

“Truthfulness Endures Forever”
John 8: 31-47
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I am using three different scripture texts today: First from Psalm 86:

“For you, O Lord, are good and forgiving, abounding in steadfast love to all who call on you. (Psalm 86: 5) Teach me your way, O Lord, that I may walk in your truth.” (Psalm 86: 11)

Then from the New Testament, John 8: 31-32:

“Then Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him. If you continue in my word you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

I am also including a verse from the book of Proverbs, written by King Solomon. Solomon was given the gift of wisdom by God, and he composed over 3,000 proverbs, words of wisdom around which we can build a God-centered life.

In Proverbs 12: 19; Solomon speaks his wisdom on truth.

“Truthful lips endure forever, but a lying tongue lasts only a moment.”

Why don't we tell the truth? Why do we ignore Solomon's wisdom?

Let me suggest that the first reason it's hard to tell the truth is that we are afraid.

I remember when I was renewing my driver's license a number of years ago I was asked did I still weigh 190 pounds? I quickly answered, “Yes.” Now that was true when I had renewed my license the time before, but not then.

I thought to myself later, “Why did I do that?”

I guess it was because I was afraid to admit that I had gained as much weight as I had from the last time I had renewed my license.

Have you ever fudged the truth because you were afraid? Afraid of what a friend, a spouse, a doctor, might say.

We are also afraid of what somebody might think if we tell them the truth.

Have you ever fudged the truth when somebody asked you your opinion about their new dress, their new car, their new hair color, their new boyfriend or girlfriend?

Do you remember the scene between Jack Nicholson and Tom Cruise in "*A Few Good Men*"? Tom Cruise is the lawyer who is pressing Jack Nicholson on the stand and Cruise says, "All I want is the truth."

To which Nicholson famously replies, "You can't handle the truth."

We also can't handle the truth.

One **reason**, as I have already said is that we are fearful, afraid of what others might think.

A **second reason** is we've learned that the truth doesn't always get us what think we want or need.

It reminds me of a Peanut's comic strip: It's the first day of school, and students are told to write an essay about how they felt about returning to school after having the summer off.

In her essay, Lucy writes,

"Vacations are nice, but it's good to be back to school. There is nothing more satisfying or challenging than education and I look forward to a year of expanding my knowledge."

Needless to say the teacher is pleased with Lucy's essay and compliments her and then in the final frame Lucy leans over and whispers to Charlie Brown,

"After a while you learn what sells."

The truth is often scary at times, but in the long run not telling the truth:

- Doesn't make people like us any more,
- It doesn't help us get a job, and
- It doesn't help us get good grades

Randy Pausch died three years ago now on July 25, 2008; he was the 47 year old professor at Carnegie Mellon University, who in August 2006 was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. He drew a great deal of attention for his "last lecture" that he delivered a year later to students and friends at Carnegie Mellon.

His book, "The Last Lecture" was published and was on the NY Times best seller's for quite some time. I have read it and if you haven't read it I recommend that you do. (I have a copy if you would like to borrow it)

In the book he shares his story and it contains lots of wisdom and good advice. He speaks several times about how important it is to tell the truth, he writes:

"If I could give three words of advice, they would be 'tell the truth.' If I got three more words, I'd add: 'all the time.' My parents taught me that 'you're only as good as your word,' and there's no better way to say it.

People lie for lots of reasons, often because it seems like a way to get what they want with less effort. But like many short-term strategies, it's ineffective long term. You run into people again later, and they remember you lied to them. And they tell lots of other people about it. That's what amazes me about lying. Most people who have told a lie think they got away with it... when in fact, they didn't." pp. 163-64

Solomon tells us that "truthful lips endure forever," because:

1. Truth builds trust.

In all of our relationships there is a fragile web of trust; A web of trust that binds us together.

And every time we lie, or get caught in a lie, that web of trust tears just a little. Sometimes that web is torn apart and when that happens it is so hard to weave it again.

The truth builds trust in our relationships; it strengthens the web – the connection between us and another person – a child, a spouse, a parent, a co-worker, a friend.

2. Truth sets us free.

In today's New Testament lesson Jesus is addressing the Jews who claim to believe in him, but in reality they aren't listening or seeking to understand his message.

They don't believe that they need to be set free from their sinful lives. They are afraid of him and wish to silence him; they are even plotting to kill him. They don't get it; his message hasn't penetrated their thick skins.

If we let Jesus' message penetrate our thick skins and if we hear and believe its truth, we will be set free.

In Bishop Desmond Tutu book, "*Speak Truth to Power*," he writes about the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which he led in South Africa.

Bishop Tutu said the commission discovered not only the depth of the atrocities that occurred under apartheid, but also the **power of the victims** over those who committed the atrocities.

That is: the power and the obligation – to first speak the truth and then to forgive.

For it is through truth and forgiveness that the victim no longer remains a victim. The victim accomplishes this by exercising the power to create a new beginning in the life of the offender.

To illustrate this, Bishop Tutu told of the day his Commission was investigating army officers who gave orders for their soldiers to open fire on a demonstration being sponsored by the African National Congress.

The hearing room was filled with the families of those who had been killed by this atrocity. The four officers came before the Commission, one white and three black. After the charges were read, the white officer told the truth as he said,

“We gave the orders for the soldiers to use their guns.”

The tension in the room was obvious. The white officer turned to the families and said,

“Please forgive us. And please receive these, my colleagues back into your community.”

With that confession, the families slowly stood to their feet and began applauding until the sound was deafening. Then the Bishop got everyone's attention in the room and said,

“Let us keep quiet, because we are in the presence of something holy.”

At that moment, in that room, the truth set free both victims and oppressors.

The truth, you see, can set us free.

3. *Truth draws us closer to God, rather than farther away*

Do you remember Jesus' words in the 14th chapter of John, the 6th verse?

“I am the way, the truth, and the life”

At the heart of God is truth, and as we speak words of truth, to ourselves and to others, we move closer and closer to God.

As we lie to ourselves, as we lie to others, we lie to God, and in doing so, we move farther away from Him.

For God has a path for our lives, writes Solomon, a path we can only discover when we seek to live out the truth. Maybe he learned this from his father, King David, who wrote in 86th Psalm: (that Alan read)

“For you, O Lord, are good and forgiving, abounding in steadfast love to all who call on you.” Psalm 86: 5

“Teach me your way, O Lord, that I may walk in your truth.”
Psalm 86: 11

So how do we learn to tell the truth? And to tell it: more often? And more instinctively?

First of all, we have to think before we speak.

I know that sounds obvious, but a lie, any lie, usually pops out fast, often before we think.

The first way we improve our chances of speaking the truth is to think before we speak.

“How much do you weigh?” “well, it use to be 190 lbs, now it is 215.”

Think of the consequences of not telling the truth.

Saying that I weighed 190 lbs., I continued to live in denial that I need to lose some weight and thereby thinking that I didn't need to do anything about it.

Second, when we speak, God is calling us to speak the truth in love.

Are there things in your life you're just not being honest about with yourself? It could be a pattern of behavior, an addiction, an anxiety, or a relationship?

The first step towards change is always moving past our fear, moving past our concerns about what others might think, and stepping forward into the path that God longs for us to walk – the path of truth.

- Is there someone you know you should be truthful with?
- Is there a relationship which has been torn in a subtle or in a significant way? Is this the time to repair that strained or broken relationship by speaking the truth in love?

- Is there somebody in your life that you are worried about and you need to speak the truth in love to them about an issue in their life that is apparent to you and to others?

Maybe this is the day to be truthful to God? Truthful about your doubts, your regrets, your anger, your hopes;

Ask yourself this question:

“In what ways will I seek today to speak the truth, and to speak the truth in love?”

One thing Solomon reminds us is that truth is eternal, “truthful lips endure forever...”

Truth is the heart of God message to us; Truth is God's way for us; and it endures forever!

As we begin our time together during this church's time of transition; as we prepare for a new beginning; as God's leads us out of the wilderness to the promised land; as we prepare to receive God's gift of new life in Jesus Christ; Help us to realize that God sent Jesus Christ to teach us the truth – the plain and simple truth!

And as you and I seek to live the truth, to speak the truth in love – we will indeed be set free.

The truth sets us free to discover God's path for our lives; a path of joy; a path of meaning, and a path of love.

“For you, O Lord, are good and forgiving, abounding in steadfast love to all who call on you. (Psalm 86: 5) Teach me your way, O Lord, that I may walk in your truth.” (Psalm 86: 11)

“Truthful lips endure forever!” (Proverbs 12:19)

“Then Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him. If you continue in my word you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” (John 8: 31-32)

Amen!