



Seeking the Truth

TEXT
John 14:1-17

January 7, 2018 — Sermon by Rev. Len Carrell

Perhaps no truer words have ever been spoken. Jesus promises us that through God's Holy Spirit, there is a spirit of truth among us — a spirit who remains here with us as our Advocate, and who reveals to us something true about who God is. "You know God," Jesus says. "God will be in you."

I chose this passage because I found it to be a natural progression from hearing the angels tell us, "Be not afraid," to hearing Jesus say, "Do not let our hearts be troubled." I was trying to make it simple. But I found something surprising along the way, something I didn't see before — a Spirit of Truth.

No other gospel writer seems as obsessed with the truth as John. He is the one who coined the phrase "and the truth will set you free." John also referred to Jesus as the Word who became flesh and dwelled among us "full of grace and truth." Even when Jesus is brought before Pilate, he tells Pilate he has come to "testify to the truth" — to which Pilate replies, "What is truth?" And here, with his disciples, Jesus says to them, "You know the place where I am going" — to which Thomas replies, "Lord, we have no idea where you're going.

How can we?" And Jesus says to him, "Yeah, you do. I've shown you the way, and the truth, and the life. It comes through me."

After the year we've just had, I don't know how to hear Jesus say, "I am the truth." I notice how he doesn't say he *has* the truth, but says he *is* the truth. After the year we've just had, I sort of feel like Thomas or Philip in this story. *Lord, where are we going with all of this? Show us God, and we'll be satisfied. But how can we know the way, when we don't know where we're going?*

I don't know if you're feeling this, but I'm relieved 2017 has ended. This particular year has been a difficult one, so I'm glad it's over. In fact, with all the floods, earthquakes, hurricanes and wildfires, this past year has felt more like two or three years.

I continue to be struck everyday by the news — or the lack of news — coming out of Puerto Rico. Almost four months after Hurricane Maria made landfall, many on that island are still without power. Officials claim the storm took only 64 lives, but the actual number of deaths since late September is about a thousand more than that. That's hundreds a day!

And there are other things that have made this a uniquely

tough year. I'm growing weary of reading and watching news. It seems like Russia meddling and a nuclear North Korea are never going away. This is our new reality, whether we like it or not. The other frightening reality is that diplomacy may be lost.

In Syria, for over six years we've witnessed crimes against humanity and a growing refugee crisis. It seems that Syria has become the trend. One of the most disturbing stories in recent days has been the fact that genocide is still being practiced and tolerated on this earth.

More than half of the Rohingya population (600+K people) have been driven from their homeland into neighboring Bangladesh. It is a humanitarian crisis. The chief human rights commissioner of the UN is calling the operations of the Myanmar military "acts of appalling barbarity." Decades of discrimination and persecution have quickly and violently turned into a textbook example of ethnic cleansing. It is horrifying that this exists on this earth.

And here at home, we are not immune to appalling acts. They're not the same, but appalling none the less. This past fall, our nation saw the worst mass shooting in our history,

when bullets rained down from a luxury hotel room onto a music festival in Las Vegas. Only a month later, the horror of such senselessness reared its ugly head again, when a 26-year-old man walked inside a small Baptist church in Sutherland Springs, Texas, and emptied his weapon. People that gathered together to worship God and say their morning prayers ended up holding each other for dear life. Their ages ranged from 1 to 77 years old.

But this year also revealed the ugliest truths about ourselves as a nation — ones we can never ignore. This year we saw our racism on parade, walking out of the shadows in Charlottesville, and it showed us that we have a lot of work to do before such ugliness crawls back under the rock from which it lives. This year also taught us that we're going to need to learn how to respect our mothers, daughters, sisters and aunts — indeed, all the women in our lives — with a lot more dignity and respect than we have in the past.

So, yeah, after the year we've just had, I wonder if any of you feel like Thomas and Philip at times? I wonder if any of you find yourself asking, "Lord, where are we going with all of this? Just show us our heavenly Father, and we'll be satisfied."

The truth is, I don't know a lot about truth.

One of my acting teachers, on the first day of class, would always ask his students, "What is talent?" We always thought we had the answer; we had him figured out. He was testing us to

see how each of us would define talent for ourselves. He would then throw us for a loop and say, "Huh, I have no idea what talent is. But I know it when I see it." So, you see, I don't know a lot about truth. But I think I know it when I see it.

I think of myself as a student of truth, which is probably true for all of us. We are truth seekers. How can we not be? We seek our true selves, our true loves, our true path. Not to mention, I strongly affirm and appreciate the plain simple truth. You know what I mean — *just the facts ma'am; give me the bottom line; what is the data telling us?* — those kinds of things.

I believe we are all students of the truth, seekers of truth, not keepers of it. But then we hear Jesus say, "I am the truth." I am struck by the boldness of his words, but what I really hear him saying, which echoes the very first words we ever hear him speak, is "Follow me." Or, as John's gospel likes to have him say, "Come and see." Thomas asks, "Lord, where are we going?" Jesus answers, "Come on, I am the way, and the truth, and the life"

The question for us is, where has Christ shown us truth this year? Even in a difficult year, Jesus has shown us something true — about ourselves, about each other, about God. So we have to ask ourselves, where have we seen God's truth this year? Because we'll know it when we see it. I'll tell you a couple of places I have seen it.

I went to a funeral this year. There's no need to get into the

details. This family had not been members of this church for very long, but you would never have known that. So many people came out to support them and lift them up. This family was lost. They were hurting. Their loss was unimaginable. Their grief could have very easily sunk them. But this church, and this community, poured into our sanctuary in ways I had never seen. They did so in order to lift this family up and hold them in love. It was amazing, and it was a moment when Jesus showed us something true — that when one of our own is hurting, we hurt with them, and we lift them up.

There's also a man I go and visit regularly. He is in his early 90s. We'll call him Frank. Frank lives on his own, still living in his family's home of 75 years. The house is in desperate need of repair. He lives on a very fixed income. Frank doesn't have family, children, or any living relatives, and he has no interest in living anywhere but in his own home.

I know Frank is scared of being alone and afraid of falling. Recently many physical issues have complicated Frank's independence. And it's impossible not to be scared for Frank. But I'll tell you, Frank has some of the best neighbors I have ever met. Instead of calling the city, they have promised to look in on him once a day. Instead of demanding his house be condemned, they have made copies of his keys, in case of an emergency.

They have created a caring coalition around him — each one of them taking on a responsibility for Frank: helping him

clean, helping him pay his bills, bringing him a hot meal, securing every legal and medical concern he has, and making sure he is never alone or feeling threatened of losing his home. They are saints in my book because they continue to show me how Christ gives us eyes of compassion to see the most vulnerable and weak among us; and in that, Jesus shows us something true.

But I want to tell you about a moment I saw this past week. I meet with a group of guys twice a month. We gather together for bad coffee and good conversation. Most of these guys have lost a wife, but not all of them. For some, their wives are living with severe dementia. These guys support one another, give each other rides, check in on each other. It's a pretty close group.

Well, this past Thursday, a new guy walked in the door. I didn't recognize him; nobody else recognized him. I introduced myself, and he seemed a little unsure of where he was. He told me his name, and that he found us through a social worker at a hospice house in Lenexa. He said to me, "I lost my wife about six months ago, and to tell you the truth, I'm having a really hard time with it." I invited him to sit with us and introduce himself. This man began to weep as he talked about how much he loved his wife. (I don't know if you know this, but guys aren't always keen on crying in front of each other.)

This man told us how he cared for his wife each day of her dementia — and how he returns to the place even now, after her

death, because he still likes to visit the people there. This man walked into a room full of strangers and opened his heart and something happened. The guys around that table started asking him questions.

"How quiet is the house?"

"Do your children live close?"

"Do you have a church?"

"What brought you here today?"

"What keeps you busy?"

When someone found out he was from Oklahoma, they asked, "Were you upset about the game on Monday?"

I was proud of them. They asked the things guys need to ask each other — and know how to ask each other. In a moment of truth like that, I know I don't know a lot about truth, but I know it when I see it. Because when truth is revealed to us through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, there is something holy about it; there is something redemptive about it; there is something faithful about it, and that's plain to see.

Christ has shown it to us with his own life. He shows it to us at his table because it is the table of truth, prepared by Christ's Spirit of truth. We see truth when we as a community, when we as a church, lift up a family that is grieving the unimaginable. We see truth when good neighbors who see the weakest and most vulnerable around them choose to act as Christ would act and choose to serve food instead of fear. We see truth when we welcome the stranger among us and treat them like a brother.



This sermon was delivered at Village Presbyterian Church, 6641 Mission Road, Prairie Village, KS 66208.

The sermon can be read, heard or seen on the church's website: <http://www.villagepres.org/current-sermonsermon-archives.html>.