

Nov 24, 2024

Pr. Steve

Texts: Daniel 7: 9-10, 13-14; Psalm 91; John 18: 33-38

In the name of God, Abba/Imma, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

*“Make my word your home, and you will know the truth,” Jesus says, “and the truth will set you free. [John 8: 32] My task,” he says, “is to bear witness to the truth.” [John 18: 37]*

And Pilate responds, *“What is truth?”*[John 18: 38]

That's the age we live in, isn't it, where clowns, and criminals, and buffoons mock Truth, flaunt Truth, discard Truth. *‘Who needs Truth?’* And millions of people around the world go along. It's where we live. This text is contemporary, isn't it?

The traditional name for this Sunday is Christ the King Sunday, but we changed it years ago to Christ the Vulnerable [Sunday], because Christ the King completely misses the point. It's an elevation by the Church, exalting Jesus high above the rest of us.

‘You lowly ones are lucky. I let you show up here, just to come to church. ‘

No. No. That's why we call it Christ the Vulnerable, because the first time that Jesus came among the people, nobody understood who he was—not even his closest disciples. He came in anonymity and humility, great character, conscience, courage. But nobody understood. Nobody.

And so, some speak of, *‘When Christ returns, will anybody recognize him?’* Maybe he'll show up like a *campesino* in the fields of Nicaragua—and we won't even know it. I don't know.

Or maybe —look at your bulletin cover —maybe he'll show up like a *campesina*. I was given this picture by a friend in Nicaragua years ago in the 90s. (I don't know her name—we never met—but her husband was a catechist.) So, in the days of Liberation Theology [1970's], lay people were trained throughout the country to go to other obscure villages [near] where

they lived to teach people the Scriptures. To teach them Truth. To set them free. And for this, hundreds of catechists were murdered—like this woman's husband—in the days of [Anastasio] Somoza. *'You'll know the Truth. It will set you free.'* These children are now in their 30s and 40s. What has come of them?

The truth is—*We really don't want the Truth, do we?*

That's a very deep truth—because it means we'll have to change. It's not just about ideas and concepts. It's the gut-wrenching Truth which provokes us changing, which the Gospel understands full well.

[Read] that quote underneath the picture on your cover [from] James Baldwin—*"Because even if I should speak, no one would believe me. And they would not believe me precisely because they would know that what I said is true."*

This is the human predicament. Baldwin was not only speaking of racism, he was [also] speaking about what it is to be a human being 50-60 years ago. And the honest truth is white people and white culture, (not all of us), but White Culture needs *'niggers'*. *'We need to know that somebody's beneath us. That's what it's all about!!'*

Do we need this in our faces today? Yes. But we really don't want to hear Truth because it asks us to change. *Coming to church is a dangerous thing.*

Gandhi entitled his autobiography, *My Experiments With Truth*, and the deepest core of his being was that Truth and Non-violence belong together. You can't have Non-violence without Truth. You can't have Truth without Non-violence. And Gandhi said, *'You know, where I learned this? Jesus.'*

And we say, *'That's nice. Oh wow! Anything else? Can we move on now?'*

Gandhi's word for non-violence was *Satyagraha*—pressing for the Truth. That's what it's about—Truth and *Satyagraha* are two sides of the same coin. This is the heart of the Gospel—we are living into this transformation of not only our lives [but also] with those around us. Nobody wanted to hear Gandhi. Remember that end of the story, too. [Assassination] Right?

Hmm. How often does that need to be repeated? Because it's the Gospel story about Jesus as well, who comes saying, "Friends, everything we experience in this life is gift, pure generosity from God—Heavens, Cosmos, Universe, Air, Ozone, Water, Friends, People, Animals. It's endless—pure generosity from God. And even when you mess up, and fall down, and fail, now there is an endless Mercy which picks you up, and says, '*You're loved for who you are. So what? Start again, start again.*' We get to begin again all the way into eternity. Nothing can separate us from God's love, nothing. Can I hear that word repeated, please? Nothing. Nothing can ever separate us from God. Nothing.

And then we sing [along with Handel's] '*Messiah*'—"He was despised, tormented, abandoned, broken, and crucified" for loving us—with the Truth—too much.

We're all in on this. We can't stand it—being loved that much. 'Please. Let's go back to the clowns and the buffoons—they're much easier to deal with, don't you think?' Aren't we strange creatures? Really, really strange.

This time of year, end of the Church Year and [beginning] of the year approaching, this passage from Dietrich Bonhoeffer always comes to my mind. He composed this on New Year's Eve 1943. Hitler had been around for more than a decade in power, with the war the last 3-4 years. And [Bonhoeffer] wrote this piece to his closest friends, family members. It's called '*After Ten Years*'. So, this is 1943, after 10 years [under Hitler].

*Are we still of any use? We need a rethinking of our Christian faith and all of its exclusive claims.*

*Ten years is a long time in anyone's life. As time is the most valuable thing that we have because it is the most irrevocable. The thought of any lost time, therefore, troubles us as we look back. Time is lost in which we have failed to live a fully human life, where we gain experience, and learn, create, enjoy and suffer. It is time that has not been filled up that is lost, just left empty. But these last years have certainly not been like that. Our losses have been great and immeasurable, but time, time has not been lost. When*

*we look at the ruins of our nation and the church, it's true. We have been silent witnesses of evil deeds.*

*We have become cunning and learned in the arts of obfuscation and equivocation. Experience has rendered us mistrustful of human beings. And often we have failed to speak a true and open word to each other. Unbearable conflicts have worn us down, even made us cynical. But, but, we have come to see the great events of this world from below. We see life now from the perspective of the outcast, the suspect, the maltreated, the powerless, the oppressed, and reviled. In short, we now see our lives from the perspective of those who suffer. We have lost much—things far beyond measure—but our time has not been wasted. This huge masquerade of evil has thrown all of our ethical thinking into confusion. That evil should appear in the form of light is bewildering; that goodness and mercy and compassion are unnecessary?*

*Who stands firm? Those whose life is a response to God's questions and calling and voice.*

What is needed is greatness of heart, the commitment and the joy to live from those qualities of life which have shaped who we are. We need a passion for Truth, a listening to God's voice from deep within, and the willingness to act responsibly, and with respect for others—all sentient beings, and the Earth, day by day. That's how it comes, day by day. This is the only way to live that will counter the unbelievable intensity of the tired indifference which is becoming our time.

*'I'm so tired. I'm so tired.'* Have you heard anybody say that? The numbing and the dumbing down of inspiration, and imagination, and empathy, and energy is sapping us. And therefore, we need a heightened awareness to attend to Christ's humility, compassion, and Truth-living—because Uncertainty is not only the place in which we find ourselves now. Uncertainty is a new spiritual discipline that we must engage.

The real question and the real crisis is not, *'How will we survive?'* but *'How shall we live so that the next generation can keep going?'*

We must live by the love of the Truth that we may never see.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

The peace, which surpasses all human understanding, keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.