

Who's Got the Truth?
John 14: 6, 16-17
October 6, 2019
Rev. Dr. Marcia B. Bailey, preaching

We are living in unprecedented times as a nation; we are more divided than ever over fundamental issues of human rights, constitutionality of government, and global ecology, to name just a few. Each group championing their cause claims their perspective as “true” and points at the others, calling them “liars” and propagators of “fake news.” Each day brings new information and allegations requiring additional discernment and judgement in order to figure out how this piece fits, what it means, what implications it has, and ultimately, what validity it possesses. I don’t know about you, but some days I find it exhausting, not to mention unsettling, to think that as a nation we can be *this far apart* on so many life-altering issues. Is there such thing as “Truth” with a capital “T” or is everything subjective? Is “fact” the same as “fiction”? (I am always reminding my students that everything they read is not a “novel”) Are all perspectives equally worth considering? How do we decide? Who’s got the truth?

We have been reading and talking about Eric Law’s book, *Holy Currencies*, in our adult Learning Community. Law outlines six “currencies” he sees necessary for churches to engage in as they strive to become sustainable and missional. One of these currencies is truth. At first, I was uncertain of where Law was going with this; maybe those of you who read the chapters we’ll be talking about today were too. In what way is “truth” a “currency”?

Perhaps the idea of truth as “currency” becomes clearer when we think about the relationships we cherish the most; what are the things we might say about the person who we love and care for so very much? We might appreciate their generosity, their faithfulness, their

friendship, their affection. We might celebrate their patience, their ability to laugh and be playful, their strength or their humility. And we might also talk about their truthfulness: their ability to speak truth about themselves and their experience, about what they see in the world, about what they understand about God. It might also be that they can speak truth about us! When we think about what we value, truth-telling is important. Not many of us would knowingly invest in relationships where we knew the other *wasn't* telling the truth. In fact, lying, hiding and not disclosing are some fundamental reasons why relationships fail. Truth-telling is a currency that has significant value in relationship. We must be able to both tell and hear the truth in order to trust each other.

But that still doesn't answer the question of who has the truth? The Gospel of John is not a likely place, actually, to look for a clear, simple answer. John writes employing a sophisticated use of metaphor: just think about all the "I am's" of Jesus recorded only here. "I am the Good Shepherd", "I am the Door" and the one we read today, "I am the way, the truth and the life". It's not a very direct way of speaking, especially across the ions of time. But perhaps there is a clue here, or more than one, about this truth business, in this statement that we've read. Jesus says, "I am the way, the truth and the life."

Law wonders why Jesus sticks "truth" in between "way" and "life." "Way" seems to refer to something that happens across time, a reference to a journey, perhaps, or pathway that one travels or a direction one seeks. Likewise, the last part of that three-fold saying is "life", *also* something that happens across time, unfolding, longitudinal. And so, it's in between these two ideas expansive ideas that Jesus puts "truth". Something we have come to believe is absolute, precise, more point-in-time than evolving.

We do think of truth that way, don't we? We frame it as a binary. We characterize people and things as "true" or "false," "good or evil," "sinner or saint." But what if truth wasn't absolute? What if truth, like "way" and "life" was something that emerges over time, something that is affected by perspective, influenced by experience and space? What if Jesus is describing himself in a way that opens him, and us, to transformation, to an expression of change, to dynamism that is revealed with our experience, as opposed to a rigid, defined, static being who is "this" or "that," a "take him or leave him" kind of thing?

Law reminds us that in the Hebrew the three letters for the word "truth" are the first letter ("aleph ") and very middle letter ("mem") and the very last letter of the Hebrew alphabet ("tav"): אמת ("emet"). In Hebrew, the word "truth" itself suggests the passing of time. So perhaps Jesus is saying something about truth itself when he frames it between "way" and "life." Perhaps he is saying that truth is more than one thing, more than a "right" or "wrong," more than what our Western, dualist mind popularly conceives, but that it too invokes perspective, that it too is born of experience, that it too emerges in ways unpredictable and life-giving.

Who's got "the truth"? Each and every one of us! I do not know what it's like to live in this neighborhood because it's not my experience. So how can I speak any truth about what is needed here? About what it's like to live here? I can only know that truth is by listening to someone who does. I do not know what it's like to be discriminated against because of the color of my skin or because of my perceived gender identity or because of my physical disability; the only way I can know any truth about those things is to listen to those who have been marginalized because of them. I do not know what it's like to live in Burundi or Liberia or

China or Argentina. But when I hear first-hand accounts of those who do live there, then I begin to be open to the truth of their experience. I don't have or know "the truth" because as much as I would like to think there is one big "Truth" with a capital "T," I am not sure it actually exists, or at least not as neatly as I'd like to package it.

I think what Jesus is saying here when he sandwiches "truth" between "way" and "life" is that he is all these things that we are experiencing and searching for. I think he might be saying that just as he is God, transformed and transforming: Creator, Incarnate, and Spirit, so we, when we dare to believe, when we dare to listen, when we dare to seek, will find all these things: the path, the truth, and life itself, when we are open to the journey, to the unfolding, to the transformation that can only happen when we make ourselves receptive to one another, and thereby encounter God.

None of us holds the entire truth of who and what God is, but when we can speak our own truth about how we have been loved and redeemed, comforted and sustained, inspired and challenged by God's presence in our lives, then and only then do we begin to form a more complete vision and understanding of who God is! In the very same way, it's only when we can extend the Table, when we can hold the cup for one another and eat the bread of another's suffering and joy, when we can listen to one another's truth, *only then* can we begin to experience a fuller and deeper expression of God Incarnate and the Spirit's vitality, alive in each and all of us!

Who has the truth? *Everyone* has some bit, some piece, some aspect of it! Every story is worth telling; every witness worth hearing. We may not understand the language, we might not appreciate the song, we might not "get" the meaning, but if we can dare to open ourselves to

one another, here in this community, here in our city, here in our country, here in our world
THEN, and only then, might we begin to catch a brighter glimpse, a wider understanding, a
deeper knowing, a more honest truth about ourselves, about one another and about God.