

Sermon: Our Core Values – We Are Truth-Bearers  
Scripture: John 17:6-19 Sanctify them in truth – your Word is truth  
Date: January 29, 2012  
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John 17:6-19 With his heart open to his disciples, Jesus prayed to his heavenly Father ...

<sup>6</sup>“I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. <sup>7</sup>Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; <sup>8</sup>for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. <sup>9</sup>I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. <sup>10</sup>All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them.

<sup>11</sup>And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one. <sup>12</sup>While I was with them, I protected them in your name that you have given me. I guarded them, and not one of them was lost except the one destined to be lost, so that the scripture might be fulfilled. <sup>13</sup>But now I am coming to you, and I speak these things in the world so that they may have my joy made complete in themselves. <sup>14</sup>I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. <sup>15</sup>I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one. <sup>16</sup>They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world.

<sup>17</sup>Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. <sup>18</sup>As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. <sup>19</sup>And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth.

Today we continue with this series of sermons on our core Presbyterian values. Please read aloud from your bulletin the boldface portion of this statement from

our constitution about the great ends or purposes of the church. We're reading the first four. (Read it.)

**From Book of Order, F-1.0304 The Great Ends of the Church are:**  
**The proclamation of the gospel for the salvation of humankind.**  
**The shelter, nurture, and spiritual fellowship of the children of God.**  
**The maintenance of divine worship.**  
**The preservation of the truth.**  
The promotion of social righteousness.  
The exhibition of the Kingdom of Heaven to the world.

Today, we are reminded that one of our purposes as a body of believers is preservation of the truth. That is to say there is truth. We can find it. Or is it that it finds us? We can learn the truth, we can know truth, and embrace truth. And we can tell it.

In his high priestly prayer of John Chapter 17, verse 16, Jesus prays of his followers, "Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth."

## **Truth**

Oh, God's Word is truth. Theologian Karl Barth was the one to specify God's **Written** Word is the Bible, God's **Living** Word is Jesus Christ, God's **Visible** Word is the sacraments. We hold in reverence God's Word.

Sanctify them in truth. Your Word is truth. In Greek it's about the logos, the Word, the overarching power and force from beyond this world. John said that Word is of God and is God. Truth, in New Testament Greek, is pronounced *a-lay'-thee-ah*. Truth. There was a young lady a couple years older than me in high school, she and her family went to my church, and her name was Aletha. It means truth.

I would assert that when you come into a gathering of Presbyterians, somewhere at the core, it may not be obvious at first, but somewhere deep within and then percolating up to the surface when you least expect it, or maybe when you need it the most, there will be something that not only smacks of truth, as we say, but is truth, and is truth-ful, something that is really of truth. Truth to us is not inconsequential. We claim to be – and I trust are -- about the truth. We seek it and desire it with all our hearts. We may not all claim that we have found it, not yet,

not completely, but at least we are truth-seekers and by God's grace we are truth-bearers.

Presbyterian minister and author Frederick Buechner suggests that Pilate asked the question "What is truth?" ". . . because in a world of many truths and half truths, he is hungry for truth itself or, failing that, at least for the truth that there is no truth. We are all of us Pilate in our asking after truth . . ." <sup>1</sup>

And I say the good news is we can have truth if we want it, and why wouldn't we want it? John in his gospel wrote that the law came through Moses but something greater, grace and truth, came through Jesus Christ. <sup>2</sup>

Jesus told Thomas, "I am the way, the truth, and the life . . ." <sup>3</sup> Jesus not only teaches truth but personally reveals it because he is the truth, he embodies it.

Jesus told disciples, "I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth..." <sup>4</sup>

And Jesus said you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free. <sup>5</sup> Falsehood is a prison but truth is freedom.

The world we live in, the society of which we are a part, may confuse truth with fiction. We can't stop that. The world may exchange truth with falsehood. We can't stop that, but we can notice it. But in the noticing, where we notice a difference between truth and falsehood, we can choose. By God's grace we can choose the truth and submit to it.

David in Psalm 25 declared, "Lead me in your truth, and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation." <sup>6</sup> Imagine that truth goes before you, it leads the way for you. Truth illumines your path. It brightens your day. It's like a lighthouse on a dark moonless night.

## **Sanctify**

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in the powerpoint presentation *The Great Ends of the Church* (Louisville, KY: Witherspoon), Frederick Buechner, *Telling the Truth*, 14

<sup>2</sup> John 1:17

<sup>3</sup> John 14:6

<sup>4</sup> John 14:15

<sup>5</sup> John 8:32

<sup>6</sup> Ps. 25:5

Jesus prayed, “Sanctify them in the truth . . . .” Sanctify. In the original New Testament “*Ha-gee’-ah-sahn*” Sanctify. To make holy. “You shall be holy, for I am holy, says the Lord.”<sup>7</sup>

In the life and actions of Jesus, we are sanctified. Hebrews 13:12 explains, “Therefore Jesus also suffered outside the city gate in order to sanctify the people by his own blood.” We usually think of someone else’s blood as a hazardous material. You don’t normally want to be around someone else’s blood. But the blood of Jesus is special. The blood of Jesus sanctifies. The blood of Jesus makes holy. No hazardous material disposal station needed.

Paul wrote to the Corinthians “... you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.”<sup>8</sup>

I feel the best church street sign is the one that says “Hospital for Sinners” instead of “Only Perfect People Are Welcome Here.”

A man felt he couldn’t come to God and couldn’t come to church until he got himself straightened out. But that was a mistake, wasn’t it? Sanctification isn’t about straightening ourselves out as much as it is being straightened out, where we are the clay in the hands of the Potter, the divine Potter forming us and making us clay blobs into beautiful divine vessels ready for the Lord’s service. It’s a process.

Jesus in the Garden prayed to Abba above about his disciples, “<sup>17</sup> Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. <sup>18</sup> As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. <sup>19</sup> And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth.” Out from the Garden they went, called to bear truth.

## **Obstacles to Truth-bearing**

There are obstacles to truth-bearing we want to try and avoid.

- Sweeping generalizations. It could be the statement: “Everybody is mad.” Well, is everybody actually mad? Let’s see, there are about six billion people on the planet. “Everybody’s mad.” Are they all mad? Don’t you mean two or three, or ten or twelve, are mad? But to say everybody is mad when only a smaller number are mad is a sweeping generalization. We want to avoid making sweeping generalizations if we are to be truth-bearers.

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<sup>7</sup> 1 Peter 1:16; Lev. 11:44

<sup>8</sup> 1 Cor. 6:11b

- Exaggeration. A form of hyperbole. I was in a church once where an elder said, “No one I know is happy.” Well, maybe, but I wondered, was that really true? How do you measure happiness? Surely there are some who are in happiness, even euphoria, while some are experiencing gloom. But to say “No one I know is happy” probably represents an exaggeration. Words are important. We want to avoid exaggeration since it tends to get in the way of bearing the truth.
- Gossip. We all are tempted to hear a little juicy gossip from time to time. Trouble mounts when gossip is repeated, sometimes inaccurately. It’s better to try to avoid needless gossip, and instead be truth-bearers. You can always say, “Tell me what’s going on *so I know how to pray for you.*” That’s a different story, a different and good use of information.
- White lies. A white lie cuts short the truth. It’s like the word “truthiness.” That word hurts my ear. “Truthiness.” Truthiness is something like truth, but not attaining the quality of truth. Let’s be truth-bearers by avoiding the telling of so-called “white lies” because a lie is a lie but the truth is the truth.
- A last obstacle to truth-bearing is thoughtless silence. They say “silence is golden” but thoughtless silence<sup>9</sup> in the face of injustice, falsehood or evil can’t be considered OK. A culture of ‘niceness’ can foster thoughtless silence in the face of an injustice or a falsehood. Sometimes niceness has to be exchanged for a bit of holy boldness in order to get to the truth, the bottom of things. Be brave. Be loving. Make sure you have the truth and not simply your version of it: there’s a difference.

So, there are five obstacles to truth-bearing that we will want to avoid. Sweeping generalizations. Exaggeration. Gossip. White lies. And thoughtless silence.

Jesus prayed, “Sanctify them in **truth.**” May God help us and guide us to be the **truth-bearers** we are called to be in Christ’s name.

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<sup>9</sup> Quoted in the powerpoint presentation The Great Ends of the Church (Louisville, KY: Witherspoon).