

“This Is Life: Dusting Off An Old Commandment

1 John 2:7-11

10.14.18



Reflection Questions for Personal Use or in a Group Context... (please consider the teaching notes prior to consideration of the reflection questions)

“How would you define ‘truth’? Why is it that some truth is offered as ‘universal’ (for everyone, for all time) and some truth is offered as ‘particular/relative’ (subject to context and interpretation)? How do you distinguish the two?”

“Can you remember a time when what you didn’t know actually hurt you? What is the difference between knowing a truth and knowing the truth?”

“Why do you think it is proving increasingly challenging to make truth claims in our culture? How might we continue to offer such claims without being arrogant and dismissive?”

“Why are both grace and truth such necessary companions? What if we have the truth without grace? What is we are offered grace, in the absence of truth?”

“What kind of life is your present understanding of reality producing?”

“Could it be true that all paths lead to the god we hope to find? What has your own search turned up? What are you not finding in Jesus that would prompt you to continue to look elsewhere?”

Teaching Notes...

John has had a full-on-sensory-experience of the love of God (*heard, seen, touched*)--- in the person of Jesus. He professes to have been with Jesus in life, at his death, and now in life again (resurrection) and he says...

“I have written this to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know you have eternal life” [the absolute fullness of life which belongs uniquely to God and is shared with us in relationship] (5:13). I want you to know you are alive!

John is always connecting truth (reality) to God, specifically as he has made himself known to us in the person of Jesus. Reality, then, is nothing short of knowing and experiencing his own life in you and the love for which you were made. Anything else would be 'inhuman'.

"This is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God and Jesus Christ, the one you sent to the earth." John 17:3

From its "genesis" (Genesis: beginnings), the Bible presents to us life in an "orderly world". I believe that our creation-story offers us imagery of a world that was both beautiful and chaotic, and that God's initial actions were meant to provide the framework for the ways that we were meant to function. It is "truth". It is what's "real" (reality). When we live into it, it contributes to our "flourishing". When we resist it or deny it, we do so to our own "brokenness" and "ruin".

"Truth" can be described as, *'the way things really are; the ways things were really meant to be'; 'reality'*

"True", not simply as opposed to 'false', but "true" as genuine; real, as opposed to what is counterfeit. Truth, not simply as some philosophical argument, but as a way of rightly understanding and interacting with our world.

We live in a world of **"un-truth"**. A world of distorted images and simulated realities. A world where un-truth is presented in 3D and HD and offered so graphically and so vividly that it looks like the 'real thing'.

There is truth and there is belief. There is "reality" and our own "version" of reality. The closer your version of reality is to what's "true" (genuine), the greater your chances of realizing the fullest experience of God and life.

Many times, our energies are spent solidifying our beliefs, versus attempting to discover the truth. We have assumptions about how the world is supposed to work, then we create a system of belief to support those assumptions.

Sometimes we suffer for what we don't know. Sometimes we suffer for what we know, but that just isn't true. Sometimes we suffer for what we know, but upon which we refuse to act. The bible identifies it all as "ignorance" and reality never adjusts itself to accommodate our ignorance

"What you don't know won't hurt you". To the contrary, if you are mistaken about what is "real", the results can be devastating (e.g. foolish builder [it couldn't carry the weight], foolish farmer [it couldn't produce]).

We live in a world that makes it increasingly difficult to make truth claims.

To say that we have “found truth” is not to say that we have reached full comprehension or that we always fully embody truth. It is not meant to be intolerant, but to simply say that our search has been satisfied in our discovery of Jesus.

To say that there is no truth is, in many instances, is not a thoughtful and conclusive philosophical statement, but a frustrated declaration which is disillusioned with what has been presented to you as ‘truthful’ and the options available to you (e.g. find it within yourself, escape it [VR], create your own).

“I am the way, the truth and the life...” John 14:6

Jesus is almost fully (3) years into his life-mission when he makes this statement and he makes it to his apprentices... people who have been tracking with him for some time. The statement is made in the context of their confusion and disillusionment.

If there is no...

way: life is confusing and ambiguous. *“Where do I go to find the answers when I can’t find them within myself?”*

truth: life is uncertain and meaningless; there is no “story”, no “conclusion”, only a mass of contradictions and debates.

life: there’s only existence. Merely vital signs. No intrinsic value to us. *“If this is really all there is, what’s the point?”*

We want there to be truth. We need there to be truth, and not just truth which is limited to our own hunches and suspicions, but one that makes sense of our lives and our being together.

“absolute” truth--- literally, *‘perfectly embodying the nature of a thing’.*

The “absolute” debate is often misguided. It gets reduced to our defense of a list of creeds we hold to be ‘true’ but have little identifiable evidence in the way that we live our lives. When our truth claims of Jesus are held before another as the way to experience the life for which we were made, they are humble and directive and liberating.

God has to find a way to deal honestly with our brokenness and sin while allowing us to maintain our dignity. John identifies it as this beautiful amalgamation of “grace and truth” (1:14).

Truth always makes grace attractive.

Grace always makes truth palatable.

Grace without truth is simply a naïve endorsement of all that’s wrong with us. Truth without grace is debilitating and leads to despair.

Truth says that God is not interested in some “co-dependent” relationship with you where his grace actually enables your continued foolishness. Grace says that the

context of loving-acceptance encourages and empowers a better response...
becoming who I was always meant to be.

“Know the truth and the truth will set you free...” John 8:32

The singular greatest expression of our knowledge/experience of truth is the way in which our lives are demonstrating increasing measures of “freedom”. Not simply freedom as “prohibitive” (in all of the things in which we refrain), but freedom as “generative” (increased levels of love, compassion, mercy, forgiveness, giving, service, etc.)

If Jesus IS truth, then any area of our lives that does not conform to his intentions and interpretations of the situation, will not result in the freedom that truth is meant to provide.

The blessedness we experience comes by our willingness to realign ourselves with God’s desires and the way he created us to function (e.g. you haven’t experienced eternal life until you have ‘forgiven’; until you have ‘shown mercy’; you don’t stop ‘worrying about your life’ until you trust him for provision).

In the context of such ambiguity and uncertainty, it’s almost refreshing to hear Jesus say, “Follow me” (Matthew 4).

This was Jesus’ initial invitation to John. He doesn’t begin with John’s theology. He doesn’t ask John to recite a creed or make a confession that seems to pre-mature for his heart to support.

I don’t have to resolve all the tension. I don’t have to eliminate the mystery. I just devote myself to being consistently present with and present for Jesus and watch how that relationship begins to slowly but decisively chip away at all my arrogance and self-sufficiency and how it begins to reflect the beauty of the life lived “truth-fully”.

The most decisive claims of truth must always be offered with the humility they demand.

The gospel, in and of itself, is offensive. We need not contribute any more offense by our presentations. If you identify yourself as a follower of Christ, you can make exclusive claims and still be hospitable and show respect for those who differ from and disagree with you.

The tension-filled, truth statements that Jesus makes only matter if the God of the Hebrew Scriptures is the One, true Creator-God and Jesus is the one who has come to make him known to us (Hebrews 1). If this statement is not true, then all we are left with is some “*wiki-version*” of faith that becomes this amalgamation of everyone’s interpretations and contributions.

As we make religious “truth-statements”--- even as convicted and convinced as we may be--- they are still “faith statements”. There is evidence; there is reason to

believe and conviction that our belief is reasonable, but it still requires trust... “*evidence of things not seen*” (Hebrews 11:6).