

"Lord, Lead Me in Your Truth" 2015
Psalm 25:4-10 John 18:33-38

I recently watched a few episodes of a TV show called "The 100" on Netflix. Its basic premise seems to be, that strong and effective leaders must be willing to lie, mislead and even get some folks killed for the sake of the good and the goals of their group... **and so you are justified in using any means necessary as long as you win and achieve your group objectives.**

Regrettably, I believe that perspective, of winning at any cost, is a pervasive understanding at work in our culture, **destructive to any sense of truth, integrity or honor.** If you are on Facebook, truly the icon of our electronic culture, have you noticed that all across the political spectrum, that in an effort to inflame and sway public opinion, blatantly false and misleading postings are shared **seemingly regardless of the facts or truth of the matter, as long as you can score a few points for your side.**

It makes me wonder, really, what is truth, does it matter, and does anyone care?

As it turns out, lots of people do care and it does matter to them, for if you Google, "**What is truth**", in less than .37 seconds, it will come back with more than 5.6 billion websites ... **which as it turns out, was a lot more truth than I could handle, and believe me there are some pretty wacky truths out there!**

In particular, the word truth as an especially prominent promise on almost every politician and political party's web site, but I'm still not convinced that all of them were being entirely truthful! ... **but may have been following the perspective of that TV show!**

That same perspective, a willingness to bend or abandon the truth and do or say whatever is necessary to get what you want, would also characterize the religious leaders in John 18, **who seemed to have very little concern for the truth or integrity.**

The religious leaders were very committed to their religion. They studied the Scriptures, hung out at the Temple, and they were scrupulous in the extreme about following all the rules, rituals and traditions of their religion.

Their problem was that Jesus posed a threat to their "religious system" and that Jesus wasn't guilty of any punishable crime... as it's described in Mark chapter 14,

Now the chief priests and the whole council were looking for testimony against Jesus to put him to death; but they found none... Some stood up and gave false testimony against him... All of them condemned him as deserving death.

For all their scruples and Bible study, these religious leaders, were more than willing to lie and deceive, and even give false testimony and manipulate the truth, **if that's what it took to get what they wanted and win.**

In the next scene, the next morning, according to: John 18:28-29

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.

The same religious leaders, so concerned about religious purity that they wouldn't even enter Pilate's headquarters, yet they had no problem with lying & subverting the truth in order to bring about the murder of an innocent man. And knowing that the Roman governor would have little or no interest in their affairs of religion... they spun, lied and falsified their accusations against Jesus, into something they hoped **would** attract Pilate's attention.

Luke 23:2

They began to accuse him, saying, "We found this man perverting our nation, forbidding us to pay taxes to the emperor, and saying that he himself is the Messiah, a king."

Here is where it might get a bit uncomfortable and closer to home. We too can be so set and intent on our plans, accomplishing our agenda that for the sake of expediency or saving time and effort, we may shade the truth, manipulate things our way a bit... and the problem is, how can we expect or believe that God will honor and bless our goals and efforts if we are using corrupt, unloving, uncaring, or dishonorable means and methods to achieve them?
If it's not truthful & loving, how can it be God's will and purpose?

God cares much more about our motivations and the methods we use, than He does about the results or even our good intentions.

Truth is not whatever works, the most convenient & expedient way, or whatever most easily achieves what we hope to accomplish, or whatever is most popular and politically correct.

In the text, Pilate also played a key role in all of this. When Jesus arrived, Pilate began to question him, and we'd hope that surely he intended to get at the truth.

John 18:33

Then Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and asked him,
"Are you the King of the Jews?"

We need to understand what Pilate was really asking, for to answer truthfully, depends on what is meant by "king". If Pilate meant 'king', as in a leader trying to overthrow Rome, then "no", Jesus was not that political sort of a king.* But if Pilate asked from the Jewish and religious perspective, then "yes", Jesus was the anointed one, the Messiah sent by God.

What Pilate really needed and wanted to know was if Jesus posed a threat to Rome -- 'are you leading a rebellion?

"Are you the King of the Jews?"

To clarify, Jesus asked Pilate, what sort of king did he mean?

John 18:34

Jesus answered, "Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?"

"Are you asking me this as Roman, from a political perspective, or from a Jewish – religious – a theological point of view?"

So Pilate explains and clarifies his question,

John 18:35

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?"

'Am I a Jew, that I should care about your religious issues? And if it is a religious issue, then why would they bring you to me? Why do they see you as such a threat, and what have you done?'

So Jesus explains that he's not leading a rebellion against Rome; or had it been an actual political movement or revolt, then they certainly would have fought to defend him.

John 18:36-37

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... I came into the world, to testify to the truth."

So now Pilate understands, Jesus isn't a political threat to Rome, and almost as an aside,

vs. 38a Pilate asked him, "What is truth?"

I don't think Pilate really expected Jesus to answer his question, but rather, cynically, what is truth that I should care? Confronted by the Truth, he shrugs, "truth? ... whatever..."

John 18:38b, 19:16

After he had said this, he went out to the Jews again and told them, "I find no case against him. ... Then he (Pilate) handed him over to them to be crucified.

Though Pilate knew that Jesus had done no wrong and was no threat, under pressure, driven by the religious leaders and the crowd, **Pilate condemned a man he knew to be innocent to die the most cruel and brutal death imaginable.**

What is truth? The truth is, the religious leaders, with planning and malice, lied & manipulated Pilate and the crowd into murdering Jesus. The truth is, before the gathered crowd Pilate declared Jesus to be innocent, yet condemned him to die because he was afraid of them-- **and in the end, the truth didn't really matter to him.**

The truth was standing right in front of him; God incarnate, -- the only person who could have answered his question, and yet Pilate surrendered his integrity to fear. **So too, sometimes we choose, not to act upon the truth that we know...** The truth is, we can be just like Pilate & the religious leaders: well aware of God's truth, yet instead choose compromise, to live by the easy lies and deceptions of this world.

*** We know that God's will, plan and purpose for us is always best,** and yet we allow fear and doubt or expediency to drive us. We let the trinkets, the worries and desires of this world, distract us and steal our attention away from God's love, **whatever** delights the eye, **whatever** feels like success **whatever** is necessary to achieve what **we** want.

BUT in the quiet secret places of where we face honesty of the soul, I believe we all desperately yearn for truth and integrity.

Pilate asks, 'what is truth?' And Jesus answers by obeying God, and **showing us the truth** by faithfully accepting God's will, God's word & God's plan by obeying and trusting God all the way to the end.

So is the message and truth of this John 18 passage that we need to work with more diligence and try harder because we're not doing enough to live within God's will?

* That doesn't sound much like Good News to me, and it's certainly not the truth or the message of the Gospel. **Actually it's a destructive and monstrous lie, that denies the truth of God's love and grace.** It's a lie that separates us from God, from mercy, joy and hope, **and that misses the point and grace of the gospel entirely.**

If it were just a matter of our own effort and for us to try harder, weren't the religious authorities scrupulous in doing just that, **and yet they ended up as co-conspirators in a murder.**

If it were simply a matter of willpower, or our best effort and our determination to do better, **then we really wouldn't need the sacrifice of a Savior, but we could get by with just a good life coach or trainer.**

Truth is, we can't do it --- and we do need our Savior. It's by grace that comes only as God's freely given gift.

God's truth, is not something that we ourselves can accomplish, as much as it is about authenticity, about being real, and keeping our focus intent on God's gracious love... trusting that the Good News is good news, and that God's grace and love have already conquered evil.

Today is Christ the King Sunday, when we celebrate the true and sovereign lordship of Jesus, our God and King.

Christ the King Sunday was put on the Christian calendar largely in response to fear with the rise of fascism & Nazis after WWI. It is a reminder that Christ is king and not the terrifying forces and powers of this world ... **and that is a truthful promise we really need to hear today especially amid all the unrest and recent acts of terrorism.**

Though it may seem that this world is spinning out of control, yet the truth is, God reigns; and God's grace defeats every evil. And our relationship with Jesus Christ calls and empowers us to reflect that truth out into our world longing for hope & peace.

Pilate asked, "What is truth?" The truth, is an ongoing process of our relationship with God, it is our growing into the reign of God & lordship of Christ as we walk in faith together guided by God's Holy Spirit.

Truth is lived when we let God's love and mercy **guide our affections** toward a more grateful, generous and compassionate life, **a more hopeful and joyful presence in this world.**

The words of Jesus are true and filled with hope,

John 14:6 & 8:32

Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life ... you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free."

Today we remember and give thanks for the truth that Christ is King. He rules, and not the corrupt ways and evil powers of this world. So in hope we ask, as we read earlier in

Psalm 25:4-5

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.