

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...

We are all guilty of selective outrage. That is, some things hit us harder than others for a variety of reasons. We focus on the death in Paris because we've been to Paris or we wish to go. It has a connection for us while the hotel takeover and death in Mali is more remote. We don't have a connection to Mali, or Beirut, or Niger or all the other places where terrorists acted this week and so most of us really don't react deeply to those events. But Paris- the city of lights, the place that figures prominently in literature and in World War II- we react to what happened there at much more of a gut level. For Christians, the Gospel passage today is one we should resonate with.

Last words are important. If any of you have been privileged to be with someone as they are dying- as they say their last words, you know that those words stick with you for a long, long time. Good words like "I love you" or "Thank you." And not so good words like "Why does it take so long to die" or "Get out." Words that can build us up and words that leave us puzzled or hurt or even angry.

Jesus' last words are in this passage from the Gospel of John until we get to the cross and the moment when he dies. These words are important to us because they remind us of who Jesus is and why he has become incarnate. "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."

Those who chose the readings for today left out a very important verse when they decided to end 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. About how we are to live- what actions we are to take- when horrible things happen in our world. The real truth is our work to be agents of love, justice and mercy be real drivers in a world that too often descends into violence and tearing apart of the fabric of life.

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 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 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 so Pilate reasons that there must be *something* to the charges that brought Jesus before him.

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? **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 or 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 herself 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.

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? Do we respond to violence with violence?

Jesus will not usher in the realm of God with violence. And neither should we. Martin Luther King, Jr. took much of the approach to his ministry from time spent with Mahatmas Gandhi, especially non-violent response and philosophy. King wrote:

The ultimate weakness of violence is that it is a descending spiral, begetting the very thing it seeks to destroy. Instead of diminishing evil, it multiplies it. Through violence you may murder the liar, but you cannot murder the lie, nor establish the truth. Through violence you may murder the hater, but you do not murder hate. In fact, violence merely increases the hate. So it goes. Returning violence for violence multiplies violence, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars. Darkness cannot drive out darkness: only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate: only love can do that.<sup>1</sup>

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 way and 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. This is the purpose of our dismissal: Let us go forth to love and serve the Lord. We come here for solace and for strength but we do not stay here. We can go forth because we have been refreshed with the body and blood of Jesus Christ. A reminder that the last words of David- that God has made an everlasting covenant with us- are still true. Christ is with us, will we, won't we. And that is good news when we see and hear of acts of outrage against the children of God.

In pondering how we, so many miles away from the various acts of terror this last week can respond, David Lose, president of Luther Seminary in Philadelphia, writes:

Pray and then witness to the One who demonstrated power through weakness, who manifested strength through vulnerability, who established justice through mercy. And to the One who built the kingdom of God by embracing a confused, chaotic and violent world, taking its pain into his own body, dying the death the world sought and rising again to remind us that light is stronger than darkness, love is stronger than hate, and that with God all good things are possible.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> From "Where do we go from here?" as published in Where do we go from here: Chaos or Community? (1967,p. 62)

<sup>2</sup> David Lose "In the Meantime" ([DavidJLose@gmail.com](mailto:DavidJLose@gmail.com), Nov. 16, 2015)

The “so what” to the acts of this world is thus to keep our focus on Jesus. To learn from how he responded to the acts of terror in his time. Our call in this time and place is to testify to the light. To live a life that witnesses to what is possible when we love God and we love one another. *Amen.*