

March 1, 2013

Truth

Matthew 13:13-16

Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."

The truth is sometimes stranger than fiction. Peter stands in this moment of truth with his eyes and mouth wide open. Where did that comment originate? The Spirit inspired Peter to speak boldly in the truth. There is a fine line between being truthful or tactful. Peter didn't seem to be tactful. So honesty boldly appears. It's difficult enough to tell God the truth when we really know that God know everything. We can remember and sing the words of a familiar song: "Open the eyes of my heart, Lord! I want to see Jesus high and lifted up." When the Spirit moves in us and we confess Jesus as the Messiah, then the real truth, much more powerful than fiction.

Prayer: Lord, bless me with your Spirit so that I may confess you as Lord and Savior. Amen.

March 2, 2013

Chains

Isaiah 58:5-7

Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke?

The possibility of unemployment haunts this nation. The longer the length of unemployment the more difficult the possibility of being employed. Our homeless fall deeper and deeper into the pit and their chains of unemployment turn into a yoke. We attempt to feed the homeless and then walk away. The homeless need to be freed from their chains and set free from the society that haunts them. Peanut butter sandwiches are good but to untie the cords of the yoke and help find a job.

Prayer: Jesus, give us the strength to be willing worker on our jobs and with the homeless. Amen.

March 3, 2013

Fools for Christ

1 Corinthians 1:23

But we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles.

Christ's crucifixion may seem to be only foolishness and weakness. Yet the strength of God's love and power flow through the cross of Christ. The cross of Christ is worn as a necklace today and sometimes as a decoration. How foolish! How powerful! Yet their foolishness turns into joy as Christians are reminded of Jesus' life, death and resurrection. We preach Christ crucified set us free from our sin. A stumbling block to Jews who are under the law and foolishness to Gentiles who have difficulties understanding the scope of God's grace.

Prayer: Jesus, thanks for making me a fool! Amen.

March 4, 2013

Tenderness

Isaiah 42:1-4

A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out.

Notice the tenderness! In a world where power is supreme tenderness takes second fiddle! No third fiddle! Power politics, power plays and underhanded power highlight our lives. Do we want power to control people? Human power is best displayed in those tender moments that change the atmosphere and affirm the person. Tenderness restores the kingdom of God and doesn't break the bruised reed. We need to rejoice in God's power shown to us through His tenderness.

Prayer: Lord, you know our frailties! Show us your kingdom of tenderness. Amen.

March 5, 2013

Affirmations

John 12:26

Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one serves me.

We are never to lose track of who we are serving. Yet how easy it is to project self-affirmation and be immersed in work's righteousness. We

are easily induced into looking into the mirror and thinking about the good deeds we have done. Gratitude from the person sometimes only reaffirmed the process. Wow! Today I fed the homeless and visited a friend in the hospital along with cleaning the lawn of the elderly woman next door. Who provided the health and being that allowed us to do these acts of kindness? What spirit motivated us? In this time of the "virus" we keep our distance and still can serve the Lord and humanity!

Prayer: Lord, thank you for sending me to serve and proclaim you as Lord and Savior. Amen.

March 6, 2013

Mentoring

Deuteronomy 6:4-9

Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.

Mentoring is the word today. Mentoring is vitally important with so many one parent families and the multitude of divorces. Big Brothers and Big Sisters affirm the process as they attempt to solicit adults to mentor and befriend children without at least one parent. In teaching the Ten Commandments to Israel, they are urged to mentor the child in the teaching and living out of the commandments. Our role modeling is vital in helping our youth sense the importance of faith in life. The Lord inspires our mentoring as we keep our six-foot distance while providing for our fellow human beings. For we are all children of God.

Prayer: Jesus, help us exercise your grace and teach your ways to our children. Amen.

March 7, 2013

Rest

Mark 6:30-34

Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest."

The more the Spirit gives growth to Christ's church, the more ministry and less time for self. The snowball effect picks up speed until you are

completely immersed in ministry and there is no end in sight. You have probably experienced the same in your work and home life. Jesus looked at his disciples and recognized their busyness plight. He invites them to come away to a quiet place and connect with the Lord in solace. Can we be part of the "quiet place" for another? Do you know someone who needs this spiritual prescription? Invite them!

Prayer: Lord, send your Spirit and a friend to invite the weary to come to you in a quiet place. Amen.

March 8, 2013

Justice

Amos 5:6-7, 10-15

Hate evil, love good; maintain justice in the courts.

Lawyer jokes are numerous and blatant. We scoff at the justice system and shake our heads at verdict without knowing the facts. Can we mix religion and justice? In Amos' time the court system was to reflect the religious system. Many of the laws in the Pentateuch were present to keep justice just and in line with God's purpose. The poor were to be protected and not under the strong arm of the rich and powerful. Amos reflects on the importance of keeping justice as part of our faith and being an advocate for the less fortunate. This structure was established to keep the community harmonious. Are we advocates? Do we turn our backs?

Prayer: Lord, may we seek the truth in our lives and in our legal system so that all might prosper in your name. Amen!

March 9, 2013

Sermon

Mark 1:14-15

Repent and believe in the good news.

Jesus' first sermon in Mark was simple and yet quite profound. "Repent and believe in the good news." The word "repent" in Greek means transformation, turning inside out and turning around. "Believe" point to the shift of allegiance from the Law to the "good news" that Jesus brings. Jesus' first sermon was probably the shortest in length but the depth of transformation of mind, body and spirit was quite profound. And the importance of continuing the transformation is #1 in our lives.

We need to do more than confess with our lips. We need to live out the Lord's presence in our lives daily through repentance. Repentance begins at home!

Prayer: Lord, take my life and let it be reshaped by your grace that leads to daily repentance. Amen.

March 10, 2013

Spelling

Romans 5:6-11

But demonstrates his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

While on the road to Damascus Saul was confronted by the Lord Jesus. This traumatic event empowered his life and led to personal reflection. His past acts of persecution against Christ's church stimulated his repentance. The Spirit not only causes Saul to change the spelling of his name but to embrace the grace of Jesus Christ. The love of God was spelled out in S A C R I F I C E and again in F O R G I V E N E S S and L O V E and M O R E. Our lives are not spelled out for us but given freely by God's grace to be lived in grace knowing that "while we are still sinners Jesus dies for U S.

Prayer: Jesus draw us to yourself and spell out your mercy in our lives. Amen.

March 11, 2013

Immediately

Acts 8:34-40

Why shouldn't I be baptized?

The Ethiopian eunuch heard the gospel of Jesus and immediately embraced Jesus as Lord and Savior. The change to be saved and enter the kingdom of God was exciting and inspirational. "Why shouldn't I be baptized?" he asked. So many times today we believe that we need more instruction and education prior to baptism. Here the hearing of the message moved him boldly and immediately to the baptism font in the desert. When Christ offers His grace and invites baptism, why hesitate? Does the infant understand God's grace? Does the adult fathom the depth of God's grace? God alone knows and celebrates the immediately in the context.

Prayer: Gracious Lord, keep us from postponing the right action. Amen.

March 12, 2013

Pausing

Matthew 26:14-75

This is the blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.

Pausing as they head to Jerusalem and pausing as we venture through Lent allows us to read the Passion History. Israel remembered her slavery in Egypt with the Passover Meal. Now Christians remember their slavery to sin and death by partaking in Holy Communion. When we partake in this Sacrament, we need to pause and remember that the disciples didn't understand Jesus' mission until after the third day. We pause to eat the bread and remember his brokenness and drink the blood remembering his sacrifice. In the midst of social distance is it not an incredible time to pause?

Prayer: Lord, as we pause to reflect, open our minds to remember and our hearts to feel your love. Amen.

March 13, 2013

Faithfulness

Psalms 138:1-3

I will bow down. . .and will praise your name for your love and your faithfulness.

Faithfulness solidifies and energizes a relationship. This year Gerry and I will be celebrating our 51st anniversary. The number may not seem high for the couples blest with more years. But the years of faithfulness to each other have permitted us to live freely and without concern regarding the preciousness of our fidelity. Faithfulness is God's hallmark in Christ Jesus. For Jesus was, indeed, faithful until death for our sake. We can only bow down and praise God for this love and faithfulness that solidifies our relationship as creature and Creator and human and divine.

Prayer: Lord, as you have faithful to us strengthen us in our loyalty to you and your kingdom. Amen.

March 14, 2013

Exactly

Psalm 78:23-29

Men ate the bread of angels; he sent them all the food they could eat.

God fed the Israelites in the desert with manna from heaven, the bread of angels. How does that relate to the homeless and hungry today? With so many dying and struggling daily of malnourished, can we not look at our cupboards and refrigerator with some disdain? A young farm boy was listening to his father praying for the hungry of the world. After the prayer the son asked his father, can we help feed the hungry with the grain in our silos? Exactly! God has turned over the work of feeding the hungry to us. What shall we do? Exactly!

Prayer: Spirit, we thank you for our daily bread and our willingness to share it. Amen.

March 15, 2013

Empathy

2 Corinthians 1:3-7

So that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.

Is this the part of Scripture that talks about empathy? "With the comfort that we have received from God" moves us to the fact that we understand because we have already been there. "Comfort" means to "strengthen" in the midst of troubles. How much comfort do we receive when someone talks to us about their similar trouble or their similar operation or their similar illness? The similarities establish a real empathy and bond us together in Christ. What a blessed privilege to share with each other and not upstage one another.

Prayer: Jesus, we thank you for your comfort and compassion. May we comfort others with the same compassion. Amen.

March 16, 2013

Conquers

Hebrews 1:14

Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?

Forest firefighters understand the best way to fight fire is with fire. Smaller controlled fires deliberately set in advance stop the advance of the forest fire. This procedure conquers the fire by burning up the fuel. So God sent his Son to earth to conquer sin by dying on the cross. Jesus conquers death by dying and rising again. In the midst of our struggles may we realize that death is vital. For when we die with Christ, we also rise with him. Be conquerors in Christ Jesus and permit the death of our sinful ways in order that we rise together with Christ.

Prayer: Jesus, give us courage to be live life fully in your name. Amen.

March 17, 2013

Soldiers

2 Timothy 2:1-10

Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus.

Paul endured many hardships and physical calamities to follow Jesus. Here Paul points out that we are called to be "good soldiers of Jesus Christ." What is soldering about? Our films and TV shows point out the basic of soldiering. Many of my friends were drafted or joined during the Vietnam War and subsequent wars. Some didn't return and endured the hardship and sacrifice of war. They are remembered and we are grateful. We are thankful for their service and sacrifice. Here Paul points out the necessity of being a "good soldier". Yes, that means basic training and discipline and saluting and saying "Yes, Sir!" yet it means more than you and I can imagine who have not been there. We are to be "good soldiers" for Christ.

Prayer: Lord, we thank you for the good soldiers like Timothy and Aquila of yesterday and the Franks and Samanthas of today. Amen.

March 18, 2013

Witnesses

Acts 1:6-14

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

Where has the Spirit led us? To what ends of the earth have we traveled in Christ Jesus? 9/11 scares many into the churches the next

Sunday. The coronavirus sends us into our homes to contemplate our witness to Christ. Our ventures in Christ may have been limited by our geographical odometers but our offerings to the Lord via the collection plate have travelled across oceans and scaled mountaintops. We are witnesses to Jesus Christ. Take time to look at the ELCA website and see how far the gospel has travelled through offering and sponsorship of missionaries. Thank the Lord keep up the witnessing.

Prayer: Spirit, empower us to be witnesses here and abroad. Amen.

March 19, 2013

Sorrow

Matthew 14:13-14

Jesus had compassion on them and healed their sick.

Sorrow invades our lives in many ways. We experience sorrow when a loved one dies or when we have done wrong to someone. The many scenarios of sorrow color our lives. At the same time sorrow's presence allows us to count our blessings. John the Baptist was beheaded in prison and his follower with sorrow in their hearts turn to Jesus. Jesus' compassion for them was deep and he healed them. Jesus understood sorrow for his sorrow for our sins was more than apparent. Blessed are those who mourn with the mourning.

Prayer: Spirit, help us to not be too weary that we fail to share the sorrow of our sisters and brothers in Christ. Amen

March 20, 2013

Laborers

Matthew 9:35-38

The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore, pray the Lord of the harvest to send laborers into His harvest.

The occupation of laborer isn't what it's cracked up to be. Working in a steel mill to earn money for college and seminary permitted me to learn the role of laborer. You are given all the jobs no one else wants. Yet without the laborer the job isn't completed. The church usually has 20% of the congregation working and 80% idle. How wonderful is we could turn the numbers around and how much more the harvest! We fail to realize the harvest in this case is not wheat or corn but the saving of humans.

Prayer: Lord, send more willing laborers. Amen.

March 21, 2013

Mindful

Psalm 8

What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?

Step outside on a clear evening and view the magnificence of the stars. Step on the shore of the Pacific Ocean and scan the endless horizon. Go to the highest mountain and look down. God's creation is larger than life. God created and rules all this and the boundaries with ingenuity and wisdom and placed us human in its midst. What's more wonderful is the Lord is mindful of each human creature. Each person is God's child. He crowns us with glory and gave us dominion over nature. His final word of love and mindfulness is Jesus who was given to save us. Still, God gives us the power to love and serve Him and be mindful of his love.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for caring about creation and being mindful of us. Amen.

March 22, 2013

Surprise

Genesis 28:16-17

Surely the Lord is in this place, and I was not aware of it.

Jacob was wide awake now! Can you imagine his trembling as he considers the happening of the night? He was running away from his brother and lay down in this holy place. Surprise! He could not escape the presence of God. Surprise! He could not hide from God! Jacob's role in the legacy of God was blessed by this encounter as Jacob reflected upon God's presence in his life. Surprise! The Lord's power and love supersede. Ask Jesus to awake you from your spiritual slumber, ask God to surprise you.

Prayer: Lord, may we be surprised with your joy and presence. Amen.

March 23, 2013

Certainties

Luke 24:44-49

You are witnesses of these things.

The resurrection of Jesus brought new life to his disciples and new meaning for life. His witnesses knew very few certainties in life and now they experienced the greatest certainty: resurrection from the dead. In the Third Article of the Apostles' Creed we confess that we believe in "communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins and life everlasting." Jesus promised us these certainties in an uncertain and confused world. Now we can witness daily to the certainty of his death and resurrection for our sake by how we live our lives.

Prayer: Spirit, move us forward in living in the certainties of Jesus' death and resurrection. Amen.

March 24, 2013

Whirlwind

Job 38:1-3

Brace yourself. . .I will question you, and you will answer me.

The voice of God comes out of the whirlwind with authority and power. In the midst of Job's chaos and chatter, God was finished with empty speculations and tedious arguments. God wanted Job to learn and listen. The afflictions of Satan probably planted seeds of doubt and Job needed to hear the truth. So out the whirlwind God confronts Job and drives him to his knees in repentance. Job was tired of suffering and needed to recognize the importance of the acknowledgement of God's grace in his life. Take time to listen in the midst of present troubles.

Prayer: Lord, speak to us out of the whirlwind of life and calm us so that we listen to you and walk humbly in your sight. Amen.

March 25, 2013

Riches

2 Corinthians 8:8-14

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.

Trouble brings people together! The story of "Stone Soup" is a good illustration. People enter a village with nothing and hungry. He set up a pot of soup as they boil water. They add a few stones for seasoning and the curious inhabitants of the village come out of their homes and add their little to the soup. In the end, they indulge in the same soup

enriched with the gifts. Jesus adds the riches of his glory and majesty to our lives by becoming poor and living among us starting in Bethlehem. Through his life and love he shares the riches of God with us.

Prayer: Lord, teach us to love and give so that all people share in your riches. Amen.

March 26, 2013

Opportunity

Isaiah 6:1-8

Here am I. Send me.

The story of the calling of Isaiah is a magnificent realization of our humanity in the midst of God's almighty power and presence. Here Isaiah stands surrounded by God's glory and given the opportunity to serve the Lord. Isaiah is offered the opportunity to have his sins forgiven and to share in the salvation history of Israel as a spokesman. Isaiah accepts the offer and moves forward with the opportunity. Are you ready to accept the opportunity to serve Christ with your gifts?

Prayer: Jesus, thank you for the call and opportunity to serve you. Amen.

March 27, 2013

Scripture

Isaiah 42:1-4

Here is my servant.

At the beginning of his ministry Jesus read this passage in the synagogue to point out his role as the Messiah. The long awaited Messiah had come but the people did not believe. Scripture had been fulfilled in their midst and they didn't see. The role of the Messiah as the Suffering Servant in scripture points to Jesus. Jesus taught his disciples to serve and be servants. Their dedication to the gospel was vital for the spread of the good news. Servants are called to do God's will and be dedicated to the kingdom of God. Time to get out the towel and the pitcher of water.

Prayer: Master, help us to serve and to share our talents as serve you and those in need. Amen.

March 28, 2013

Bragging

Luke 9:46-48

An argument started among the disciples as to which of them would be the greatest.

America has the audacity to claim bragging rights for. . . You fill in the blanks. "You're the greatest!" is heard and spoken by ESPN and American from the east to the west coast including Alaska and Hawaii. We love to hear that our team is #1 and love to toot our horn. The disciples evidently had the same discussion except for bragging rights to be #1 next to Jesus. Pride is the disease that destroys not only the person but the entire community. Brag about Jesus and what he has done for us and we will rarely say, "I am better than. . ." or "Look at me. . ."

Prayer: Spirit, keep from looking down on my neighbor and keep me looking up to Jesus. Amen.

March 29, 2013

Goals

Psalm 27:1-6

One thing I ask of the Lord, this is what I seek; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to seek him in his temple.

What do you want to be when you grow up? What are the goals for your occupation? Your marriage? Your family? We are asked about our life's goals! What goals are empty? What goals are selfish? The psalmist only wanted to "dwell in the house of the Lord." "To gaze upon the beauty of the Lord" is an awesome vantage point to see the glory of the Lord and sense the wonder of His majesty. My goals at graduation from seminary was to share the good news of Jesus and bring others to Christ. For 40+ years I have been privileged to gaze upon the work of the Lord. How about you?

Prayer: Lord, help us to see the important things in life. Amen.

March 30, 2013

Shallowness

Psalm 90:1-4

From everlasting to everlasting you are God.

We cannot fathom "eternity." We cannot understand "omnipotence." We cannot ascertain "omniscience." We cannot imagine "omnipresence." Our

shallowness is apparent when we attempt to scope the essence and presence of God. We live in the temporal and see that things break or wear out or die or grow moldy. We purchase brakes with guarantees as long as we own our car. Thomas Edison invented the light bulb. One bulb placed in the socket in 1905 still burns brightly. That's older than anyone of us, not eternal but old.

Prayer: Gracious Savior, make yourself known to us as Lord and Savior in the midst of our human shallowness. Amen.

March 31, 2013

Gospel

Galatians 1:6-10

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel

Are there "different gospels?" Can I pick and choose what suits me? If it fits and is stylish is it correct for today? The content of the Gospel is important. Desertion is an abandonment of the real Gospel. There is only one Gospel with Jesus as the center. The message is not always stylish or in adherence to our beliefs. Instead, the Gospel speaks the "truth in love so that we are not tossed to and fro by the winds" of wrong doctrine. The resurrected and living Lord breathes life and power into the Gospel. The Gospel is not all about health and wealthy but about Jesus as Lord and Savior. In the midst of this human crisis the "good news" is that Jesus is still the Savior and we recognize that there is only one "GOSPEL!"

Prayer: Spirit, keep us focused on the one Gospel of Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Amen.