

## Epiphany II A 2017

Those who follow Jesus are called to truthful speech and follow one who spoke the truth. The truth is sometimes difficult to discern and difficult to hear; it is for some impossible to bear. Have you ever been with someone, as I have, who lied and seemed not to know it? It seems hard to call it lying when some deep level of denial is involved, when someone seems not able to see the truth that is readily apparent to many others. Reciting untruth in the face of truth is terribly destructive, of self and relationship.

After we wonder about one who does it, it makes us wonder about ourselves as well; we are probably not immune to the road of denial. And yet the truth is, *it is*, whether ignored or hidden or twisted or denied. Truthful speech is our best attempt to share the truth, to articulate what we have learned in our listening, our self-examination, our prayer, and our experience. It is hard won and effort must be made to preserve our capacity to speak it. We must be trained to seek and speak the truth.

Jesus, of course, had a gift for speaking truthfully. He did not fear offending others, it seems, and carried a divine confidence. He spoke openly in the synagogues and marketplaces, challenged rulers and elders, and said hard things even to humble, hurting to people who might not have been ready to receive them. Remember the woman at the well, the Syro-Phoenecian woman, the rich young man? They all received a measure of truth from him, for which they were not ready.

He did often speak and his words are remembered to us in simple sentences, and in like manner John the Baptist, an early colleague of his in ministry. They were to the point and powerful. John is remembered in this passage *declaring, testifying, and exclaiming*, all powerful ways of sharing the truth he had perceived in Jesus. When Jesus spoke after all of John's gesturing toward him and speaking of him, he said little but spoke volumes. He demanded of John's disciples who were scoping him out: "What are you looking for?" (*What are you looking at!?* The young toughs now say.) And he told them simply that they should "come and see." He called Simon by his old name and gave him a new one, using just about as few words as possible. Perhaps he kept their attention with his brevity; a lesson for preachers, and perhaps for you. Simple sentences get the job done, perhaps what Isaiah spoke of when he described one coming with a "mouth like a sharp sword," one to cut to the chase and speak the truth.

The gift was meant not just for him: St. Paul gave thanks in his letter to Corinth for their enrichment in Christ, that they had been enriched “in speech and knowledge of every kind.” Their renewed minds led to renewed tongues and new voices, to the telling of the deeper truth of the love of Christ.

Those gifts are also ours in the Holy Spirit.

And yet we know the trouble of truthful speech.

It will sometimes get you killed.

The Romans and the Temple leaders could not bear what Jesus had to say.

And so they made him a Cross.

The powerful truth announced by our brother Martin, that a region and country mired in violent white supremacy and simultaneously claiming Christian identity, must change; this left him dead on the balcony of a Memphis motel, after years of threats and imprisonment.

Beware what truth you tell; it may cost you friends;

it may cost you your life.

And yet those who seek to save their own lives often lose them in the process.

I remember a quip about an old lady, that she was so lady-like that she seemed to have hardly any personality at all.

Truth long swallowed is a bitter pill; truth buried within is a poison and pollutant.

Ask a therapist, ask someone who has long lived with a painful secret.

Once you know the truth, it can set you free, as the prophet said.

Or you can seek to make the known truth your prisoner and find that it has made you its prisoner.

The truth is meant to live in the light, and we with it.

The truth need not be told all at once, to be sure, especially if we speak of family or romance or the things of the heart,

away from the great and public injustices that call for truth with the greatest urgency.

If we speak the truth in love, we may, by love, share the truth as we discern it in all humility, with the needs of others in mind.

We will often discover it by degrees as well.

And when light dramatically shines, when we know the truth, and achieve a moment of clarity, we ought to remember that we call them moments of clarity because they are momentary.

We are all as ignorant as we are wise, as blind as we are visionary.

The fog that prevents us from knowing the truth will return, when our moment of Epiphany is over.

Do you think we know all that Jesus said by the Scriptures? I wonder.

Was some truth forgotten by these ancient writers?

Did the Spirit let some fall on the cutting room floor, for future use?

Who knows what the Lord left unsaid that pulsed through his consciousness, his thought?

As openly as he spoke, he still may have reserved some of the truth he might have shared for the day of his coming that still waits.

Perhaps the divine compassion within him occasionally retrained his speech.

Perhaps he wanted us to yearn and seek and strive to speak the truth.

What wisdom, unknown to us, still rests in the heart of God by his refraining?

How wonderful it will be to know and to be fully known,

to be bathed in the light of his truth and love,

to be done with secrets and lies,

and to join our voices to his, in the truth song of the Kingdom.