

SERMON: To Tell the Truth
TEXT: Ephesians 4:1-16

I know I'm dating myself, but I'm pretty sure I'm in good company. Do you remember the TV game show called *To Tell the Truth*? Each episode featured a person of some notoriety – along with two impostors – tries to match wits with a panel of four celebrities. The object of the game is to try to fool the celebrities into voting for one of the two impostors. Let's say John Smith is an inventor. He and the other two people each introduce themselves: "I'm John Smith." The celebrities then ask questions that a true inventor should know the answers to. In the end, the host would ask, "Will the real John Smith please stand up." The three contestants would hesitate, look around, start to stand and then sit again, until finally one stood up, often to the surprise of at least some of the celebrities and audience.

There was another show during the same era called Truth or Consequences, which sounds similar to the popular teenage slumber party game, Truth or Dare, but in this game, you don't get to choose one or the other. The question comes first, and if you don't answer truthfully or correctly, then you suffer the consequences of having to perform an embarrassing stunt.

One of my favorite ice-breaker games in a group of people asks each person to tell three things about herself. Two of them should be true, and one is a lie. The rest of the group then tries to guess which one she's fibbing about.

Oh, it's all fun and games until someone gets all tangled up in a web of deceit.

It seems our whole world is tangled up in a web of deceit these days. Everybody lies and excuses it as their own version of the truth. Everybody spins a story to their own advantage. Nobody wants to take responsibility for their own actions. It feels like it's worse than ever, but it's really nothing new.

Truth is either the primary or a secondary subject in each of the three passages of scripture we read today.

From Second Samuel, we heard just Part Two of the David and Bathsheba story: the consequences of David's web of lies and manipulation. To summarize the full story, you may remember that David impregnated another man's wife. When he was unable to trick her husband Uriah into going home to Bathsheba, David sent him back into battle with orders that he was to be sent to the front lines

and left unprotected by his own army. Uriah was killed, and David dodged a bullet. Or so he thought. He took Bathsheba as his wife and she bore him a son. “But the thing that David had done displeased the Lord, and the Lord sent Nathan to David. Nathan cleverly told a parable to David: a rich man with many flocks of sheep steals the only lamb of a poor man. Not recognizing the parallel to his own crime, David became angry with such an injustice, saying the rich man deserved to die. Nathan confronted David with the truth: “You are the man!” David is forced to confess: “I have sinned against the Lord.”

I feel compelled to add that Uriah was not the only victim here. Notice that Bathsheba was essentially stolen by David. David took her after he saw her bathing on the roof. And he took her again – as his wife – after the death of Uriah. There is no indication that Bathsheba was a willing participant in any of this. I’m sure David didn’t ask her permission. Why would he? She was just a woman. She was property. David stole Uriah’s property.

In my 2018 version of the story, Bathsheba finally speaks her truth – the untold portion of the story – and joins the MeToo movement. David is guilty of lying, theft, adultery, deceit, murder, and sexual abuse.

It occurred to me that truth-telling is an important thread that weaves through each part of our worship service and ties it together.

In the Call to Worship, we tell the **truth** about God – that God welcomes all, that God is worthy of our praise and worship, and that we need this time in the presence of God and one another.

Obviously, the Prayer of Confession is our opportunity to come clean about our fears and our failures in following God's call. It is a time to confess, as David did, "I have sinned against the Lord." We've made it too easy for ourselves, however. We just read these words on the page with barely a thought as to what they mean or how they apply specifically to us. And yet, we are reminded – even if just for a moment – that we need TO TELL THE TRUTH to God... and to ourselves.

Fortunately, we know the **truth** that we worship a God of forgiveness, mercy, and grace. We are reminded of this in the Declaration of Forgiveness.

The scripture readings, of course, reveal God's **truth** through the stories of God's activity throughout history, through the word made flesh in Christ Jesus, and through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit which brings the word to life for us.

The sermon, I hope, interprets scripture **truthfully** and applies it to our lives faithfully. The sermon, at times, requires the preacher to play the role of Nathan in revealing the **truth** to David and confronting him with his sin. "You are the man!" It is a daunting responsibility that must not be taken lightly, and that recognizes that all of us "have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:23) As we read from Paul's letter to the church at Ephesus, it is important that *we* – not just preacher to congregation – but that *all of us* strive to "speak the **truth** in love" to one another. Speaking the **truth** in love, we help each other grow into a mature faith, we foster unity in the church, we equip the saints – that is, all followers – for ministry, and we build up the body of Christ.

In our prayers – both spoken, silent, and sung – we reveal our **true** hearts and souls, the gift that God most wants from us. And in giving tithes and offerings, we acknowledge the **truth** that all we have comes from God and that we are called to give back in grateful thanksgiving.

Finally, in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, we find **true** community and **true** oneness around Christ's table which reaches beyond this time and place to gather and connect all souls who hunger for the Bread of Life – the **true** bread from heaven – and who thirst for the Cup of Salvation.

The passage we read from the Gospel of John follows immediately after the feeding of the five thousand. The crowd continues their search for Jesus, hoping to see more miracles performed. But they seem to be asking all the wrong questions; the answers Jesus gives aim to redirect their focus. “Very truly I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you.”

The barrage of questions continues: What must we do to perform the works of God? What sign are you going to give us so that we may see it and believe in you? What work are you performing? As the crowd seems intent on discovering the tangible things they can see and do, Jesus points out the intangibles to be found only in relationship with him. The crowd continues to seek the food that will satisfy their physical hunger – food that perishes. Jesus offers food that endures: the **true** bread from heaven, the bread that gives life to the world. “I am the bread

of life,” Jesus tells them. “Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.”

When truth seems harder and harder to come by, may we know the eternal truth in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ. May we place a priority on worshiping together, that we may be strengthened at his table and that we may learn to speak the truth in love... to the glory of God!

AMEN.