

PSALM 25:1-10

To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul. O my God, in you I trust; do not let me be put to shame; do not let my enemies exult over me. Do not let those who wait for you be put to shame; let them be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous.

Make me to know your ways, O Lord; teach me your paths. Lead me in your truth, and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all day long.

Be mindful of your mercy, O Lord, and of your steadfast love, for they have been from of old. Do not remember the sins of my youth or my transgressions; according to your steadfast love remember me, for your goodness' sake, O Lord!

Good and upright is the Lord; therefore, he instructs sinners in the way. He leads the humble in what is right, and teaches the humble his way. All the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness, for those who keep his covenant and his decrees.

PROVERBS 17:1-5, 7

Better is a dry morsel with quiet than a house full of feasting with strife. A slave who deals wisely will rule over a child who acts shamefully, and will share the inheritance as one of the family. The crucible is for silver, and the furnace is for gold, but the Lord tests the heart. An evildoer listens to wicked lips; and a liar gives heed to a mischievous tongue. Those who mock the poor insult their Maker; those who are glad at calamity will not go unpunished...Fine speech is not becoming to a fool; still less is false speech to a ruler.

John 18:28-38

Then they took Jesus from Caiaphas to Pilate's headquarters. It was early in the morning. They themselves did not enter the headquarters, so as to avoid ritual defilement and to be able to eat the Passover. So, Pilate went out to them and said, "What accusation to you

bring against this man? They answered, "If this man were not a criminal, we would not have handed him over to you." Pilate said to them, "Take him yourselves and judge him according to your law." The Jews replied, "We are not permitted to put anyone to death." (This was to fulfill what Jesus had said when he indicated the kind of death he was to die.)

Then Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus answered, "Do you ask this on your own, or did another tell you about me?" 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?" 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. 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." Pilate asked him, "What is truth?"

TRUTH ACHE

Psalm 25:1-10
Proverbs 14:1-5, 7
John 18:28-38

I have a truth ache. I am aching for the truth—some truth, any truth. But no one seems to be able to find the truth or even agree on what truth is. Did you know that Oxford Dictionaries' word of the year is "post-truth" referring to the era in which we are now living? Truth be known—if it can be found—is that facts are currently less important in determining reality than people's feelings and personal biases.

In fact, (pardon the pun) what has increasingly become apparent is that "truth" is whatever we choose to make it. We live in a world where fake news has begun to rival verifiable reporting of events. As stated in a recent USA TODAY article: "Between fake news

that sways elections, fake apps that trick shoppers and fake book reviews that stymie sales, the web has seen a surge in fantastic, misleading and outright false messaging that threatens to make the truth hard to find.”

And as Pilate asked Jesus, what is truth anyway? Because it would seem to me that there is more than one kind of truth. There are facts that can be scientifically proven—the earth is more than 5000 years old—but there is also emotional truth—what we know in our hearts to be true for us even if it cannot be verified empirically. And I think where we have run into trouble is that the distinction between the two has become blurred. There are truths which cannot be rationally disputed and then there are those which are deeply personal that we protect as sacred treasures which no one else has to agree with and no affect upon them anyway.

This is really the discussion that Jesus is having with Pilate during his interrogation. Pilate wants to know, *Are you the King of the Jews?* And give Pilate credit. He actually wants no part of this conflict with the Jews and is attempting to reach some sort of factual evidence, some truth upon which he can base his judgment. After a bit of verbal jousting, Jesus responds, *My kingdom is not from this world...my kingdom is not from here.* Now we are getting somewhere because what Jesus has just done is to distinguish between the spiritual and the secular, the emotional and the physical, the subjective and the objective.

Pilate then cuts to the chase. *So are you a king?* And Jesus answers, *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* which then leads Pilate to ask the dangling question, *What is truth?*

The stage is now set for us in these confusing twenty-first century times. We are being challenged as Christians to make decisions every day on what we are going to regard as truth on more than one level. And it matters what we decide. As writer Robert Bitzer said, “The belief that something false is real does not make it so but does govern our actions. The bush alongside a mountain trail can startle us if we believe it is a bear.”

And each of us does contribute to the national consciousness. Whose voice do we listen to? What the world says and what God says are often entirely different things. Do we even care? Seeking the truth doesn't seem important anymore. What seems to be driving our national consciousness is not truth, but competition to sway opinions and emotions to garner support for one's favorite prejudice or political cause and the truth be damned.

Since Pilate has asked, let us return to his question: *What is truth?* And because we are, I assume, truth seekers, let us turn to what we regard as holy writ and lay a foundation for answering Pilate's inquiry.

There is much to be learned from Psalm 25 for truth is also on the writer's mind: *Make me to know your ways, O Lord; teach me your paths. Lead me in your truth and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation...* What we need to know as we explore the psalm is that truth is not an intellectual concept for the Hebrews. Rather, it is relational. In fact, the word used here for truth also means, "constant, permanent, faithful, reliable." *O my God, in you I trust; do not let me be put to shame...Be mindful of your mercy, O Lord, and of your steadfast love, for they have been from of old...unchangeable, reliable, constant.*

For the Hebrews, truth and trust go hand in glove. So, you cannot avoid a behavioral, moral and ethical extension of truth: *He leads the humble in what is right and teaches the humble his way. All the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness, for those who keep his covenant and his decrees.* We too then are expected to live in truth by forming covenantal relationships to one another. Are we trustworthy? Are we constant? Are we reliable? Do we spread fake news? Are we complicit in creating alternate realities which are dangerous and injurious to others? Are we card carrying members of the Liars' Club? For remember too that the scriptures have no patience with those who peddle falsehood to enrich themselves, to elevate themselves or to subject others to their will. As Solomon says in Proverbs: *The crucible is for silver and the furnace is for gold, but the Lord tests the heart. An evildoer listens to wicked lips; and a liar gives heed to a mischievous tongue...Fine speech is*

not becoming to a fool; still less is false speech to a ruler.

So again I ask, What is truth? Is it just what we want it to be or are there universal components which apply to everyone in every situation? What is the truth to which Jesus came to testify and to which we are bound to listen? It seems to me we have two complimentary tasks—one is to stay on top of what is being proclaimed in the marketplace—the messaging which is being put out on social media and biased news channels—left or right—to influence our feelings and beliefs. And the other is to remain constant in our efforts to walk in the paths of the Lord which are steadfast love and faithfulness in all of our relationships.

This is not easy. On the contrary, it takes time and requires our utmost attention. We have a responsibility to educate ourselves on the facts—the objective truth—because a lot of people will simply not do that. On our vacation last summer, we had the good fortune to make friends with a delightful British couple who were staying at our B&B. The Brexit vote had just taken place—they were very much against it—and spoke disparagingly about their nephew who had voted for it and who was already expressing buyer's remorse. He confessed he did not even know what he was voting for. He had simply believed a lot of propaganda put up on Facebook and had done no objective research on the actual consequences of leaving the EU.

Why are people so gullible? Research shows—if you can believe it—that once we have established a belief about something, we will hold fast to it even if the evidence against it is overwhelming. And then, of course, we will also embrace false news that tends to confirm that belief. So if you believe that Muslims are a threat to your existence or that immigrants are stealing your jobs, you will also then believe fanciful statements that tend to confirm your biases—thousands of Muslims cheering in the streets of Newark after the Twin Towers went down.

Cleveland Plain Dealer editor George Rodrigue nicely laid out what I believe is all of our responsibility when he wrote: “We can be respectful, but we need to be truthful. It’s time to educate those around us to facts and eradicate fake news. It’s time to push back when

intolerance and hate creep into normalcy...Wrong is wrong and shouldn't be covered in excuses. We cannot assent to hateful speech with silence, and we cannot be complacent."

It is true that Jesus' kingdom is not of this world. His kingdom is in our hearts. It is his Way that brings life. We cannot just give lip service to all people being children of God. We have to actually live it. We can study it all we want, but there is really no more knowledge to it than that. It is more about steadfast love and faithfulness to his teachings. Our work is never easy and it is never finished. For we cannot rest until we have brought good news to the poor, procured release for the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, have let the oppressed go free and proclaimed the year of the Lord's favor. And that, my friends, is the Truth.

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