

TRUTH

Ecclesiastes 11:1-8
November 19, 2017

What is the truth?

The Trump administration claimed that the crowd attending his January 21 inauguration was the largest ever to witness the inauguration of an American president and when news outlets published photos proving otherwise, White House press secretary, Sean Spicer, labeled them as deliberately misleading.

What is the truth?

Eight women have identified themselves as victims of inappropriate and unwanted sexual contact by Alabama Senate candidate Roy Moore, but he has flatly disavowed any misconduct and denies even knowing most of the women. He has characterized their accusations as a political conspiracy designed to derail his campaign, and last Thursday enlisted a dozen religious leaders to vouch for his integrity at a press conference.

What is the truth?

The tax reform bill currently under discussion in the House and Senate has been styled a “middle class tax cut,” but critics and independent analysts agree that the proposed provisions of the bill will raise taxes for half of middle class taxpayers within ten years, while greatly benefitting corporations and the wealthiest Americans.

What is the truth?

Climate scientists warn us we are fast approaching an irreversible tipping point, when the effects of human-caused warming of the atmosphere will snowball, resulting in catastrophic global changes: sea level rise, drought, ecosystem upheaval, species extinction, perhaps even human extinction. But the chorus of naysayers continues unabated, ridiculing the science of global warming as “myth” or a willful “hoax.”

What is the truth?

Once upon a time, there was a thing called truth, “Truth” spelled with an uppercase “T.” The search for “Truth” was the quest of scholars and just rulers and artists and regular folks. This quest gave birth to mathematics and physics and to metaphysics, the headiest discipline of philosophy, the queen of the sciences. And though scholars and rulers and artists and regular folks might dispute what was “True” and what was not, they agreed that “Truth” exists. It merely needs to be found.

And they agreed that when it is found, when the “Truth” is known, it has consequences for human behavior. We are accountable to the “Truth,” to behave in ways consistent with the “Truth.”

But pride and ambition too often turned “Truth” seekers into “Truth” possessors and the possession of some absolute “Truth” became a pretext for the consolidation of power, for suppressing dissent and oppressing the masses. As thoughtful people grew more and more disillusioned with the use of “Truth” as a means of control, and as the expansion of human knowledge revealed a universe far more complex and mystifying than ever imagined, a new “truth” was born, “truth” with a lowercase “t”.

This “truth” was relative, not absolute, which means that what is “true” depends on context, on point of view, on perspective. What is “true” here may not be “true” there. What is “true” now may not be “true” then. What is “true” for you may not be “true” for me.

Relative “truth” makes a humbler claim than absolute “Truth,” but it is also less compelling and leaves us less sure about, well, everything. There is so much we don’t know, and what we do know we know only provisionally, so “truth” requires little accountability. Why live by the “truth” if it may not matter tomorrow and indeed if it may not even matter to most people in most places today?

Then along came our own age, data-saturated and instantly connected, enjoying access to more information than at any time in history and arguably knowing less than at any time in history! Ours is an age, not of “Truth” or even of “truth,” but the age when TRUTH died. There is no more truth and falsehood, but only what I choose to believe because I choose to believe it. What is true is what I say is true and anything that might contradict what I say is true is “fake news.” And the “happy” result is that if truth is whatever I say it is, I am accountable to nothing and to nobody, absolutely free to pursue my own ambitions and desires without limit.

Do you see that we have come full circle back to the tyranny of the absolute? Except now the absolute is not a “Truth” outside me to which I am accountable, but the absolute is me and I am accountable to nobody. So what may seem a “happy” result for me proves to be a most “unhappy” result for everybody else.

So what is the truth? Or has our age succeeded in killing it?

I am glad to tell you that TRUTH is stubborn. It has not died and never will. “I am the way, the truth, and the life,” Jesus said. Does that mean that Jesus has unlocked all the secrets of the universe, that all mysteries may be solved if we just listen to him? Perhaps, but I don’t believe that is at all what Jesus meant to say. His words point to TRUTH not as a thing to be possessed or discovered, but TRUTH as a way, his way, a way of being, a way of living. TRUTH is life -- not merely the way life should be, but the way life is, the way he is, the way the world is.

No matter which direction a tree falls, it will lie where it fell.

Did you want the tree to fall? Do you wish it hadn't? Do you wish it fell the other way or do you wonder why it fell at all? Do you wonder what if ...? What if the storm had tracked further north? What if the ground hadn't been saturated by recent rains? What if it had been a different kind of tree?

It doesn't matter! There it is! No matter which direction a tree falls, no matter what causes it to fall, it will lie where it fell. There it is.

When the clouds are full, it rains.

Yes? It's raining. But why today? Why did it have to rain today? Why did it have to rain here today? It's raining. When the clouds are full, it rains. It is what it is.

This is the TRUTH, not the object of a scholarly quest, not however things might seem to be from my point of view, not whatever I want it to be, but what is. It is what it is. TRUTH is the way things are.

This is the TRUTH. I am standing here. I am living and breathing and standing here in front of you and listening with you to a word which sisters and brothers before us have listened to and learned from for twenty-five hundred years. I am here and you are here, right here, right now. We don't know what will happen tomorrow or even this afternoon. We have plans, we have hopes, but we don't know.

But we do know we are here now together and that it matters that we are here now together. It matters because we are here now together with Jesus, and that is the TRUTH.

And this is the TRUTH. Don't wait! Live now!

If you wait until the wind and the weather are just right, you will never plant anything and never harvest anything.

You don't have tomorrow, or at least you cannot count on it and can never live in it. You only have today. You can only live in today, and if you wait for life to become what you wish it be, you will never live.

And this is the TRUTH.

God made everything.

God made everything. We don't know how. There is so much we don't know and can never know about the mysteries of what God does, but we know God made everything. And we know that what God made is good, because we can see it!

And this is the TRUTH. God made you. This is the TRUTH. God made you, which means you are marvelously made, which means you are made good and made for good, and which means you are accountable. You are accountable to God for how you live, accountable to God for what you do with your life.

But your life is yours to live, God's gift to you. This is the TRUTH.

It is good to be able to enjoy the pleasant light of day.

There is so much about this life that tests us and frustrates us and perplexes us and makes us weary, so much of what we are and what we do that seems in the end to amount to so very little, like chasing the wind, and yet this is the TRUTH:

It is good to be able to enjoy the pleasant light of day

It is good to be able to enjoy the pleasant light of this day.

So we are grateful -- *grateful for every year [we] live* -- grateful not so much for this or that, but grateful for life itself. Grateful for the extraordinary blessing of seeing the world God has made, for the extraordinary blessing of living in the world God has made.

Grateful for the extraordinary blessing of companions along the way, for the seed of love that God has planted in each of our hearts, a seed that can and does come into bloom among us, bringing joy to us and joy to God.

We are grateful for fathers and mothers, for sisters and brothers, grateful for friends. Grateful for the extraordinary blessing of friends who are sisters and brothers, sisters and brothers in Christ, sisters and brothers brought together by our common faith in Jesus Christ.

We are grateful today for the extraordinary blessing of "Meach" and Soh, our brother, our sister, who will stand before us today expressing their gratitude: their gratitude for this church family, their gratitude for the God who calls them and us together, their gratitude for Jesus, the One who shows the way, the One who is the way, the One who is life, the One who is TRUTH.

What is the truth?

You know it!