



The Rev. Alan Sutherland, Rector

October 19, 2008

Pentecost 23 2008

Truth

In 1905 in Chicago a man called Paul Harris met with three of his friends to discuss ethics in business and how businesses can help the wider community. They decided to meet weekly and they rotated whose offices they would meet in.

They adopted a motto that would focus the purpose of their business. Service above self. The second motto they adopted was 'they profit most who serve best'.

They also decided that to make this all work there had to be standards not only by which they worked, but also by which they lived. So they devised what is known as the 4 way test. 4 questions that they asked of themselves before any words or actions were taken.

This 4 way test asked

Is it the truth?

Is it fair to all concerned?

Will it build goodwill and better friendships?

ST. JOHN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

*Established in 1847*

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Will it be beneficial to all concerned?

The numbers who attended the meetings began to grow and because they rotated their meetings their organization got the name Rotary. Now, because it is in many countries it is called Rotary International.

The 4 way test is used by all Rotarians, but I think it could well be used by everybody, because I believe it has its roots in the words and teachings of Jesus Christ.

It begins with a dominant theme of the ministry of Jesus. Truth.

In today's gospel reading the Pharisees confronted Jesus with a difficult question. Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor or not. Matthew is very clear that these men were not honest in their seeking. They were not seeking truth. Their only purpose was to entrap Jesus, because if he answered either yes or no it would have landed him in big trouble. And that's what they wanted. I don't really think they could have cared less about Jesus' opinion of paying taxes to Caesar. They were dishonest, and even sickeningly flattering, in telling Jesus he was sincere, teaching the ways of god in accordance with the truth.

What they did not realize is that Jesus has a thing about truth.

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At the well of Jacob when he had the conversation with the Samaritan woman she was not very honest about her previous marital status. Jesus reminded her she had been married 5 times and the man she was living with was not her husband. He was not condemning her. He just wanted her to be truthful.

Another woman who had a hemorrhage thought she had touched the hem of his garment without him knowing and Jesus asked who had done it. Not condemning her but just wanted to know the truth.

At his trial, so many witnesses were brought that did not agree until finally 2 agreed. When taken to Pilate to be interrogated Jesus was so in trouble by lies and deceit he was asked by Pilate what is truth?

The irony of this question is that the standard of real truth was standing right in front of Pilate.

Jesus who said he was the way the truth and the life.

Jesus who said the truth will set you free. Jesus, who calls for all of us to be truthful.

Yet it seems that in general our society is not so prone to truth. Our society today is one that is for the most part dominated by 24 hour news, internet services, and access to all kinds of information that may have many opinions, but few shades of truth. We live today in a world of information overload and what is it that we see?

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We see our government leaders, especially this time of year with those running for office in all parties, trading blame and accusations against one another followed usually by the denial of the allegations and accusations. We witness every day from whatever sources we listen to this fairly new incredible dance that is called spin.

Probably from the old term spinning a yarn. Stretching the truth.

We then see the leaders in the Church now taking sides and pointing fingers because one or the other has not been truthful.

We observe a legal system that has bound itself up so tightly with microcosmic rules that in some cases important evidence cannot be used.

We have a movie called 'an inconvenient truth, that before it can be shown in Great Britain, the British High Court made a ruling that the 11 inaccuracies of the movie be told before it was shown.

And this is how we observe our society that is presented to us by the various sources of information. The danger with this is that by the standards of truth that we observe in the world we can begin to believe that even in our own lives, if it is not very truthful, then, maybe it does not really matter. We just seem to be like the rest of the world.

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But as Christians we are not to be like the rest of the world.

As followers of Christ we are called to be people of truth. Sometimes the truth about us is not very pretty, but you know what, Jesus knows that. We pray to God every time we gather for worship about our hearts being open, all desires known and from God no secrets are hid. It is no surprise that the heart of the gospel of Jesus is forgiveness because He knows all about us, and he is ready to forgive those things that may still be eating our lunch.

But that is not the end for us who claim to followers of the way because a new way of life is asked of us. And one of the hallmarks is truth.

Jesus said it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person but what comes from the mouth that defiles you.

Paul Harris hit the nail right on the head in 1905 when he made the first question of his 4 way test is it the truth.

It is that question that should direct our thinking before we say or before we do anything. Is it the truth?

Amen.

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