

Dear friends in Christ



St. Francis Episcopal Mission Outreach

Rev. Dr. John C. Forney
Pentecost 11, August 8, 202
Proper 14

“Truth, What is Truth?”

1 Kings 19:4-8; Psalm 34:1-8;
Ephesians 4:25-5:2; John 6:35, 41-51

Rudy Giuliani, Sunday morning was flustered and taken aback by Chuck Todd’s question as to whether his client, the former president Trump, would testify at his impeachment trial. Fulminating and sputtering, he finally blurted out, “Truth isn’t Truth.”

Not any different sentiment from that of Pilate at Jesus’ so-called trial. Bored with the whole proceeding, Pilate responds to Jesus’ assertions that he has come into the world to testify to the Truth, “What is truth?” a bemused Pilate asked.

“We have alternative facts,” Trump’s press secretary Kellyanne Conway would counter, when confronted by inconvenient facts.

Truth, indeed! What is truth?

In John's gospel, Jesus proclaims that he is the "bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty." A certain reference to the Eucharistic meal.

And what is this bread which satisfies completely? In our disingenuous and duplicitous age, this heavenly bread is TRUTH.

When Jesus in John's gospel proclaims: "I am the way and the truth and the life," this is the testimony of John's faith community that Jesus is in his being and teaching true nourishment. He's the Real Deal. He is what leads to ultimate fulfillment and satisfaction. Jesus is the Door to the blessings that make our days worthwhile. He is God's true Wonder Bread that satisfies to the utmost. No bad aftertaste.

In a bygone age many of us got our "truth" from a handful of trusted sources. Walter Lippman, Edward R. Murrow, Walter Cronkite, Jim Lehrer or Dan Rather or a trusted local newspaper.

We got another truth on what mattered and the formation of a "good life" from trusted clergy and medical professionals. Don't forget Dr. Spock. From Scout leaders and our teachers. The police were our friends. "If you feel you're in any danger, find a policeman," we were told.

Those old verities are as obsolete now as a buggy whip. Not that they are not true or don't communicate wise advice, but nowadays, nobody pays much attention and there are too many exceptions to the rule.

Not all clergy, not all teachers or scoutmasters are safe. News outlets put out patiently false information, "alternative facts." The kind that will kill you, if you trust them over CDC director Dr. Rochelle Walensky and Dr. Fauci. Or your own doctor on getting your inoculation. Kill you, they will.

Facebook is "less than." A poor substitute. Fake News and alternative facts. I'm not talking about how some of us keep daily contact with a wide circle of friends or post crazy video clips of cats doing improbable things.

Apparently, all sorts of “alternative facts” and sketchy narratives are pushed by some groups with an ax to grind. Or a plot to overthrow an election. Or racists organizing neo-Nazi and KKK hate events. Or pillows to sale. Caveat emptor – let the buyer beware!

Jill Lapore, in a recent piece about Facebook begins citing its mission statement — “to give people the power to build community and bring the world closer together.”

“That sounds like a better fit for a church, and not some little wood-steeped, white-clapboarded, side-of-the-road number but a castle-in-a-parking-lot megachurch, a big-as-a-city-block cathedral, or, honestly, the Vatican.”¹

That mission statement is all a lie. The real mission is to make money – a ton of money for Mark Zuckerberg and the top management. An obscene amount of money. That’s the truth of the matter.

So go on, post the clip of the toddler trying to get up on the couch, pictures of your vacation. But don’t rely on Facebook for your news. For the truth of the day, go to Judy Woodruff on PBS. That will set you free and will often delight.

The Truth that is Jesus’ mission statement is life affirming TRUTH, a warning to allow for life-giving alternatives, the warmth of human connection. It is the door to a new way of walking that scripture calls life eternal. It’s what builds up.

It is life enhancing. After Simone Biles’ difficult week at the Olympics, her boyfriend, to boost her up, texted that one’s harshest critics will be those who have the “least investment in you.”

Or as Yogi Berra quipped, “The loudest boos come from the cheap seats.”

¹ Jill Lapore, “Facebook’s Broken Vows,” *The New Yorker*, August 2, 2021 issue.

Jesus Truth is magnanimity. It is a “Generous Orthodoxy” to the wayward son in a “far country” -- to that woman at a well in Samaria. His Truth is a word of possibility to each of us. It is Life Abundant. Here is good counsel -- wisdom with an investment in you.

“Just do it. You will feel so good,” comes the deadly counsel for too many on our junior high and high school campuses.

This, the “alternative facts” of those out for their own gain. This is the lure to bring the lonely into their orbit of destruction. This so-called truth is death and heartbreak for families across America.

In a three-part series our local paper ran an expose on drugs ravaging our quiet little community of Claremont. “Forever 15” is about a local girl who, indeed will be forever 15. Because she’s dead. Chloe is one of some nine recent suspected overdose victims at our high school.

On a Saturday early in July of this year, “Karie Krouse hosted a memorial service for her daughter Chloe Kreutzer, now forever 15.” The rising Claremont High School sophomore died June 1 of a suspected drug overdose.²

The Truth is, we are a nation in crisis. Our children are adrift. Drugs and violence flood our campuses and streets. That is the terrible Truth, more and more coming to light, as the Covid crisis fades – or had begun to fade until the delta variant came along.

In the case of Chloe, it was just one pill. What she thought to be a Percocet, but laced with fentanyl. Given from a friend, bought from a stranger? Who knows? In any case, enough to kill. That was the sad truth for her, for her family and friends.

² Mick Rhoades, “Forever 15: Fentanyl, and the opioid crisis hit home in Claremont – PART 1,” *Claremont Courier*, July 24, 2021.

“The news hit Claremont hard. Chloe was by all accounts a kid who wasn’t a regular drug user. She had a lively, supportive group of friends who are still mourning today.”³

There is another truth, a TRUTH that is Light and Life, a Truth grounded in the spirit and reality of Jesus. Help is available.

In the midst of this overdose tragedy, our communities abound with those who are there to listen, who will hold a hand. There are alternatives.

Narcotics Anonymous has helped countless addicts free themselves from addiction. Their 12-step program may not work for all, but it has been the salvation of many. Many high schools now have trained peer-advocates.

The truth of “recovery high schools” is life-giving reality for teachers and students who hold one another up through the journey to sobriety. This truth is of the same reality as that TRUTH that is “amazing grace.” It is Light and Life. A taste of eternity.

Ed Bacon is fond of saying that, yes, the truth will set you free, but first it will hurt like hell. It is inconvenient. It’s saving TRUTH to wake us up. Bread of Life stuff.

When former vice president Al Gore produced his film and the companion book, “An Inconvenient Truth,” many scoffed. It was simplistic. It was imagined apocalypse – Old Testament fearmongering. It would now be labeled “Fake News” by those very same scoffers. The cheap seats.

The inconvenient truth announced this week on global warming is that the folks in Europe are going to freeze. We have just about managed to shut down that flow of warm water that issues from South America and the Caribbean we know as the Gulf Stream. This is that current that continues up past Great Britain and Greenland that then dives down to the bottom of the

³ Op cit.

ocean to return south again.⁴ This is the Atlantic Meridional Overturning Current. Your science lesson for today. There'll be a test.

If this current is completely halted, Europe will experience the coldest winters ever since the Little Ice Age that in medieval times killed millions and destabilized the political order of the entire continent.⁵

Nature made the last ice age; we may be making the next. Inconvenient truth.

This calamity will wreak havoc throughout ocean circulation around the entire globe. God only knows what it will do to the climate. God only knows because the scientists surely don't.

This "inconvenient Truth" is warning and danger given that we might amend our ways as a human race. Whatever President Biden and our congress have in their budget to address global warming – It's not enough.

What to make of this hodgepodge of news, facts and various truths? Indeed!

A visiting pastor attended a men's breakfast in the middle of a rural farming area of the country.

The group had asked an older farmer, decked out in bib overalls, to say grace for the morning breakfast.

"Lord, I hate buttermilk", the farmer began.

The visiting pastor opened one eye to glance at the farmer and wonder where this was going.

The farmer loudly proclaimed, "Lord, I hate lard."

Now the pastor was growing concerned.

Without missing a beat, the farmer continued, "And Lord, you know I don't much care for raw white flour".

The pastor once again opened an eye to glance around the room and saw that he wasn't the only one to feel uncomfortable.

⁴ Ryan Morrison, "The Real-life Day After Tomorrow," *Daily Mail.com*, August 5, 2021.

⁵ Brian M. Fagan, *The Little Ice Age* (New York: Basic Books, 2000).

Then the farmer added, "But Lord, when you mix them all together and bake them, I do love warm fresh biscuits.

So, Lord, when things come up that we don't like, when life gets hard, when we don't understand what you're saying to us, help us to just relax and wait until you are done mixing. It will probably be even better than biscuits.

Let us pray – that with our effort, the result will be better than the raw ingredients served up on some days. This is the life-sustaining TRUTH that we are invited to participate in, to engage with. Keep bringing it on -- Jesus TRUTH – wholesome Bread, “strength for the journey.” Amen.