

The Church of the Pilgrimage
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John 8:31-36

To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” They answered him, “We are Abraham’s descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?” Jesus replied, “Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. ³⁵ Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. ³⁶ So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.

The Truth Shall Set You Free

When I was in high school, the senior class in the school yearbook could have a favorite quote under their picture as part of their wisdom or thoughts they were leaving behind. I remember I used this line from the Gospel of John: “You will know the Truth and the Truth shall set you free”. I don’t remember if I was making a point about anything special. I suppose leaving high school I could have been referring to any number of things to be free about! I don’t remember and perhaps it’s just as well! But I did leave that message and it came to mind as I was preparing this sermon: You will know the truth and the truth shall set you free.” We are in the midst of summer, a time of rest, relaxation and renewal I thought it might be helpful to think about what truth we may carry with us during the rest of this summer. What truth sets us free? This message in the Gospel of John is a strong one – at first the disciples don’t get it because they say they were never enslaved, therefore they do not need to be freed. We can say the same thing...or can we? Are we enslaved to anything in the living of our lives in 2018? You will know the truth and the truth shall set you free. Jesus suggests that anyone who lives in sin is not free, but that is really the topic for another sermon! While we are in the midst of this summer what truth will set us free?

Some things come to mind when thinking about the word truth:

- As children we may have played the game truth or dare. As you know truth or dare is a verbal party game requiring two or more players. Players are given the choice between answering a question truthfully, or performing a "dare", both of which are set by the other players. The game has existed for hundreds of years, with at least one variant, "questions and commands", being attested to as early as 1712.
- When Edith Ann debuted on “Rowan and Martin’s Laugh-In” in 1969, the precocious 5-year-old — as portrayed by Lily Tomlin, appeared out of a refrigerator box. Tomlin describes playing Edith Ann which the producers did not think would catch on. But viewers were endeared by the way Edith Ann’s child-size views of the world contained big dollops of adult-size humor, insights and satire. And viewers were enchanted by her catch-phrase: “And that’s the truth,” which she followed with an emphatic raspberry. Edith Ann did catch on and began appearing in an oversized rocking chair and lasted until 1973.
- When we were younger we were taught not to “air our dirty laundry” that is don’t talk to anyone about what might not be right at home. This often led to people keeping secrets,

secrets that have not been helpful to carry into adulthood and learning how to trust in relationships. These secrets may have been damaging for one's sense of worth and well-being.

- In our adult lives we may not be so truthful about our addictions...to alcohol or drugs; to gambling or pornography; to shopping or food.
- In the preamble of the United States Declaration of Independence written in 1776, we know this familiar phrase: We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed, by their Creator, with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.
- In our justice system people swear on the Scripture of their faith and promise to say the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth so help me God. Sworn testimony is evidence given by a witness who has made a commitment to tell the truth. If the witness is later found to have lied whilst bound by the commitment, they can often be charged with the crime of perjury.
- Today, we may wonder about the truth...in the midst of claims of fake news and alternative facts, what is the truth? Webster's defines truth as (1) the body of real things, events, and facts : ACTUALITY (2) the state of being the case: FACT (3) a transcendent fundamental or spiritual reality: GOD. So, I think that gives us a good guide...truth is based on facts, science, what is real. It's not something we make up or present as true trying to persuade people. Truth is authentic, real, something to rely on.
- The essential idea of truth in the Bible is faithfulness or reliability. God's truth (faithfulness and reliability) is basic for all other truth, such as Love. God is the truth. God is true in a physical sense; true in God's being: God has a real subsistence and gives being to others. God is true in a moral sense; God is true without errors; without deceit. God is prima veritas, the pattern and prototype of truth.
- Without truth there is no trust, no honor, no respect, no way to build a foundation from which to grow.
- Truth can be painful or uplifting, it's not always easy but it will make you stronger.
- From a place of truth we gain inner peace and security.

From our Gospel lesson this morning right from the beginning there is a jockeying for position if you will, by the writers of John: some skepticism about the Jews believing in Jesus; was their belief just about certain doctrinal positions, but not really having personal trust in him? Thereby making them just partial believers. Jesus clarifies: these and all believers would truly be his disciples only if they continue in his word. Events in the church at the time when this Gospel was written confirmed the possibility that "believers" may not actually live as they should so the author was faced with the need of devising tests to distinguish true faith from false. There were those within the church who continued to commit sin. Aware of this precarious spiritual position, Jesus offered them true freedom from bondage. If they would abide in his teaching they would thereby come to know God's truth, which is not a set of timeless ideas but a dynamic power that can make people free. Believing meant not just a changed view of God from what Jesus taught but a changed view of themselves. In this changed view it didn't matter if you were Jew or Gentile, slave or free, woman or man, we are all one in faith. And believing meant changing how we live: turning away from sin, turning away from just meeting our own needs, turning away from things of this world and focusing on relationship with God, focusing on living

as God intends for us to live, focusing on caring for others, focusing on bringing the light of God to our world. This passage helps us to set our priorities in the living of life.

So what truth do you carry as you live your life of faith? I believe Psalm 139 is a good place to start. Leslie F. Brandt wrote *Psalms Now* a contemporary version of the psalms. This is his version of Psalm 139: O God, you know me inside and out, through and through. Everything I do, every thought that flits through my mind, every step I take, every plan I make, every word I speak, You know, even before these things happen. You know my past; You know my future. Your enveloping presence covers my every move. Your knowledge of me sometimes comforts me, sometimes frightens me, but it is always far beyond my comprehension. There is no way to escape You, no place to hide. If I ascend to the heights of joy, You are there before me. If I plunge into the depths of despair, You are there to meet me. I could fly to the other side of the world and find You there to lead the way. I could walk into the darkest night, only to find You there to lighten its dismal hours. You were present at my conception. You guided the molding of my unformed members within the body of my mother. Nothing about me, from beginning to end, has been hidden from Your eyes. How frightfully, fantastically wonderful it all is! May Your all-knowing, everywhere-present Spirit continue to search out my feelings and thoughts. Deliver me from that which may hurt or destroy me, and guide me along the paths of love and truth.

The psalmist writes God has searched me and known me. This knowing is on an intimate level. We belong to God because God created us, believes in us and is always reaching out to us. God seeks to be known in return in the same way. The relationship described of God in this Psalm is an out spilling of love beyond all that the human mind can conceive. Think of feeling loved and carefree...God loves us in this way and even more. That is the freedom that Jesus refers to when he says: You shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free. God knows what makes us “tick”, knows our thoughts before we speak them. God knows every detail about us – how we treat people we encounter, our motivations - some more honorable than others, our limitations. And God loves us. God loves us when we’re in a good mood and even when we’re not! What an awesome thought! Yet we are free to choose how we act and what we do each day and how we “go on our merry little way”. And still God loves us. This is one truth to carry with us this summer.

Most religions believe and even take for granted that God is to be found everywhere. What is contained in Psalm 139, not found in other religions is that God maintains God’s personhood and remains other, yet is always seeking to be in relationship with the creation. God can be present anywhere God chooses. In addition, God is present with us, anywhere we choose to go. No matter how we live, we cannot flee from God’s spirit. Even if we try to go it alone, we cannot. If we try to flee from God’s presence, if we try to turn our backs on God, we cannot. We cannot escape God. Even when we sink into the depths of Sheol – no matter what keeps us down or holds us back – those secrets from our childhood, our depression, our acting out, our meaningless living, our addictions, our feelings of worthlessness, being too busy, seemingly not caring; even then – we cannot escape God. In life with temptations and emptiness, God brings direction and brightness, God brings good out of chaos. No matter what our chaos – God can transform it. This is one truth to carry with us this summer.

The writer of Psalm 139 is in awe regarding the mysterious complexity of creation – the human body, the universe, the stars, the cycles of nature, the ocean and we could go on and on. All of creation is connected, one with the other. Even to the minute detail of when we were just an embryo in our mother’s womb, seen by God but not by humanity; known by God but only an expectation for humanity. And we are knit together still. Each with the other. All of us today in this church. All the people in all the churches, temples and mosques around the world, we are all connected. Even people not at church we are still connected. Think of all the things you do or have done in your life to help other people, big or small, it doesn’t matter, all the things you volunteer at, all the calls you make, the cards you send, all the visits or meals you’ve made, all the people you have helped in your lifetime. All these tasks ultimately have to do with our faith and with our relationship with God and God’s relationship with us. Take a moment and look around the church, really look around. These are God’s people, God’s hands and arms and legs and voices and eyes. These are the people that reach out to people in need. These are the people that show us through their kind words and deeds that the world is not a terrible place but one where we bring God to and where we find God when we forget that wonderful message in Psalm 139. And it’s not just the people of our church, it’s people around the world who make a difference in our world through their acts of kindness, love and generosity. We are all connected to each other. This is one truth to carry with us this summer.

So, whether you played truth or dare as a child; whether you are versed in the Declaration of Independence; whether you have ever given sworn testimony; whether you carry the scars of keeping secrets from your past: God's truth (God’s faithfulness and God’s reliability) is the basis for all other truth. As we continue in this summer let us carry these messages of truth with us:

- God knows us intimately and loves us.
- We cannot escape God no matter how we are living.
- God can transform our chaos, indeed changes us, no matter how we see ourselves.
- We are connected to each other and as simple as that may seem, it is no small thing in the eyes of God.
- The kind deeds people do, including our own, matter and do make a difference.

From the Gospel of John, we are reminded: you will know the truth and the truth shall set you free. So, for the rest of the summer, whether we find ourselves in a church on a Sunday morning carry these truths with you. As Edith Anne would conclude...and that’s the truth!

Amen.