

A BIMONTHLY NEWSPAPER PUBLISHED ON THE WESTSIDE, FOR THE WESTSIDE!

WHAT IS TRUTH?

The question hangs in the air as we move on from the Presidential election. It is not new. Ancient philosophers posed it. Pilate, Governor of Judea, famously asked it of Jesus at his trial. Yet, the recent election cycle begs the question afresh. Two main reasons account for this, the one philosophical and the other practical.

Philosophically, the question has arisen because we are witnessing the fruit of postmodernity. Postmodernity is the name given to our present age. It follows on from:

- Medieval Christendom. The general belief was that truth exists because God has revealed it, and grants understanding of it through faith. Both Roman Catholics and Protestants held this view.
- Modernity (roughly 1789 onward). The moderns also believed in truth, but modernists jettisoned the idea prevalent in Christendom that truth was understood by faith. Instead, they argued that truth was understood by man's powers of reason.

By contrast, postmodernists believe that there is no absolute truth to bind society together. Rather, society is subdivided into different "tribal groupings" which create their own truth. So, what is true for me is not necessarily true for you, especially if you inhabit a different tribal grouping and have been taught differently. Truth, then, is what each tribal grouping makes it to be, "Truth" has become a "social construct." By this, postmodernists mean that it is constructed by the group to which we belong.

Practically, the question has arisen because no one has known who or what to believe during this recent election season. Has there ever been an election in which media outlets have been so blatantly in one tank or the other. Or, in

which the media has whipped up a frenzy according to their own social construct, and aggravated so much societal discord? To protect ratings—which to the media are more valuable than truth—out comes the post-election *mea culpa*: "Oops, we got some facts wrong!" quickly followed by, "But don't trust social media's fake news."

The mother of all news outlets, the British Broadcasting Corporation, once renowned for impartiality, has been no more objective, The BBC is not after the ratings, but the sustaining of its own agenda or social construct. Boldly proclaiming to the American electorate, without a shred of evidence, that Donald Trump would throw in the towel before November 8, they forgot how President Obama lost the Remain campaign 1–2% in the recent Brexit Referendum for meddling in British politics.

The point is not to be party-political, but to bring to light how postmodernity denies the concept of truth, and undercuts thereby the morality and social responsibility of reporting the news. One only has to compare the Dedication of the BBC's Former Broadcasting House to see the difference which postmodernism has made to media standards:

This Temple of the Arts and Muses is dedicated to Almighty God by the first Governor of Broadcasting in the year 1931, Sir John Reith being Director-General.

It is their prayer that good seed sown may bring forth a good harvest, that all things hostile to peace and purity may be banished from this house and that the people, inclining their ear to whatsoever things are beautiful and honest and of good report, may tread the path of wisdom and uprightness.

Jaded, then, with the spin, the smears, and fake news? An epitaph on a Scottish grave comes to mind: "Plato is dear to me, but dearer still is truth." If you are looking for a way out of the depressing relativism, why not follow Pilate and ask Jesus, "What is truth?" We'll continue this overleaf . . .



What Has Truth Got to do with Christmas?

Jesus and Pilate lived in a day which, in some respects, was very much like our own—one of tolerance of evil and intolerance of truth claims. No one knew this better than Jesus. He was on trial before the Governor of Judea for the peaceful truth claims he had made, yet was subject ironically to the very injustice God hates. The rulers of the Jews wanted him dead, but since threatening to destroy the temple and to rebuild it in three days—a reference to his resurrection—would not have gotten Jesus the death penalty, they made out that he was seditious, a threat to Caesar, for claiming to be King of the Jews (John 18:28ff.).

While Jesus could not deny himself (for that would not be truthful), he made clear to Pilate that his kingdom was not of this world. If it were, reasoned Jesus, his servants would fight for his release. To check he had understood aright, Pilate responded, “So you are a king?” To which Jesus replied, “For this purpose was I born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.” Breathing the cynicism of the age, both his and ours, Pilate retorted, “What is truth?”

This encounter is fascinating for a number of reasons.

First, it includes Jesus’ very own understanding of why he was born. Having faced the false witness of the Jewish Sanhedrin (council of 70), and the contradictory “witness” of those the Council sought out to testify against Jesus, and standing before the gubernatorial representative of Roman imperial power holding to no absolute truth other than belief in the worship of Caesar, we can understand why Jesus spoke of his birth in terms of his witness to the truth.

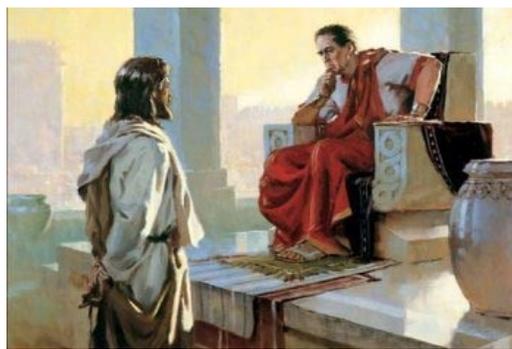
Second, the encounter is fascinating because it connects us to an important thread running through the Gospel of

John. From the outset we learn that Jesus, according to John’s firsthand eyewitness account, was “full of grace and truth” (1:14). Although no one has ever seen God, he who was at the Father’s side (literally, “in the bosom of the Father”) has made the Father known. Thus, not only is Jesus truth personified, he tells the truth about how we may come to know the only God as our Father. This is the truth to which he was born to witness. How tremendous is that!

Interestingly, the Jews accused Jesus of blasphemy but not of lying. Jesus’ claim to be the Son of God carried too much corroborating evidence (*e.g.*, his authoritative teaching and miracles). A charge of lying could not stick and would not earn the death penalty. Moreover, liars don’t need liars and the duplicitous to condemn them. They are condemned by their own lies. Furthermore, on hearing Jesus, Pilate goes back out to the Jews and tells them he finds no guilt in him (18:38).

Third, the encounter fascinates because it challenges us as to whether we are willing to hear Jesus. How can we tell? Jesus says, “Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.” In other words, we are of the truth not simply if we hear what Jesus has to say, but if we listen to him when he says that if we put our trust in him and the work he was about to accomplish on the cross in taking away our sin, then we, too, may come to know the only God as our Father.

Since we cannot act on the truth to which Jesus witnessed in life without first hearing what Jesus has to say, we warmly invite you this Christmas to Seventh Reformed Church to learn more. There is no better gift to receive this Christmas than a relationship with God. Christ was born not only to tell you that God is offering it to you, but to purchase the privilege for all who will receive it!



Jesus on trial before Pontius Pilate, Governor of Judea

The Best Gift this Christmas

Tim Paul Matandika



I was born and raised in the Central African country of Malawi, in a Christian family of seven children—three girls and four boys. I am the sixth born and unmarried.

Where I come from, an upbringing in a Christian family is a blessing probably every child would want to have. Each day following

dinner my parents would call all the kids around the table to listen to God's word. But whatever my dad used to teach us, it made no sense to me.

On June 26, 2004, when I was in grade 12 of high school, there was a night of prayer on the campus. Most of the students went to attend, but I decided to sleep. After two hours of sleeping, my friend came to wake me up and pleaded with me to come along to the prayer meeting. Although I did not want to go, I could hear the preaching from under my blanket. While my heart became restless and developed a desire to attend, my body was tired. Yet, from the moment my friend woke me, I could not sleep anymore.

Within a few minutes of struggling as to what I should do, I woke up with great energy as if someone was after me, and went to the assembly hall where people were praying. On entering, I sat on the last chair at the back of the hall. No sooner had I sat down than a preacher stood up and opened the book of Romans 6:1–14. During his sermon he used an illustration in the form of an equation: $PD - C = D2$ (*i.e.*, Physical Death minus Christ = Double Death [physical and spiritual death]), while $PD + Christ = L$ (*i.e.*, Physical Death plus Christ = Life).

This struck a cord with me, for since I was a little boy there was a prayer I used to pray daily. There were two parts to it: "God, I need to see you and to know what is beyond death." In God's providence the preacher emphasized Romans 6:7 which says, "for the one who has died, has been set free from sin." This answered the one part of my prayer, for through this text of Scripture I came to realize that in Christ there is freedom beyond death. The preacher con-

tinued, saying that Christ is the resurrection and the life, and that if you have Christ you have God, and if you have God you have life. This life we come to by God's grace.

The preacher emphasized that this gift of eternal life is based on the works of God through Christ. First, God chooses us before the foundation of the earth. Next, he sent Christ to die for us so that his righteous anger against our sins may be turned away from us (propitiated) and our sins may be covered by his shed blood (expiated).

At the time, I was convicted of my sins, and did not believe the good news of Jesus. In reflecting on my life, I could not see how God's grace could be enough to save me, I sensed within the filth of sin, and the stench it is to God. Yet, the preacher finished his sermon by saying that God is faithful to forgive all of the sins of those confessing them. The preacher urged us to make confession to God without delay, for God, through Christ, immediately receives the confessor into his family!

I remembered a song that had been sung to me:

I hear thy welcome voice
That calls me, Lord, to thee,
For cleansing in thy precious blood
That flowed on Calvary.

This was the voice I heard! I could not resist God's grace anymore. Following my silent sincere prayer of confession, I was assured of forgiveness for my sin and that I now belonged to Christ. The old self was gone and the new self had come. I learned from that moment on, that freedom in Christ begins in this life.

You might be feeling heavy and weary, as I did before receiving Christ. There is no better time to receive Christ than now, for he calls us to put our trust in him for forgiveness. The salvation he offers is free and can be known immediately!



*****ECRWSEDDM****

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Holiday Worship Services

† Lessons and Carols

December 18, 6:00 P.M.

Join us for a service of lessons from the Bible and carols celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ! Refreshments following the service.



† Christmas Day Service

December 25, 9:45 A.M.

Join us Christmas morning as we celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ! Refreshments following the service and a goody bag for the children.



† New Year's Day Service

January 1, 9:45 A.M.

Begin the new year by joining us for our worship service seeking God's favor in the year to come. Ordination and installation of the new deacons and elders will take place at this service, too.



Winter Activities—December and January

† GEMS and Cadets—Girls' and Boys' Clubs Grades I–6

December 14, and January 11, 25
6:45–8:15 P.M.

GEMS is an exciting, safe environment for girls to learn about God, His Word, and His world. Each meeting girls will have a Bible lesson, a time for crafts, and practice movement to our theme song for the year.

Found in Luke 2:52 “Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men” we find the goal of Cadets—to help boys grow spiritually in all areas of life (devotional, mental, physical, and social) by providing Christian men with a uniquely designed structure, program, and materials.

† English as a Second Language All ages

December 14, and January 11, 25
6:45–8:15 P.M.

Our ESL classes are available to anyone of any age looking to improve their English skills. Individualized English instruction in a casual setting. English learners of any skill level are welcome to come improve grammar, reading, writing, vocabulary, or pronunciation.

† Westside Soccer Club Grades 3–7

Every Friday (Off December 23, 30)
4:00–5:30 P.M.

The vision of WSC is to create and nurture a valuable learning atmosphere, where Westside children can develop their soccer skills as well as character traits pleasing to God such as good sportsmanship, fair play, teamwork, giving one's best, perseverance, respect for opponents and officials.

Questions about our worship services, activities, or church?

Contact us at 616-459-4451 or 7thref@7thref.org