who Jesus is and why those leaders were so determined to turn him over to the Roman authorities. The verse left out is at the core of the questions we ask every day. "Pilate asks him 'what is truth?'" What is truth: about Jesus, about our lives, about things and events around us, about how we are to live, about our relationship with God.

Pilate asks Jesus "Are you the king of the Jews?" This is at the heart of the potential charges against Jesus. If Jesus answers "no", then there are no grounds for Pilate to hold him. If Jesus answers "no" then Jesus denies who he is and why he is in the world. But if Jesus answers "yes", then Jesus is a threat to the civil authorities. Jesus can be charged with treason and executed. Risky business.

Jesus turns the tables on Pilate and asks Pilate: "do you ask this on your own or did others tell you about me?" Jesus asks this question of us, today, as well. Running throughout the Gospel of John, again and again, the question to us is "who do you say that I am?" Not who others say Jesus is. But who do you say – and who do I say- Jesus is. The very personal question of who Jesus is to each of us. You and I can't depend upon another's answer. Each of us must answer this question for ourselves. What does it mean to you and to me when we say Jesus is the Christ, the anointed one of God, the one God clothed in human flesh to give us insight into what is possible when we focus our life and our decisions on right relationship with God. And then, what are we to do in response to how we answer the questions of what is truth and who is Jesus.

Pilate takes Jesus' answer literally probably because he is not capable of understanding the nuances of the question. Pilate's response, "you must have done something to end up before me" is like our saying "where there's smoke, there's fire." People generally don't wrongly accuse someone in Pilate's world so he reasons that there must be *something* to the charges that brought Jesus before Pilate.

Pilate persists: "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." And back we circle to the fundamental question for the day: what is truth? And when we know what the truth is, what do we do in response. Jesus –Son of God- incarnate so that we might know God in a new way. Jesus comes into the world to testify to the truth.

Testimony is important to our faith and to our lives. Testimony is not limited to a courtroom. Testimony is not limited to talking before the crowd gathered in church or synagogue. Testimony is not limited to the Bible-thumping man on the sidewalk. Testimony is life in action. The ministry of Jesus – of Christ the King- wasn't about sitting around a table and talking. His whole ministry was full of action. He got out among the people and found out what their needs were. Sometimes he filled those needs – and sometimes he asked questions: “Do you want to be made well?” We know Jesus could heal – but in at least one case, the question was “do you want to be made well?” Jesus led people to articulate their needs and then to act on them: “Get up and walk.” Jesus calls us to action: Feed the hungry; clothe the naked; tend the sick; visit those in prison. Each of the least of these carries within him- or her-self the image of God. If you can see Christ in the least among us, then you serve God. Then you witness to the truth.

And when we fail to see Jesus in the least among us, then we also turn away God. And we damn ourselves for judging others and for failing to help when we are able. God doesn't sit back and wait. God is active in the world – although sometimes it can be hard to see God when flooding and famine and earthquakes and all the other horrors of the world are around us. God calls us to overcome our fears and to act with love and compassion towards others.

On Thanksgiving Day there was a horrendous crash on Interstate 10 in southeast Texas. Two dead, 80+ injured and at least 140 cars were involved in the crash. Rod Carroll responded both because he is a Texas deputy sheriff and because he is a paramedic. In an article in the *Los Angeles Times*, Carroll said he will long be haunted by what he saw in the fog on that holiday morning, but also by the good Samaritans he witnessed. “This was the most-traveled day of the year,” Carroll recalled. “Part of the problem was that there were so many vehicles on the road. It was all families. Grandparents, grandkids – everyone traveling to see family. But that helped us, it really did.” He said many people who survived the mishap became first responders. “It was people helping people,” Carroll said. “We were overwhelmed, and I saw strangers sitting and holding, putting pressure on people that were injured. It was really amazing.”¹

This is the Last Sunday of Pentecost and is also known as Christ the King or the Realm of Christ Sunday. It is a Sunday when we can reflect upon the last year. How well have we lived as disciples of Christ? How well have we proclaimed the Gospel to all with whom we come into contact? Have we fed the hungry, clothed the naked, tended the sick or visited those in prison? Or have we been so wrapped up in our own needs and wants – and ways in which we feel we are victims that our world has become smaller and smaller. Have we missed seeing the sunshine outside for the gloom inside?

This is also the time when St. John's rallies to participate in the REINDeer project. When you go into Whitlock Hall, you will see bags with lists. Wants and needs expressed by 50 children here in Montgomery County who are less fortunate than we are. Fifty children who hope that they matter. Fifty children who are among the least that Jesus calls us to care for.

¹ <http://www.latimes.com/news/nation/nationnow/la-na-nn-texas-fog-pileup-20121123,0,7271140.story> (November 24, 2012)

As human beings we are not going to get everything right every time. We are not always going to see the truth clearly. We are not always going to know how to respond once we do determine the truth. We can look to Jesus for guidance. Get up. Get out. Find ways to be of service to others.

Sundays like today are times to reflect upon the past year. When we did well, celebrate. When we didn't do so well, look and see how we might do better the next time. When our focus turned inward instead of outward, be alert to the next time we're tempted to hold a pity party because life isn't exactly how we wish it might be.

What is truth, Pilate asks Jesus. "I am the way, the truth and the life", Jesus responds. Look to the life of Jesus – to what he said and what he did -to know what the truth is. Get up. Get out into the world. Serve others. What you do and what you say is your testimony to the love of God for you and for me and for all. *Amen.*