

Reason to Believe: The Way, The Truth, The Life

LaGrave Christian Reformed Church

July 26, 2020- Livestream Service

Reverend Ruth Boven

John 14:1-14

Do not let your hearts be troubled, what a timely message from Jesus. Today, as we think about the matter of truth, I find it interesting that Jesus' discussion about truth comes in the midst of a time of trouble. In Chapter 13, just before our text for this morning, Jesus and His disciples are sharing their final meal together. Soon, the tension filling that upper room as Jesus predicts how Judas will betray Him and Peter will deny Him-will pick up momentum and grow until their friend and teacher, after being arrested, beaten and mocked, will be hung to die on a cross of shame outside the city. In the midst of trouble, Jesus talks about truth, hoping His disciples will have ears to hear.

I guess that makes good sense. Maybe when life is easy, when troubles seem far away, when the path we're on is unfolding in all the ways we hope and dream about-our quest, our longing, our search for truth just doesn't seem all that pressing. When everything's going my way-why question it?

But, as we all know, life doesn't go our own way forever. As we know well-our life paths sometimes unfold in ways that confuse us, that frighten us, that cause us grief and sadness and frustration. We don't have to live very long to realize this. Even kids know this to be true.

I was thinking recently about the many children's tales I heard as a child, that tell of a menacing character who pops up along the pathway on which the main characters' are traveling. Like the big bad wolf who Little Red Riding Hood encounters on her way to Grandma's house. Or the troll monster who lives beneath the bridge along the way the Billy Goats Gruff must travel to get to the grass they need to eat to survive. These stories of trouble along the path are told not to scare kids (though many of them actually are terrifying) they're told for the purpose of finding truth (though sometimes misguided truth). They're told to help kids discover how to live in a world that's sometimes troublesome, a world that along with a beauty and joy and goodness also holds space for menacing monsters along the way (even microscopic ones).

Jesus too is well acquainted with trouble. In fact, in the previous chapter, John says Jesus' own heart was troubled. And it seems that Jesus' heart is troubled over the fact that in the midst of the swirling, growing trouble in the air, the disciples weren't discerning the truth very well. In fact, it seemed like they were missing or forgetting all together what Jesus and His mission were all about.

Even though they had been on the path with Jesus for years, learning from Him, watching Him move toward the sinners, the outsiders, the despised, the hungry and the suffering. Even though Jesus had clearly shown them the shape, the nature, the ways of God's kingdom-here in our text it seems they've lost the plotline.

Judas seemed caught up in the false notion that he could secure his own future with a good financial portfolio. Peter seemed to imagine that the way of truth would unfold without controversy or challenge. Thomas and Philip in our text seem completely confused about where Jesus' mission is taking Him and about where God is in all of this. And these were Jesus' closest companions. His dearest friends. The people with whom He had shared the most about who He was and what He had come to earth to do. So if they had a hard time holding the plotline in the midst of trouble, maybe it's not surprising that sometimes we do too. As Christians we are

concerned about many things. We're trying hard to manage our lives: finances and families, health and safety, and at the same time try to act justly toward our neighbors, to love mercy and to walk humbly with God—even as the monsters of Covid or cancer or unemployment or racial injustice or depression or uncertainties about the future menace our paths. That's why we can be deeply thankful today that Jesus, in our text, addresses troubled hearts. And Jesus does that by talking about truth.

There's much to say, of course, about what truth is. But this morning we'll focus on three ways Jesus points His followers to the way of truth that leads to life, even in the midst of troubling times.

First, Jesus indicates that to have the truth, we must begin with God. Jesus says "do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God." Jesus starts with God and so should we. As we consider what truth is—we think not only about our beginning in God, about God creating the world and everything in it, we also think about why God created the world. Jesus says, "in my Father's house are many rooms." God created the world to have a family. To have a people. To have a household with all the many rooms filled to the brim. The Greek word John uses here is *Oikia*, which means house or dwelling or family.

When we are searching for truth in the midst of trouble, we begin with the God whose love overflowed the boundaries of the first family, the first community of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and started a family. We begin with the God who desires flourishing and blessing, hope and future for all people.

Sometimes in the midst of trouble we can lose the thread of God's story, we can get lost and turned around in our thinking. But Jesus points us back to God, who made all people in love and who is able to keep us all in love. The Bible makes clear that there is no trouble, no monster big enough to prevent God from gathering and blessing God's expansive family.

I've been reading a book called The Very Good Gospel. In it author Lisa Sharon Harper talks about how on the fifth day of creation, Genesis interestingly names the fact that God created the sea creatures, who in the mind of the ancient people, included the great sea monster, mentioned several times in the Bible. So why is the sea monster such an important thing to mention, she asks? Well if the sea and the sea monsters in it, which represented the most fearful trouble there could be to the ancient people, are under the control of God—then we, the people God made and loves are not subject to the worst the deep has to offer. There is no trouble big enough to prevent God from working God's goodness into this world or to prevent God from lovingly gathering a world-wide family. When Jesus speaks of truth He begins with God, God's good purposes, and God's deep desire for communion with all people.

Second. When Jesus speaks of truth, He does not point to a set of propositions, creeds, or moral codes. He points to a person. He points to Himself. When Thomas gets confused about what is seemingly becoming a downward trajectory for Jesus' life, when Philip asks Jesus to show them the Father—Jesus does not give them biblical bullet points or Q&As from the catechism (as helpful as those can be). Jesus gives them Himself. "I am the way, the truth and the life." If you want to know God and God's truth—look no further. Jesus is what the living breathing God looks like. As the noted theologian Elton Trueblood put it, "The historic Christian doctrine of the divinity of Christ does not simply mean that Jesus is like God. It is far more radical than that. It means that God is like Jesus." "Anyone who has seen me, has seen the Father," said Jesus.

So what does God and God's truth look like in Jesus? Well, the author and Bible teacher Rachel Held Evans proposes—it looks like compassion for the poor, esteem for women, healing

for the sick, and solidarity with the suffering. It looks like breaking bread with outcasts and embracing little children. It means choosing forgiveness over retribution, the cross over revenge, and cooking breakfast for the friend that betrayed you.

The truth of God that we find in Jesus looks very different from the way many might imagine God and God's reign. And even for people who know the story of God's grace so well, it's shocking to realize again that having the truth is less about believing the right things and behaving in right ways and more about receiving and embracing and walking and living the Jesus way.

But even that's not the whole story. For finally, it's also true, that any ability we might have to live into Jesus' truth and to walk in His way is because of His life in us, His Spirit in us. To be able to act justly toward others, to love mercy and to be humble and true in our walk with God and one another is not so much about the truth we hold, but about the Truth that holds us. Friends, the deepest truth and good news of the Gospel is that the Truth holds you!

As we celebrate that good news, we also keep in mind that the same Truth and Love that holds you is at work in your neighbor, whether you or they know it or not. Which is why we should always be humble in our assessments of others. Garret Keizer tells a story in his memoir, [A Dresser of Sycamore Tress: The Finding of a Ministry](#), in which he is at the grocery store buying bananas to take to an elderly man he visits regularly. In front of him as he checks out is a woman with multiple orders and multiple forms of payment. Keizer feels smug about his good deed while he judged a lady buying what he deemed to be "trivial" odds and ends-and doing so slowly. He writes, "I watched her walk to her vehicle-feeling that same uncharitable impulse that makes us glance at the driver of the car we're passing just to 'get a look at the jerk.' She got into the driver's seat of a van marked with the name of a local nursing home and filled to capacity with elderly men and women who had no doubt handed her their wish lists and checkbooks as soon as she'd cut the ignition." At which point Keizer realized how often he loses the plotline and forgets to consider God's great love for every image bearer and God's patient work and desire to fill God's many rooms to the brim.

Maybe that's one of the most important calls to the church-to help each other keep the plotline of the truth of God's story revealed in Jesus. For the truth of our story begins and ends with God-who in Jesus says to us today "Do not let your hearts be troubled. For I am the way, the truth and the life. And I will lead you all home." Thanks be to God!

© Rev. Ruth Boven