

**Sunday, November 18, 2018**  
**First Presbyterian Church of Redlands**  
**Rev. Cheryl Raine**

**The First Reading is 2 Samuel 23:1-7:**

Now these are the last words of David:

The oracle of David, son of Jesse,  
the oracle of the man whom God exalted,  
the anointed of the God of Jacob,  
the favorite of the Strong One of Israel:

<sup>2</sup> The spirit of the LORD speaks through me,  
his word is upon my tongue.

<sup>3</sup> The God of Israel has spoken,  
the Rock of Israel has said to me:

One who rules over people justly,  
ruling in the fear of God,

<sup>4</sup> is like the light of morning,  
like the sun rising on a cloudless morning,  
gleaming from the rain on the grassy land.

<sup>5</sup> Is not my house like this with God?

*For he has made with me an everlasting covenant,  
ordered in all things and secure.*

Will he not cause to prosper  
all my help and my desire?

<sup>6</sup> But the godless are all like thorns that are thrown away;  
for they cannot be picked up with the hand;

<sup>7</sup> to touch them one uses an iron bar  
or the shaft of a spear.

And they are entirely consumed in fire on the spot.

**The Second Reading is from the Gospel of John 18:33-37:**

<sup>33</sup> Then Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" <sup>34</sup> Jesus answered, "Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?" <sup>35</sup> Pilate replied, "I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?" <sup>36</sup> Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here." <sup>37</sup> Pilate asked him, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. *For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.*" Pilate asked him, "What is truth?"

**The Message: To Whom Do We Belong?**

Truth is an interesting word. Earlier in John's Gospel Jesus says, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life." Before Pilate, in our text today, Jesus says, "For I was born... to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice."

“The truth... testify to the truth... belongs to the truth.”

Yet, “what is truth?” sarcastically asks Pilate, as he leaves Jesus and goes out to the Jews again. As the rest of this story unfolds between Pilate and Jesus in the Gospel of John, Pilate’s question is not answered by Jesus.

So, what is truth? Is it your truth or my truth or someone else’s? Miriam Webster defines truth as “the quality or state of being true; the real facts about something.” I am not sure this definition helps us much, given the classic illustration of witnesses to a car accident or at a crime scene. Each witness bears truth from his or her perspective, but usually what is “really true” about what happened is pieced together from a collaboration of all the truths shared.

If we open a newspaper or watch a newscast we see the impact of truths colliding in our world today. We just experienced the collision of truths in our recent elections, as candidates sparred with one another while opposing sides battled to pass or defeat propositions. Militant groups bent on their truth wreak havoc around the globe, as versions of truth cause incredible violence and even wars. So, what is truth?

The problem with the definition of truth in our culture is that we often equate “truth” with “fact.” For those of us over 50, we might remember Dagnet’s Sergeant Joe Friday. Do you remember his tag line, “All we want are the facts, ma’am?” The facts equaled truth for Joe Friday, as this would lead him to discover the criminal. He didn’t want what the witness thought or felt about an incident, just the facts ma’am that’s all! Yet, our 21<sup>st</sup> century understanding of facts, just the facts falls short of the claim of this passage.

“The truth... testify to the truth... belongs to the truth.” Jesus is trying to teach us about more than mere facts. Jesus is teaching us about more than one truth of many. Jesus is teaching us about the truth of his very self. The truth of the way in which he lived and moved and had his being among us. Jesus’ way of living, of being in relationship with God and with others is **the truth** to which we are called as followers.

To know the truth that Jesus is speaking of is not to ascribe to a particular set of dogmas or beliefs. To know the truth is not to force everyone else to believe exactly as we do. To know **the truth is to live in such a way** that our lives reflect the way of Jesus in relationship with others and with God.

Do our lives reflect the way of Jesus? I suppose we have to know Jesus to even begin to answer this question for our own lives. Here are just a few things we know of Jesus: Jesus knew the holy texts of his faith – the Hebrew Scriptures or what we call the Old Testament. Jesus had compassion on others. Jesus touched untouchables. Jesus ate dinner with the despised. Jesus stopped injustice. Jesus fed others. Jesus calmed storms. Jesus forgave sins. Jesus healed people. Jesus restored life. Jesus warned against hypocrisy. Jesus lived the spirit rather than letter of the law. Jesus called others to repentance. Jesus wept. Jesus taught. Jesus prayed. Jesus surrendered his will, to God’s will. Jesus laid down his life for others. Jesus even loved his enemies.

What I notice most strikingly about the way in which Jesus lived among us is that the powers and principalities of both church and state constantly were at odds with him. The way in which Jesus lived collided with not only the state, but also the church. It seems that Jesus walked to a different drumbeat, so to speak. His life was in step with God, the creator of the heavens and the earth, the giver of life, and not with the powers and principalities of the world that often deals death and destruction. Jesus fostered restoration and wholeness wherever he went

Jesus confirmed this when he said to Pilate, “My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews.” The kingdom, to which Jesus belongs, is not a political reality but a theological one. Jesus’ statement asserts that no human power or principality is sovereign; only God is sovereign. This is a different lens by which to see humanity as well as the world. Jesus saw with the eyes of God and his piercing questions always came at a price for those he encountered.

Jesus didn’t answer Pilate’s initial question. Instead he said to Pilate, “Do you ask this question on you own, or did others tell you about me?” Jesus was confronting Pilate with the truth about his own life. Is your question prompted by fear Pilate? Are you worried the Jews will become uncontrollable, if I am not crucified? Do you really believe I am an insurrectionist, a threat to your leadership? Is your real goal, regardless of cost – to stay in control and look good before Rome? We don’t know the answers to these questions; we just know that Pilate didn’t reveal himself to Jesus.

Jesus through his questions with those he encounters throughout the gospels offers to be the good shepherd, and he does so in this text even for Pilate. Jesus offers to lead every one of us into abundant life. But to do so, we must face the truth about ourselves by asking yet again: Do our lives reflect the way of Jesus? Does the life of this church reflect the way of Jesus?

Something simple, yet incredibly difficult is asked of us as we seek to answer these questions as individuals and as a church. The simple, yet difficult question for all of us is this: “Who is sovereign in and for our lives?”

[Pause]

To follow the way of Jesus is to declare that no allegiance is given to any other person, principality, or power claiming to be sovereign. God is first, not country. God is first, not family. God is first, not church or denomination. God is first, not happiness or success or security. God is first, not money. God is first, foremost, and sovereign of our lives and of this church.

I hear the refrain of a hymn I know, for it goes like this: “I surrender all, I surrender all, all to thee, my blessed Savior, I surrender all.” The words of this refrain are what it means to belong to the truth, to belong to Jesus, and declare that God is sovereign.

Yet, most of us know we will never fully surrender ourselves to God this side of heaven. We can’t seem to let go of much and even surrendering some is hard. Worry and fear get the best of us. And we forget that we have confessed somewhere along the way that we belong in body and soul, in life and in death, to God alone.

As we look at our text from the Gospel of John, the lectionary paired it with King David’s last words found in 2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel. David’s song points to the foundational importance of knowing the source of one’s strength and worth. David’s strength and worth comes from God alone. David sings that his reign was a gift from God. The wisdom of David in the twilight of his rule is that he knows the source of his life and reign. David belonged to God, even in his failings. God is sovereign and not anything else.

King David’s life story provides us with hope, because God is faithful still. In reverence to God, David’s reign was able to sustain life and to cause life to flourish for the people of God. In reverence to God, may all of us live in such a way as to sustain life and to cause life to flourish. As King David learned, we are able to do this by gently holding what has been given to us by God.

Gently holding what has been given to us, realizing that all we have – our power, our possessions, our talents, our financial resources and so much more are not just for us. Do we gently hold what God has generously given not only as individuals, but also as a church? Have we learned to hold the gift of our buildings gently? Are we willing to have our buildings used by community groups even though we realize it will mean more maintenance? What about our reserves, do we hold them gently? What about the way we contribute to mission endeavors locally and globally? What about the way we welcome changes as new people enter our midst? We will always have room to grow in learning to let go and to let God guide us in the use of all that we have been given as a church.

Do we hold gently what God has generously given each of us individually? Even though we recognize the challenge of surrendering what we have and who we are to God. Our annual financial commitments to the life and ministries of this church, gives us a chance to practice surrendering some of what we have to God. As you exit the sanctuary today, we have envelopes that include third quarter statements and the financial commitment letter for 2019.

I can confidently say that the church asks for annual commitments, not for my sake as your pastor, but for yours, because our finances are often the last spiritual battleground of surrender. Hue Martin says this pretty plainly, for he says, “If one's faith does not affect one's use of money, then one's faith is in vain.”

Our paper money says “In God we trust,” but if we are honest with ourselves, we all put our trust in money. Our money is what keeps a roof over our heads, food on the table and the lights on at home and church. Our money also helps us do what we want to do, when we want to do it. Money is hard to surrender, yet when we stop putting our trust in money and place our trust in God, amazing things begin to happen.

I testify that although my salary is substantially less as a pastor than it was when I was a professional engineer, my generosity since leaving the corporate world continues to increase. I remember that when I first realized this, I couldn't figure out how. My earnings were down, but my giving was up. I believe that is because God's math is just different. God's math is abundance, not scarcity. Although at times, I couldn't explain God's math, I surely have lived it as a pastor. My giving mirrors for me what Chip Ingram once said, “Faith increases giving, and giving increases faith.” As I hold more gently my finances, I believe my faith has increased.

Jesus asks us today, “To whom do you belong?” To whom or to what do we belong? Who has our allegiance? Is it God or something else? “Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice,” says Jesus. Truth that made an everlasting covenant with King David, ordered in all things and secure. Truth that makes an everlasting covenant with each one of us, for our security is in God alone.

May we listen deeply to Christ's voice and learn to live ever more fully like Christ, as he walked among us. You belong to God. Claim this truth for your life. Amen.