

C Good Friday 4.15.22

John 18:1-19:42

Focus Statement: Where there is mess, there is Jesus.

For years I've been fascinated by the part of the Passion narrative in John's Gospel where Jesus said that he "came into the world, to testify to the truth." To which Pilate responded, flippantly in my hearing, "What is truth?" This question, "what is truth" has long interested my millennial search for meaning. What, really, is truth? How do truth and myth and fact intertwine in a post-modern culture? Luckily for you all, this text shows up on Good Friday, so you haven't ever had to sit through this sermon that really should have been a PhD dissertation that I'd long wanted to explore.

I use "long wanted to explore" in the past tense, because the last few years exploring this idea of truth felt increasingly dangerous. Waxing poetic on the concept of truth seemed like an interesting theoretical exercise, like my undergraduate philosophy course on Aristotle's musings on the chairness of chairs, until facts themselves became subjective. While I was interested in pursuing Pilate's questions about the nature of truth, now, when objective facts like the number of people who voted in an election, the validity of scientific research, and if there are Nazis in the Ukraine, are up for interpretation by who can yell the loudest, pondering the existence of truth felt like feeding into the narrative of misinformation.

There has to be objective truth, because living in a world where facts are determined by who has the most Twitter followers is just too frightening.

Thinking about this again this week, as I ran through the Passion story in my head, and the power of scripture, the reason that this book is still so current millennia after it was

written, struck me anew. Because the question I've been asking, what is truth in a post-modern, social media driven, click bait culture, where anyone with internet access, which is everyone, can create facts as they see fit to confirm the story they want to believe, that is the same question Pilate is playing on. Pilate too was living in a world where, to quote an old nineties tv show, "the rules are made up and the points don't matter." Or, better put, I'm really pulling out my nineties references today, in the Disney movie, Aladdin, the villain Jaffar described "the Golden Rule, whoever has the gold makes the rules." In Pilate's world, the rules, the facts, were set by the Empire. Rome determined what was true, what was factual, how the world operated. It had the gold, it had the power, it set the framework of truth in place. If Rome said it was peace, then the fact of armed soldiers on every corner meant peace. If Rome said there was plenty, that people were starving was their own fault. If Rome said you had freedom, then the control on your religion, culture, decisions, livelihood, was because others—always the mysterious other—were threatening that freedom. Pilate asked Jesus, "what is truth" because Pilate knew that truth was whatever he wanted it to be, whatever met his needs, his wants, his objectives, as part of the Roman Imperial culture. Truth was whatever brought Pilate power under the guise of "I alone can fix this; I alone can save you." Protect me, support me, benefit me, because only through my gain will you be ok.

If this sounds familiar, it should. What's amazing about scripture is that every single thing in our culture has changed. Pilate wouldn't understand a single thing about modern life. He couldn't comprehend cross-continental communication, that there even are other continents, democracy as it's practiced, globalization, the internet, dependable mail service.

Nothing in Pilate's time is like it is in our time. Except this one thing. Human nature hasn't changed, we haven't changed. Truth, in the hands of people like Pilate, is still subjective, still adaptable to the whims of what suits their needs, wants, and desire for power.

So what then, is truth? Truth, dear people of God, is not a fact, it is a relationship. Truth is a God who walks right into the mess and says not, I alone can fix this, but I will give myself for you. To see truth, look not to those who ask for everything, look instead to the one who will give up all. Truth is not found in bluster or promise, truth is found in sacrifice. Truth isn't words, it is actions. Truth is "the Word became flesh and lived among us." Truth is "I will only be with you for a little while longer... Love one another as I have loved you."

Truth is, "am I not to drink the cup" and "Woman here is your son" and "You have no power over me." Truth is "It is finished."

What we get on Good Friday is a God who does not say, "come to me, give me everything, for I alone can save you," but who instead, despite our protesting, doubts, betrayal, by Judas, by Peter, by everyone else, despite shouts of "crucify him," and "we have no king but the emperor," despite all of that, a God who shows up and walks right into the face of death itself so that we might be set free from the powers of sin and death. Ours is a God who comes to us, comes to where we are, meets us in the mess of everything. Pilate missed that Truth was standing right in front of him because Pilate had never experienced a Truth like that, a Love like that, Love willing to sacrifice everything for the sake of the beloved.

Dear people of God, the world is a mess. I won't lie to you and say that it isn't, nor will I tell you that I, or anyone else knows how to fix it. The world is a mess, has always been a mess, and will always be a mess until the day Christ comes again. It is a mess because it is full of us, full of humans. And as much as we have changed in our time on this planet, the fact of our messiness has not, never will. We are broken, we are sinful. We hurt each other, ourselves, God's creation. We tell lies to build ourselves up, we create grandiose expectations of our abilities. We think that we are God. And what makes Good Friday Good is Good Friday is a day where we experience God wading right into the middle of all of the mess and brokenness and hurt and pain to declare it finished.

It doesn't feel finished, dear people of God. It doesn't look finished. We resurrection people live in the confluence of Christ has died, Christ is risen, and Christ will come again, and that transitional space is an uncomfortable space to be. It doesn't look finished, it doesn't feel finished, but it is. And here's how I know. I know because every other promise of salvation through other means throughout all of history has always fallen short. Not once in the whole history of time has a leader promised, "give me everything, and I will save you" ever saved us. But the promise Christ makes on Good Friday, the promise to walk right into the mess of it all and be with us, live with us, until the end, that promise I have seen lived out again and again in a million large and small ways. It is finished, God is here, has always been and will always be, until the end, no matter what. Thanks be to God.