

The Ugly Truth, the Beautiful Truth

Pentecost Sun. – 5/23/21 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: John 15:26-27; 16:4b-15 Pastor Keith Besel

v. 26, [Jesus said,] **“But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, He will bear witness about Me.”**

Introduction

- ⊗ Ok folks. It’s time for all of you to make a commitment and show your answer to a couple of questions by raising your hand. First question: “How many of you love the truth more than you do falsehood or deception?”
 - ➔ Second question: “Do you still love the truth when it’s directed at you and it convicts you of some sin you’ve committed or reveals something you’d rather hide?”
- ⊗ Yes, we all know things about ourselves that we just don’t want to face or admit. I remember at least 10 or more years ago, when I had to admit to myself, and to my kids whom I could always beat in a short foot race, that not only was I no longer the fastest in the family, but that I actually dreaded the idea of trying to sprint at all because of pain and too much risk of a nasty fall.
 - ➔ On top of that, the truth that I have to use some kind of tool or mechanical help to open a jar lid that’s extra tight – well, I’m still trying to deny that ego-bursting fact.
- ⊗ All of us have things – some more serious than others, to which we refuse to admit. We eat too much, we’re poor housekeepers, we have poor study habits, we’re disorganized, we’re going nowhere in business, we drink too much, we have anger or jealousy or hatred issues ... but don’t let anybody try to tell us any of this “ugly truth”, because we’ll just deny it to the death.
- ⊗ Today, on the Church calendar, we celebrate the coming of the Spirit of truth – the Holy Spirit whom our Lord Jesus promised shortly before going out to Gethsemane where He would be betrayed. It’s great to remember the day Jesus’ promise was fulfilled in our Second Reading: the rushing wind, the tongues of fire, and the apostles’ ability to preach in languages they had never learned.
 - ➔ But what does this Spirit of truth mean for us? It must be pretty important, since John refers to the “Spirit of truth” three times in this section of his gospel. Why is it that the truth can breed such fear and trembling, when the One who appears on Pentecost and in our baptism to “guide [us] into all the truth” (v. 13) does so to bring us great joy?

I. The Ugly Truth is hard to swallow

- ⊗ In fact, our culture’s fear of truth has made it virtually impossible to define and get ahold of the truth at all. The apologist Greg Koukl says that the truth in this postmodern day and age is so nebulous that we’re living with our “feet firmly planted in midair”. Any attempt we might make to say that there is any kind of absolute truth about anything, especially when it comes to measuring ourselves and others against a moral standard, guarantees that we’ll be branded as “mean”.
 - ➔ And if we do use that measuring stick on someone else, have you noticed how much we resent the same measuring stick when it’s used against us?
- ⊗ There’s a great example of this in Scripture with King David. Remember how he gave in to his own lustful thoughts, and had an affair with Bathsheba. When she became pregnant, David worried about his reputation and what people would think of him, not about the evil he had committed. So he quickly had her husband Uriah killed. Then, in a deceitfully “noble gesture”,

David took in the grieving widow as one of his wives. He hoped no one would be the wiser – but of course God always knows.

→ So He sent the prophet Nathan to David to seek advice from the king. Nathan tells the story of a rich man with a large flock of sheep who prepared a banquet for a guest. Instead of taking one of his many lambs for the feast, he snatched instead the single ewe lamb of his poor neighbor. When David heard this, he was enraged and demanded justice.

→ He said, “As the Lord lives, the man who has done this deserves to die”. That’s when things took a dramatic turn. Looking the king right in the eye, Nathan declared, “You are the man!” (2 Sam 12:5, 7). Even though it had to be scary and potentially dangerous, Nathan spoke that ugly truth about David.

✘ The Ugly Truth is hard to swallow when it is applied to us. Like David we find it amazingly easy to apply justice to somebody else or when it’s addressing our world or culture in general. David and we and our world are often so quick to proclaim “As the Lord lives, that man/woman/group deserves to die” or be fired, or punished in some other way, because then the truth doesn’t really ever touch us.

→ But then when the Ugly Truth is spoken, through the power of the Spirit, directly at “me” and I have to see in the mirror, as Nathan told it to David, “you are the man”; “you are the one who is wrong here; you are the sinner”, we know it is the Ugly Truth; we can’t hide it from others and we can’t hide it from ourselves.

→ When David’s ears received the truth from Nathan’s lips, his heart finally heard it and accepted it. He could no longer hide from the truth that he, King David and not someone else, had committed adultery and murder and tried to cover it up. With his shame exposed, David publicly confessed, “I have sinned against the LORD” (2 Sam 12:13). And in Psalm 51:3 he also said, “I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me”.

✘ But that Ugly Truth about ourselves and our world; the truth that does not change from Holy Scripture and is not tweaked or adjusted or rationalized differently when it is applied to myself instead of to other people; that objective truth is denied and labeled as “mean” and “hurtful” and “discriminatory” and even “racist” by many groups and people today. From government corruption, to sexual and gender issues, to scandals in the church, and even immorality in Hollywood and professional sports, we and our society have become too quick to buy into the idea that truth is what you “feel is right for you”; that you “create your own reality”; that the only absolute truth is the truth that I have made and that “I absolutely believe” will make me happy.

II. The Spirit of truth brings the hidden to light

✘ But the “Spirit of truth” that Jesus describes in our Gospel today is sent not merely to get us to say, “I’m telling the truth” or “honestly, it happened this way.” No, the Holy Spirit testifies and points us instead to the Word – both recorded in the Bible and in the flesh. He reveals that God is truth; Jesus is truth; the Spirit is truth.

→ And it’s not just that God knows truth at a deeper level than us; God embodies all that is real, for God is truth. He is true to His perfect Word. He speaks His Word, and it is.

✘ And when truth is identified with Jesus, it takes on a reality that cannot be denied, as Jesus took on the reality of God in the flesh. This is the reality that exposes the ugliness of our soul when it has turned away from the goodness of God in sin. As the truth from the Spirit worked to bring David to repentance, so it works among us as well, as verses 8-9 says, convicting the “world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment”.

- Like David, we all become pretty adept at concocting stories and excuses to try and hide from the ugly reality of our sin. In doing, as Paul says in Romans 1:25, we exchange “the truth about God for a lie”.
- ✘ But Jesus says the Spirit of truth “convicts” us all concerning sin and the judgement that we all deserve. The way that He uses the word “convicts” talks about uncovering something that has been hidden or denied so that now its reality is beyond question.
 - The Spirit shines the bright light of God’s truth upon the darkness of our lies and deception and He brings the hidden things to light. He pierces our hearts and opens them to the reality of who we really are. He comes and says, “You! You are the man/woman” – not somebody who’s on the late-night news, convicted of a felony. It’s not about some great evil “out there”, it’s about you. You have been convicted. That’s the Ugly Truth.

III. Beautiful Truth

- ✘ Yet there is another truth – a Beautiful Truth – that is revealed by the Spirit. Jesus promises in verse 26, “When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, He will bear witness about Me”. God’s Word is not, of course, only about the truth of sin and judgment. Verse 10 tells us that the Spirit will also convict us of righteousness.
 - He brings to us the reality that is beyond question that Jesus who is “the righteousness of God” (1 Cor. 1:30); He is our Savior. He has won righteousness for us by shedding His blood on the cross.
 - This is the Beautiful Truth of the Gospel that, despite our sin, God loves us, forgives us in Jesus and adopts us in baptism as His very own! This is God’s reality. And God is true to His Word.
- ✘ So today we can celebrate the coming of the Spirit without fear of the truth that it brings. He’s the One who fills us through baptism with the gift of faith so that we are now able to believe the miracle that when we confess our sins, as 1 John 1:9 says, God “is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness”.
 - Just as God did not reject David, a confessed sinner, adulterer, and murderer, neither does He reject you or me. This is the truth! How do we know it? Because God’s Word of truth says in 1 John 1:7, “The blood of Jesus ... cleanses us from all sin”. God loves you. God loves even me. And He welcomes us, by grace, into fellowship with Himself. This is the Beautiful Truth; the Gospel truth, to which His Holy Spirit bears witness today!
- ✘ What makes this truth so beautiful is that God’s love and Christ’s forgiving and saving work remains active and true even when you and I sin over and over and over again. Even if I get to the point of thinking, “I’ve done too much, too often” and I begin to think “there’s no hope, no truth that can help me”, this is when the Spirit of truth convicts me of the truth of Jesus; of the reality that His death really did pay the price for all sin, not just a portion of it; not just for some people.
 - Romans 5:6 is not a lie, it is the Beautiful Truth, “For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly”. And a few verses later in Romans 5:9, “therefore, we have now been justified by His blood”.

IV. Since Pentecost, truth comes in Word & Sacrament

- ✘ Today, on Pentecost Sunday, we rejoice at the creation of the Holy Christian Church, and at verse 13 that says, the Spirit now “guides [us] into all the truth”. We rejoice that the Spirit will

glorify Christ, take Christ's work and truth and give it to us. Jesus promised in verse 15, "All that the Father has is Mine; therefore I said that He will take what is Mine and declare it to you". That is the reality of God's Word!

→ In our Old Testament Reading from Ezekiel 37, the Spirit of the Lord works through Ezekiel's proclamation of God's Word to breathe new life into the sin-dried bones of the house of Israel. That same Spirit entered into you and me; into our sin-deadened hearts and minds and souls when the same truth of God's Word was breathed out and spoken into us. That same Spirit was poured into our sin-parched souls as God worked His miracle of new life through the waters of our baptism. That same Spirit of truth is placed into our hands and upon our tongues when the true body and blood of Jesus that He gave and shed upon the cross is fed to us by Christ's under-shepherd in the Sacrament of the Altar. Yes, in these gifts of Word and Sacrament, the Holy Spirit breathes new, eternal life into our bones and flesh; deep into our very beings!

→ Yes, here in God's household, there is life. It's the life of Jesus Christ for all those who struggle with the ugly truth of pain and suffering in this world; for all who see their sin and repent of it. For each and every one of us who bears a load of deep guilt, the Spirit gives us the Beautiful Truth of Jesus Christ; the truth that He has taken our sin upon Himself; that He has born the judgment that we deserved and that He now gives His righteousness to us for life – today and into eternity.

⊗ That's the truth; the reality that will not and cannot change, for the Spirit of truth has proclaimed it. To God be the glory, today and forever. Amen.