

“What is Truth?”

September 20, 2020

John 18:33-38

Then Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, “Are you the King of the Jews?”

Jesus answered, “Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?”

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?”

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.”

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.”

And Pilot retorts:

What is Truth?

Every Sunday I call my mother. For the last couple of months, I have tried to convince her who to vote for and why. I had all the facts. I even sighted them. My mother is very stubborn. And believes she is always right. She accuses me of the same. So, I know in the end my attempt to tell her what is right – is futile. But I try anyway. Last week, she said (exasperated with my “truth telling”) What is the truth, then? How do you know it is the Truth?

My mother who I love dearly – says let’s not talk about. We are on two different sides. What is truth? It keeps me up at night.

I remembered this story:

In Hopi oral tradition, the story says that once the truth was a whole body of knowledge known by all beings – people, animals, stones, plants, there was no separation. Then an imbalance came. The circle was broken and the whole truth divided. Each clan was given responsibility for a portion of the truth.

They were instructed to care for this truth until such time as they could remember their wholeness and reunite the circle.

Of course, after a period of time, the clans forgot that they carried only a fraction of the truth, and began to think they carried the whole truth. They began hoarding it, protecting it, trying to impose it on others.

Their spirituality became religions that divided them and caused disrespect for other ways of life. They began dividing up the land and claiming the clans of the animals, plants and stones for themselves.

Scarcity began to dwell among the people. Masala, the messenger of the Hopi people, prophesied that there would come an eleventh hour when all the people would have to choose: to remain divided and destroy themselves and the planet, or to reunite and restore the balance of life. Certainly, we are at that hour.

Constantly, the news reports another investigation. Who did this? And here is the reason. And this is the truth

Truth hunting has taken up most of the national dialogue. Every day there are new revelations. Information that was hidden – now coming out at a rapid pace from multiple sources. It can be crazy making. And it keeps me up at night.

In only one day you can hear - the story of an unarmed black man gunned down in a suburban neighborhood and violence against the police trying keep the peace; of the life a child living in Gaza and - the life of an Israeli child living on the green line, of a gun owner in Vermont who cherishes his historic rights - and a parent whose child was killed in a school shooting, and who is fighting for gun control legislation. And lately, the west coast fires are a result an arsonist from Black Lives Matter, or from not raking leaves and - Climate Change is exasperating the earth atmosphere.

Maybe you remember when there were just three news networks, telling basically the same story but through different faces. Today we have access to the stories not only of those who wield power, but also those whose lives have been marginalized in our society and throughout the world.

We possess both the gift and the challenge of living in a world of multiple narratives, multiple truths.

You know what happens. We take sides. We want good guys and bad guys. Like the old Westerns, white hat and the black hat were predictable markers of a world we could understand. We want good and bad to be obvious.

The thing is what we are seeking is not a fixed, heavenly ideal.

The Hopi prophet says - once the truth was a whole body of knowledge known by all beings – people, animals, stones, plants, there was no separation. Then an imbalance came. The circle was broken and the whole truth divided.

Here is what I am not saying:

Allowing for multiple truths does not mean sitting on the sidelines. The way of Jesus - requires standing up for those cast out of society. Attending to those who are hungry. Loving and sharing with your neighbor. Being the Body of Christ. Remember, it was Jesus who knocked down the merchant tables in the temple. There is no sitting on the sidelines to follow Jesus.

Let me be absolutely clear, I am not suggesting providing a platform for those who advocate and preach hate, bigotry, or the inhumanity of the other.

What is does not work is claiming that your side is the ONLY side.

For example, I try to understand those who believe that kneeling during the national anthem is disrespectful.

I cannot and would not take away from anyone - sacredness is imbedded in the flag, or their tours of duty protecting our country. We need to listen to those we disagree with, and hear their stories, to understand their truths.

And on the same token, who am I to tell a black man, who has witnessed his brothers and sisters shot by a police officer for a broken tail light, a man who has every day of his life been treated differently in this country because of his skin color, a man whose ancestors were brought to this country as mere possessions, that he is wrong? That only I know what it means to be a true patriot? And that only I have accessed the whole truth?

What have we done? What kind of world have we created? When did we mistake our morals, values, and ideas for capital “T” Truth? When did each of our beliefs about the proper order of society become THE ideology? When did our practices and beliefs become more sacred than those of our neighbors? At what point did our stories become THE narrative of our country?

Or in the words of the great Jewish philosopher Martin Buber.

“When did those who disagree with us become mere objects rather than fellow human beings with whom we truly engage and hear?”

I have tried for months to write a sermon about “What is the Truth”. And every time, I get to this point I stop and write a different sermon. But the whole idea how do we know Truth keeps me up at night. How do you discern what is really true in a climate that banters over “fake news, alternative news, or hoax news?” Pilate said “what is truth”?

St. Ignatius who developed the prayer of Examination – offers this spiritual practice is to make decision.

1. RELY ON REASON AND FEELINGS

Ignatius advises creating a list of pros and cons – and urges you to listen to your feelings as they consider each option.

Emotions act as compass points to one’s deepest desires. So, he asks individuals to consider: Do some pros or cons stand out because they bring you a sense of peace, joy or hope? Or feelings of dread, anxiety or despair?

He advises probe the origin of your feelings to find out where they come from – are they based from desires for power or greed, fear of what others may think – (Pause) a desire to do good or to be selfless.

Ignatius teaches that freedom from attachment to a particular choice or outcome is essential. As Martin Luther King Jr. said, “Faith is taking the first step, even if you can’t see the whole staircase.”

Ignatius advises - to share deliberations with a confidant. To help make sense of your thoughts and feelings. He also urges to make decisions for the “greater glory of God.” God’s dream for the world. And ask - how do your decisions affect the vulnerable, the poorest and the most marginalized. Next, he guides is:

2. IMAGINATIVE REFLECTION

Ignatius offers three exercises if no clear choice emerges:

- Imagine that a friend struggling with the same. They describe their choices, pros and cons, and their thoughts and feelings about these truths. What would you advise them?
- Imagine you are on your deathbed. Looking back at your life, and assuming you made the decision in question, how do you view it from that perspective?
- Imagine a conversation with the Holy One. Or a conversation with someone you love and trusted – and has passed away. What does this person say to you about your options? Would they be pleased, disappointed or neutral about your decision?

3. SEEK CONFIRMATION: Ignatius advises to act on reason, feeling confident that you have invested your time and energy –

To make a good choice. But he also says we should seek out additional information to see if reason confirms the choice. The emotions we feel following a decision, such as peace, freedom, joy, love or compassion, gives a good indication if it is the right choice.

Finally - here is what I believe: Sacredness is not capital “T” - Truth, but is truth with a lowercase “t” – the symbols, places, people, events and principles that bind us together as one community.

It is the morals, values, and ideas that prompt us to march, protest, and speak. It is the stories and narratives of our ancestors and grandparents, the profound events that compel us to welcome and love the stranger.

Lower case t truth binds us together in a deep and real way, it is our compass that guides us in this complexed universe.

But let us not for a moment confuse that which is sacred, that which is lower case t truth, with that which is God’s Truth.

And when Jesus, whom we understand as Truth with a capital “T” was asked: What is, finally, the essence of it all? What does - the God and Creator of us all -finally want of us? What is truth ? He said, simply, “Love God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself.”

That's all I have for you today. Amen.