

John 18:33-38 November 24,2018

Truth-would you recognize it if you saw it?

It is not as easy to recognize truth as it sounds. Not even at a trial. Perhaps especially NOT at a trial. It seems these days that there is always some big trial in the news, that grips people's attention. These days it's El Chopo and the drug deals. We are fascinated with trials- perhaps because of the suspense. What really happened? Will the truth come out? But is a trial the place to find truth?

This trial recorded for us in John chapter 18 didn't make news in Rome. Jerusalem was a small town, really, not of great importance to the Roman Empire. It was in a troublesome province on the eastern border with a troublesome neighbor to the north. Emperors came there only twice. Once 60 years before Jesus was born and once about 70 years after Jesus was born and both times those emperors came with armies to conquer and destroy Judea and Jerusalem. All Rome wanted was for Judea to not be a problem. Nobody cared what happened in Jerusalem, and nobody really cared about this trial, or this Jesus, who stood before Pontius Pilate. Truth, we find out at the end of the trial, was not really what Pontius Pilate was worried about.

Yes Jesus keeps talking about truth. Three times the word truth comes up in these few verses, already in the Gospel of John Jesus has used the word truth 26 times. Yes, 26 times! So if Jesus talks about the truth much, why does Pilate not see it? Why do the crowds not see the truth? Why do you and I have a hard time seeing the truth?

Pilate does not see it, because he does not understand what truth is- and sometimes we don't either. You see, there is a difference between

something being true and the truth. There is a difference between determining that a statement of fact is true, and the truth. Let me give you an example. It is a true thing to say the temperature of the flame of the candles burning on the altar is about 175 degrees. You can get out a thermometer and can measure the temperature of the flame and determine that it is a true statement that those candles are burning at 175 degrees. Or, it would be a true statement to say that the name of the road that runs past the church is called North Citrus Springs Boulevard. It is true because we can go, look at a map, observe and report.

You notice the problem though: that kind of truth, a true statement about something, relies on our observation, our judgment, and our evaluation. You and I become the one who determines the truth-but if that is all that there is to truth, then we will never reach it, because truth, then is subject to my judgment, my interpretation, or yours or 5 billion other people's interpretation and how do you know which observation and judgment is right?

Is it any wonder that Pontius Pilate could not see the truth, when it was standing in front of him? He was used to being the one who decided what was a true statement and what was not. And here, thrust in front of him, is a small, weak, inoffensive man who lots of people wanted dead. This Jesus did not have an army, or weapons, or wealth or power- none that Pilate could see. "Are you the King of the Jews" Pilate asked. The Jews didn't have a king, let alone this guy, standing in front of Pilate. To his observation, it was a true statement to say that Jesus was NOT king of the Jews. Just look at him.

And then Jesus answers: "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world". Pilate doesn't get this kingdom is not of this world-what other world is there? But he picks up on the King thing again. "So you are a king Pilate asks?"

Jesus response with the truth-not with a true statement, subject to evaluation but with the truth. Actually, with a story about him: "For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world-to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice."

He does not say that he came to fill our heads with true statements-oh, he does some of that throughout the Gospels, but he tells us true things so that we can understand something about the truth.

You see, truth is not simply a collection of true statements, like the temperature or a burning candle or the name of a street. The truth is that upon which everything rests, in whom we live and move and have our being is that Jesus Christ is the foundation upon which everything rests. Jesus Christ has come into the world to make known the Father to a people who were lost, separated from their God, by sin. Jesus Christ came to restore us to God, to undo the sin that Adam and Eve brought into the world and which we have inherited. Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, hung on a cross, died in our place, rose from the dead and is coming again to restore us, body and soul, to God. That is the truth. You cannot measure it, you cannot test it, you are baptized into it.

That is why Jess uses that odd phrase at the end: everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice. He does not say “everyone who believes true things listens to my voice. Rather, only those who are of the truth. This is the main statement. “Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.” In other words, Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice. Pilate did not belong to the truth and so when he sees this Jesus standing before him, he cannot see that he is the Son of God, that he is, indeed King not only of the Jews but of all creation. The crowds did not belong to the truth. But we can see because we are of the truth. And this changes everything. You see, it is a true statement to say that you and I do not live up to the standards of God’s law. We can measure ourselves, evaluate ourselves but we will fall short. It is a true statement to say that everyone of us has, at one time or another, put our trust and confidence in something other than God our Father- whether that is our wealth, or our reputation or our power. It is a true statement to say that we have faltered in our worship, that we have failed to love one another, that we have not cared for widows and orphans in their distress. Those are all true statements. They can all be observed and measured. And it is a true statement to say that as a result, we are all worthy of death and separation from God.

But that is not the truth. The truth is that because Jesus died on the cross for you and rose from the dead that you are holy. The truth is that because of Jesus Christ you are forgiven. The truth is that because of the work of the Son of God you are righteous in God’s sight, you are perfect in his eyes, you are his dearly loved child. That is the truth. And it is because of one man, Jesus Christ, because by his work and the sending of his spirit has called you by the Gospel, enlightened you with his gifts, sanctified and kept you in the true faith. What is truth? It is

Jesus Christ, and in our Gospel reading he stands before you, about to be crucified, for you. Because he is the way, and the truth and the life.  
AMEN