

“The Truth”
Micah 6:6-8; 1 John 4:7-8
Sermon
8/18/19

She had been baptized in the congregation, attended Sunday School and worshiped regularly, was active in the youth group, and was generally mild mannered and a delight to have around. It came as no surprise that when it was time for her to be confirmed, she was among the first to register for the class. What did come as a surprise was that two or three weeks into the class, Chrissy announced to her family that she wanted to quit the class. “Mr. Stinson, she told them, “is teaching lies. I don’t want to listen to him telling lies.” Taken aback, her mother, who knew me very well, and knew Chrissy usually thought the world of me, asked Chrissy for specifics, saying “I find it difficult to imagine him doing so. I never knew him to lie.” “But he does lie, he tells us that Jesus lived and died as a Jew. He was not a Jew, he was a Christian.”

Thankfully, we worked through that thought. Chrissy came to class again, and to no one’s surprise was the “same old Chrissy. I asked her, during that time of misunderstanding, why she had found it difficult to think of Jesus as a Jew. Can you guess her answer? She said “only Christians go to heaven and Jesus surely is in heaven. How could he not have been a Christian? He had to have been a Christian.” Needless to say, we talked a lot about the expansiveness and all-inclusiveness, of God’s love.

That experience helped me realize how easily thinking in such exclusive terms leads to prejudice and judgments toward those who don’t share our understanding of *truth*. If we follow the thought pattern, it is easy to see how people who hold to a literal, unwavering understanding of *truth* can form negative images of those who believe differently than they do. It is such an understanding that helps explain immigration policies that reject people who are different than *we* are, that subject them to inhumane treatment and rejection. It is such an understanding that allows us to shame and reject those who lifestyles differ from ours. It is such an understanding that allows room for enemies. It is such an understanding that pits us one against another, an understanding that is, in fact, not understanding.

While we ponder that thought, let me share one more true story. Most of you know that I was born and raised in Brooklyn, NY. What you might not know is that Brooklyn was once known by the “locals” as the Borough of Churches. There were so many churches, Protestant and Roman Catholic, that it was difficult to walk one

or two streets in any direction and not pass a church of one kind of another. The Protestant Churches in Brooklyn, at one time, had organized A Protestant Sunday School Union. The Union worked across denominational lines to speak politically and socially. The first Thursday in June all public schools closed at noontime so that the Protestant kids could go home and prepare for the Annual Anniversary Day Parade of the Brooklyn Sunday School Union. Such was the political and social strength of Protestant Churches.) At three o'clock on that day each Protestant church would join the parade route, complete with a Float that depicted a scene representing a theme for the year. Everyone in the parade wore a banner that carried the theme as well. These were often along the lines of "Jesus is King", "Following Jesus", and the like. As Archie and Edith Bunker used to sing, "Those were the Days." And "they were the days", if you will, when even the little congregation in which I was raised, would muster about a hundred kids, plus their parents and other members of the congregation, to march. It was a joyful, fun filled afternoon, for both marchers and onlookers. The exceptions to the rule were the kids who attended St. Barbara's school, which our contingent passed on our way to the parade route. As we approached the school, which dismissed the students at about the same time as we approached the parade route, where we met up with the other church groups in line for the march, the Nuns would literally snap their fingers and every one of the students being dismissed would turn and face the school wall so as not to see us. From the Nuns' point of view, I suppose, they knew their *truth* and did not want their children exposed to someone else's.

It was bigotry, which was matched by more bigotry. In fact my father, not unlike other fathers told my older brothers and sisters that they could date anyone they wanted, as long as they were not Catholic. I know Catholic fathers who held the same attitude about their children dating Protestants. In my family's case that dictum fell flat on its face as my three oldest brothers married, in short order, three Catholic girls. If nothing else, that reality convinced me that God has a sense of humor. How wonderful it was to experience my father buying his first granddaughter a dress to be worn as she was baptized - you guessed it - in a Roman Catholic Church.

Love made the transition from bigotry to acceptance. Love keeps us from facing the other way and allows us to see another *truth*. It always does. Which is why the author of I John, a solid Christian, espousing solid Christian teaching, knowingly or not, speaks to me and my *truth*.

Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love.

It is why the prophet Micah never fails to move me.

With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before my God on high?

He has told you, O Mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly before God.

It is why I am convinced that if we do not listen to, and respect, anyone else's ***truth***, we are neither loving nor doing God's will. It is why I have always had a love/hate relationship with the institutional church. I love what it teaches and what it yet can become, but I hate the various ways in which it hurts those who are ≠other than us. It is why I struggle so often to explain myself. I try to explain the difference between being religious and being faithful. One tends to follow rules, the other tends to favor loving actively and inclusively.

It always amazes me how often people say, "You don't act like a minister." To which I always say, "Thank you." What people mean by "act like a minister" is not always clear. Although it sounds judgmental. I did not sign up to act, I signed up to be a follower of Jesus. That is not acting. It is a way of life. (Did you know the earliest Christian communities were known as ***People of the Way?***)

The reality, it seems to me, is that it is often far easier to act a certain way, than it is to ***do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly before God.*** It is too easy to be religious and sometimes too hard to be faithful. The apostle Paul, in discussing the gifts the Church, the body of Christ, needs has this to say.

If I speak in the, tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away all my possessions, and hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not love, I gain nothing.

Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things. Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they

will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult I put an end to childish ways. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love. (I Corinthians 13)

In our day and place, a time where racism, white supremacy, hatred and rage is directed at some of God's children, a time when even simple civility seems rare, a *truth*, a different *truth* cries out to be heard.

Beloved, let us love each other, for love is of God. The *truth*, modeled and taught by Jesus, is pure and simply this. We are to love each other, regardless race, ethnicity, sexuality, skin color, regardless anything, *for love is of God.*

The *truth* is so simple. As Peter, Paul, and Mary asked in another era, *When will we ever learn?*