

Truth: An endangered species

The truth is, that truth is under attack. And the truth is, that truth always is - sometimes more than others. We're living in one of those times, but you don't need me to tell you that. You know it deep in your bones. You feel it underneath your skin like subcutaneous shingles. It's a nagging pain that simply won't go away. It's fueled by fear, a sense of foreboding, the realization of our own vulnerabilities and by the insistence of others on muddying the clear waters where truth lives. All of us are grappling with the question of what to believe and who to listen to. We worry constantly about being in the deep shadows of the unknown.

Each of us in our own way mulls over the big mysteries of life. My self-isolation has sent me to my bookshelves in search of some of the other truths about life before I tackle the myths and misinformation swarming around the Coronavirus and its stranglehold on our country.

One of the books I re-read just last night was "On tyranny: Twenty lessons from the 20th century" by Timothy Snyder. It chronicles, as the title implies, the various periods during the last century where truth was subordinated and later redefined by despots, tyrants or dictators. The author is careful not to go off on a political tangent and make comparisons to then and now, but he does identify some truths worth contemplating. One is, crises always cause us to re-evaluate and re-assess our grasp of the truth, and opportunist leaders always see those times as a void that can be filled by power with themselves at the helm.

But radical change doesn't always occur from the top down; it can also germinate from the bottom up when people are gripped with fear and insecurity. The obvious examples are the Depression and the collapse of economies around the world, namely in Germany, when hyperinflation and joblessness had people scrambling to stay alive. Enter the 'new truth' of manifest destiny espoused by a silver-tongued maniac in a brown shirt who proceeded to alter truth's DNA to fit his political agenda. As Snyder says, "History does not repeat, but it does instruct...it can familiarize and it can warn...Aristotle warned that inequality brought instability, while Plato believed that demagogues exploited free speech to install themselves as tyrants." The founders of our American Republic knew the truth embodied in those statements made centuries earlier and endeavored to create a system whereby the truth couldn't be permanently hijacked by a single individual or organization (or political administration).

In Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice* his character Launcelot said, "Nay, indeed, if you had your eyes, you might fail of the knowing me: it is a wise father that knows his own child. Well, old man, I will tell you news of your son: give me your blessing: truth will come to light; murder cannot be hid long; a man's son may, but at the length (the) truth will out." Man has been seeking truth since time began, but like the country western song, *Lookin' for love* by Johnny Lee, man has also avoided looking in the right places for it. Many of us have concentrated on what's outside our spiritual selves instead of focusing on Christ's statement in John 14:6, "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father (the ultimate truth) except through me."

That's the BIG truth if you're a believer. If you're not, you are on your own journey to answer the burning questions of why we're all here on this beleaguered planet. Truth is often hidden by the clouds of subterfuge created by malicious individuals who are on their own personal quests for power and the domination of others. Ninety-nine times out of a hundred those quests require subordination of the truth about our actual problems with our social structures, economies and political ideologies. Alternative truths were born in the last century by fascists and communists who feared globalization and the real and perceived inequalities that would result from the adoption of free markets and free thought. Snyder states that most of our freedom is freely given to authoritarians who come to power, and he makes a good case for it when looking at pre-WWII Germany. When people are afraid and morally depressed they are more susceptible to 'alternative truths' such as Hitler offered - that the German people were destined for greatness because of who they were.

The argument for the mythology-based truth was strong enough to convince the convinceable that there was an empire there for the taking. The choice of continued misery or a return to prosperity and national pride was an easy one for most Germans to make. Snyder also talks about something called, 'anticipatory obedience' - a public act of adapting instinctively without reflecting (on the truth) to a new situation. The Coronavirus scare is a recent example of how we've given in to our leaders and the 'experts' and are obeying their guidelines and accepting their truths as being self-evident. Indeed, they may be right...but they could also be wrong.

Political realities are not necessarily political truths. Some can be, but most aren't. While life is political; make no mistake about that, politics is not the playground of the truth. It is often, however, the crucible in which the truth is separated from other ideas. Given the constant twisting and spinning of the truth by our leaders and our media, what can you and I do? How can we counter the recent attempts to consolidate power by federal and state officials to severely limit our ability to assemble for church services, to purchase firearms for our own protection, and to stop illegal seizure of property as Governor Cuomo of New York is threatening? (He calls it, "sharing of resources" not forcible seizure of them.) Have we adopted anticipatory obedience as our modus operandi while power grabs by governors continue to expand and are later justified by our otherwise brilliantly devised constitutional republic? Let us hope that you and I will press on in our search and demand the truth from those we've chosen to lead us.

Back to Shakespeare. In *Julius Caesar*, Mark Antony said, "The evil men do lives after them; the good is oft interred with their bones." We must all make sure that goodness and truth do not become a casualty of our current crisis and that we exercise our responsibility to hold those who hold our future in their hands forever accountable for their actions. There is no time to wait for any evil to live beyond bad decision-making. Our very survival hangs in the balance.

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