

## What Is Truth?

John 18:33-38

In a baseball game, the pitcher throws the ball right down the middle, into the catcher's glove. Is it a ball? Is it a strike? The umpire replies, "It ain't nothin' 'til I call it." In baseball, truth is not an objective reality. It depends on the perspective and discretion of the umpire.

What is truth? Is it straight answers and clear questions? Are truth tellers the ones who shoot from hip? We admire "straight shooters" in American culture.

That's not Jesus, however. He did not answer in straight-forward ways because he knew that truth often lies at a deeper level. He told Pilate, "I came into the world to testify to the truth". In response, Pilate asked Jesus the question of the day, "What is truth?" There is no answer from Jesus that has been recorded.

Today is *Christ the King* Sunday in the Christian Year. It's the final Sunday in that year. Next Sunday is the beginning of a new year with Advent. Calling Christ a *King* was intended as an honor. It indicates that he ascended to the highest status his culture could bestow. Since he was born in poverty and executed by Rome, that was quite a statement.

As with most symbolic language, *king* is a very limited concept. Referring to Christ as king should not limit our understanding of his nature and of his important role in our lives. The image of *king* as a superlative for our human culture hardly begins to reflect the value of Jesus' life for us. We don't need to run away from *king* language, but, at the same time, we need not dwell on or make too much of it.

Writers of the New Testament used the image of *king* as an alternative source of authority and meaning to Rome and to the Temple authorities. In Jesus' day, a king represented power. When Pilate asks Jesus, "Are you king?" he is also asking, "What is your truth?" In Jesus' world, "truth is what the King says it is". It's kind of like the umpire.

What is truth? It's easier to say what truth is not. It's not a perfectly crafted statement or an impassioned expression of law, morality, or religious faith. Truth lies at a much deeper level than words, thoughts, or even beliefs. Truth is at the foundational level of the underlying forces that shape our lives, like the 90% of an iceberg that is under the water. We find truth in our lives deep within ourselves, deep within the emotional processes that shape us.

For Jesus in John's gospel, his truth is not expressed in words, even the most powerful ones that are full of wisdom. Truth is expressed by his life and his death. Truth is the pathway to the cross lined with love and a commitment to God.

Do you consider yourself a seeker for truth? Do you still seek the truth even when it is inconvenient and challenges what's familiar and comfortable? What is the piece of truth you have experienced in your life? Can articulate it? Are you willing to let the truth you experience change your life?

Each week, I stand before you and attempt to articulate the truth that I understand and experience. I can tell you, from first-hand experience, that you really can't articulate or even grasp truth itself. But we can recognize truth as it goes by us. Sometimes, we are able to know it when we see it lived. We each see pieces of the truth and, at some level, grasp how those pieces fit a larger truth.

So, what is truth? I suggest the following as expressions of truth I experience and affirm (derived from *Subversive Orthodoxy* by Robert Inchausti). The truth is that life is spiritual. When we listen to our self and to others, we can see a reflection of God.

The truth is that all life is essentially one. As humans, we have so much in common. There is much more that unites us than separates us.

The truth is that nothing is value neutral. “There is so much good in the worst of us and so much bad in best of us.” Every action and thought aligns us with justice, peace, and love or with injustice, violence, and indifference. We are always choosing, always feeding, one or the other.

The truth is that science does not hold the key to all answers because not all truth is demonstrable. Religion also does not hold the key to all answers because much truth is demonstrable. You and I are living by faith that God acts in our lives for love.

The truth is that life is much more than what can be seen, touched, and comprehended. Its focus is here and now, but its meaning and its value comes from beyond ourselves. We can touch the mind of God, but cannot control it. At the same time, all creation is moving toward it.

One of great privileges of pastoral ministry is being with people in the significant times of their lives, including the death of loved ones. It is a challenge to be speaking at a funeral and to be speaking what you believe to be truth that is meaningful, healing, and accessible to a widely diverse group of people. I’ll soon have the opportunity to speak the truth I have experienced about my father at his funeral, a truth embodied in his life.

Last night, I was really struggling how to articulate this teaching about truth. I found that I was proving myself correct at how hard it is to articulate truth. In the midst of my struggle, I received a phone call from a person who shared with me her experience of being with her mother at the time of her death and her funeral. I was reminded how powerful, mystical, and healing the experience of death can be for a family when loved one passes peacefully. It is like being born from this life to what’s next.

All of us will die. That’s the truth whether the transition is fully conscious, welcomed, and peaceful or otherwise. It is like being born. Death is a mystical transition to Truth. We can see it, at least in part, if we pay attention in our living now – if we listen. We need to listen to people in our lives whose experiences are very different from ours. We need to listen to people who disagree with us. We need to respect them.

Jesus testified to truth not primarily with words, but with his life – the truth he revealed in his life. God’s truth is revealed and embodied in people today as well – people like you and me. We need community to experience truth. The community we need consists of our inner selves, the communion of other people (those we love, family/friends), and the presence of God, the Eternal. In this triad, we experience truth. On the journey, in ourselves, and in others we meet God.

**John 18: 33-38 (The Message)**

33 Pilate went back into the palace and called for Jesus. He said, "Are you the 'King of the Jews'?"

34 Jesus answered, "Are you saying this on your own, or did others tell you this about me?"

35 Pilate said, "Do I look like a Jew? Your people and your high priests turned you over to me. What did you do?"

36 "My kingdom," said Jesus, "doesn't consist of what you see around you. If it did, my followers would fight so that I wouldn't be handed over to the Jews. But I'm not that kind of king, not the world's kind of king."

37 Then Pilate said, "So, are you a king or not?"

Jesus answered, "You tell me. Because I am King, I was born and entered the world so that I could witness to the truth. Everyone who cares for truth, who has any feeling for the truth, recognizes my voice."

38 Pilate said, "What is truth?"