

## 2 Samuel 23:1-7

<sup>1</sup>Now these are the last words of David: The oracle of David, son of Jesse, the oracle of the man whom God exalted, the anointed of the God of Jacob, the favorite of the Strong One of Israel:

<sup>2</sup>The spirit of the Lord speaks through me, his word is upon my tongue. <sup>3</sup>The God of Israel has spoken, the Rock of Israel has said to me: One who rules over people justly, ruling in the fear of God, <sup>4</sup>is like the light of morning, like the sun rising on a cloudless morning, gleaming from the rain on the grassy land. <sup>5</sup>Is not my house like this with God? For he has made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and secure. Will he not cause to prosper all my help and my desire? <sup>6</sup>But the godless are all like thorns that are thrown away; for they cannot be picked up with the hand; <sup>7</sup>to touch them one uses an iron bar or the shaft of a spear. And they are entirely consumed in fire on the spot.

John 18:33-38

33 Then Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, 'Are you the King of the Jews?' <sup>34</sup>Jesus answered, 'Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?' <sup>35</sup>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?' <sup>36</sup>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.' <sup>37</sup>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.**' <sup>38</sup>Pilate asked him, 'What is truth?'

### WHAT IS TRUTH?

Good question: What is truth? I must give for this sermon to my favorite theologian, Paul Tillich, who, more than anyone else, has inspired my own search for truth. Today's sermon is drawn from a chapter in his book *The New Being* entitled "What is Truth?"

There are many books about truth, and now there's a movie called "Truth." We teach our children to tell the truth. If you researched the philosophy of truth you'd find numerous theories on what truth is. The fact is that whether we are intellectual or just ordinary people, truth is important to us.

Jesus declares, quite correctly in John's gospel, that "the truth will make you free" (John 8:32) We go through life searching for truth. When we're young we get truth from our parents, but as we get older we question the truth that they presented us. That's normal; growing up means coming up with our own answers and not simply accepting the answers that our parents provide us. We come up with our own answers, and we take responsibility for the truth that we embrace.

But do we ever really find truth? There are those who embrace a truth, like terrorists who are so persuaded of what they believe that they would kill and die for the truth they embrace, yet you or I would easily dismiss that truth they embrace as a horrible lie. There are fanatics who pledge absolute allegiance to their country or the government that runs their country, like many a German citizen in the 1930s, who believe that their leaders are speaking truth and leading them in the right direction, only to learn that what they thought was truth was indeed a lie. Many of you have gone to different churches in your life, or even come from different religions. Have you found truth here at Bethel?

Because if you're like most people you are not so sure. We live in a time of great uncertainty where truth can be so hard to discern. Not only are our brains overloaded with stimuli, information from all directions injecting itself into our minds at an alarming rate, but so much of what comes to us that claims to be truth is proven to be a lie, and with so much information to process, and so many lies competing for our attention, we find ourselves asking the same question that Pilate asks; *What is truth?*

But the problem is not so much one of definition; I think we are hardwired by God to gravitate toward TRUTH; the problem is that there are so many lies, even within the realm of Christianity, that we can easily start to doubt ourselves, and turn into cynics, like Pilate, who just consider the whole notion of TRUTH to be out of our reach; we see too many fanatics who are so convinced that the truth is a lie, and we wonder if we were so convinced of anything claiming to be truth that we might ourselves be fanatics. It's safer to claim that we don't know the truth than it is to claim a truth and discover later that it is somehow a lie.

It's funny how our doubts play out in our Christian faith; I've spoken to people who profess a belief that Jesus is the Son of God as if their profession was a sort of insurance policy; "Well, I'm not sure that Jesus rose from the dead or that he is the Son of God, but I figure if I profess it as truth I'll be safe." Yet all the while, such a person harbors hidden (or not-so-hidden) doubts about their faith. In order to ease their doubts they look for some miracles or some historical evidence that confirms their fragile faith and prove its truth. But beware: if you've already got doubts, you have to ask yourself, "What can I find that will really eliminate my doubts?" I'm reminded of a line from the movie "Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy" where a British intelligence agent is speaking of his Russian rival who is a fanatic, and he says, "I know we can beat him, because a fanatic always conceals a secret doubt."

So I ask again, *Is it possible for us to discover truth amidst all the lies and all the doubts*, and of course my answer is yes, and one finds truth in none other than the person of Jesus Christ. It's not merely what Jesus says that is truth; that would mean that he was no more than a great philosopher. It's not merely what people say about Jesus that is truth, because truth is far more than fact. JESUS HIMSELF IS TRUTH. HE DECLARES AS MUCH: "I am the way, the truth, and the life."

To declare Jesus' teachings as truth is to subject people to a new law – and we're no different from the Jews who crucified Jesus, the Jews who zealously embraced law. We don't proclaim that Jesus came to bring us new law and thus a new form of slavery. In fact he came to free us from the law. Yes, Jesus' teachings POINT to the Truth, but they themselves are not truth.

And doctrines about Jesus may be true, but can we say that they are the truth that really sets us free? Doctrines about Jesus have led to division, exclusion, excommunication, bloodshed and warfare. Doctrines about Jesus have been used as tools of suppression, and have discouraged people from the honest pursuit of truth. At best doctrines point to the Truth, but they themselves are not the truth that sets us free.

And it is God's desire that we truly be free, free from both laws and doctrines that confines us to other people's false notions of truth. The truth that sets us free is not the laws that Jesus teaches nor the doctrines about his identity, but it is Jesus himself who is the Truth that sets us free.

And so we should go back to what Jesus himself declares in John's gospel; Jesus says "I am the truth." It's not believing in Jesus as the truth that sets us free, and it's not doing the things he tells us to do that

sets us free. IT'S ABIDING IN HIM. How does that happen? How do we abide in Jesus? You might say that it comes by doing the things he tells us to do, or believing in what the Bible says about him, but it's much more than that. It comes from *knowing him*. Jesus says, "Everyone who is of the truth hears my voice." Not a voice proclaiming laws to follow. Not a voice proclaim doctrines to embrace, but a voice that speaks to your inward being, a voice that you indeed recognize that declares truth. It is the voice of Jesus who himself is the truth, the truth grounded in love, that is grounded in communion with God and draws us into loving communion with one another. It's a voice that we often struggle with, because it declares truth that we are tempted to resist by embracing laws or doctrines in its place. No, the voice of Jesus can come to us in nature, in literature, in church, in a smile or a cry, but we know it when we hear it. It's a voice that can lead us to question our doctrines and laws, and it's a voice that directs us to a higher law called LOVE.

Today is Christ the King Sunday, and though this nation is not too fond of monarchs – we fought a war to gain independence from one - we should appreciate what a relationship with a king is about. We have a constitution which is in essence a set of laws and doctrines that we commit ourselves to believing and obeying. But a relationship with a king is a bit different. Our Old Testament lesson speaks of a good king who rules justly, but a relationship with a king is more than just a social contract where you obey your king and he guarantees justice. A relationship with a king is one of trust and one of fidelity; you don't *elect* a king, and you don't decide whether or not he is your king; you belong to the king as much as he belongs to you; you abide in him as he abides in you. We have one king who reigns supreme in us. I pray that you keep your ears open for his voice.