



Sunday October 25, 2020

Pastor Tony Acompnado

John 8:31-36 (Twenty First Sunday after Pentecost)

Truth Telling

Lying seems to be a way of life for many people in America today. The book, *The Day America Told the Truth*, says that 91 percent of those surveyed lie routinely about matters they consider trivial – 36 percent lie about important matters; 86 percent lied regularly to parents, 75 percent to friends, 73 percent to siblings, and 69 percent to spouses. And just to be clear to my wife – Lori, I am not included in this 69 percent! But when we hear these stats, perhaps it shouldn't surprise us then that there's so much unhappiness in the world. Lies are easy to tell but rarely do they help make a situation better. In general lies create mistrust and doubt.

So, let me get right to the point – I simply cannot read the words of Jesus today without thinking about the reality of the world in which we live. Because it seems that “truth” has taken a back seat in recent years, almost as if it's optional. And given the rise of alternative facts, conspiracy theories, and all the other misinformation that's swirling around the internet – “*truthiness*” seems to be a more appropriate term for what many people believe these days.

“*Truthiness*,” if you aren't aware, was a term that was coined several years ago by comedian Steven Colbert in a political satire skit about something seeming to be true but based on one's opinion or gut-feeling rather than any basis of logic or factual evidence.

And there's so much of this swirling around on social media these days. Especially as the presidential election looms. Poll after poll shows Americans are deeply divided, and there seems to be only one thing all parties can agree on – that this election may be the most consequential election of our time. As a result, emotions are running high and they're fed on every side by a 24/7 news cycle that seems to rely on outrage for its ratings.

So, I'm desperately looking forward to this election being over and I pray that the political scene will once again shrink back down to its normal size and not occupy our attention every single day as it does now.

And when that happens, and please God let it be soon, those of us who follow Jesus will need to attend to what is always one of the primary tasks of a Christian – the hard work of reconciliation. And this means engaging in truth-telling, but not only in a speaking truth-to-power kind of way, but also in a self-reflective, confessing our sins kind of way, seeking forgiveness from those we've hurt and forgiving those who have hurt us.

Because here's the thing – no political party has a monopoly on the truth. All politicians and, quite honestly, all human beings, are prone to “spinning” the facts to make them fit their own prejudices and interests.

Today is Reformation Sunday, but let me be clear, I have absolutely no intention of giving you a sermon about Martin Luther, or how great the Reformation was, and I definitely don't plan on giving you a history lesson – no matter how engaging some of you might find that to be. What I am planning to offer you, however, is a little bit of straight up truth telling.

And here it is – like it or not, we, just like Jesus' original audience, are captive to sin. Sure, we can try to make as much money as we can, elevate our status as high as possible, pretend all we want, and say “we're okay” every time someone asks how we're doing, but it still doesn't change the fact that we aren't living up to the vision God has for us – and deep down we know it. And that my friends is the hard truth.

Remember in the beginning of my sermon when I told you that lying seems to be a way of life for many people...well guess what...when I told you that I wasn't going to tell you about Martin Luther – I lied. Martin Luther defined a “theologian of the cross” as someone who “calls a thing what it is.”

That kind of truth telling is as necessary now as it was during the Reformation – truth telling about ourselves and about our communities and our world, and truth telling about Jesus who forgives and redeems and makes all things new. Truth telling is an important part of any reformation, and reformation is an important part of being the people of God.

The truth of the gospel demands to be heard even when rejection is sure to be the response. The gospel insists on the fact that the shaping of our moral imaginations is its duty. Maintaining the status quo is not the nature of the church and it most definitely isn't the nature of being a follower of Jesus.

Yet each time that we choose fear, silence, or staying seated instead of standing up we are turning away from God's call. But brothers and sisters, we weren't called to silence and complacency. The world needs us to stand up, to have courage, and to speak truth into all the places that hold us in bondage to sin.

On this and every Reformation Sunday we celebrate the power of God's grace to reform and reshape. This reforming and reshaping must take place on every level – in our personal lives and relationships, in our churches, in our communities and across the world. And we can do all this because of the freedom given to us in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

Sometimes, however, I think that we've reduced reformation to mere accomplishment. But reformation isn't just one more thing to say you've done – reformation is a state of being. And reformation also cannot just be a looking back because by its very definition it demands a vision for the future.

As followers of Jesus we must always be rooted in the past and simultaneously growing into the future. We and the church must always be reforming in order to live out the love of Jesus in an ever-changing world. We are called to trust in the freedom given to us in baptism to celebrate and proclaim the truth of the good news of God's grace, and Jesus Christ sets us free every day to do this life-transforming work.

Freedom matters. It matters to us as individuals, it matters to us as a collective society, and it matters to the systems that structure our lives. And so, this Reformation Sunday I hear Jesus saying, "Continue to let my word guide you, follow me and know the truth."

Our families, our country, our world, and our very being are crying out for freedom from the bondage of sin and death. We need the truth to reign over us and set us free. We need Jesus, because it is the saving grace of God's love in Christ Jesus that transforms us and sets us free to proclaim this gospel truth to the world.

My friends, God has been reforming the world long before Martin Luther and the Reformation, and God continues this reforming work each time we speak the truth of Jesus Christ. And God is calling you and me and all of God's people into this ongoing work of reformation.

So, when you understand that God chose for you to be saved and that you didn't choose this for yourself, then and only then will you understand the truth about what it means to be free. Then and only then will you fully understand God's amazing grace and love. And when you do, you will experience the truth of this life-saving and life-giving gospel and it will be your freedom. So, may we all know the truth, speak it boldly, and be set free. Thanks be to God. Amen.