

Seventh Sunday of Easter, May 24, 2009, Year B

St. Bartholomew's Church in the Town of Tonawanda, N.Y

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ - Associate Rector Scripture: John 8:25-32, John 17:11-19

"To Tell The Truth"

Jesus said *"If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free."* (John 8:31-32)

An interesting turn of events took place two Sundays ago, at the 11 AM service as I prayed the collect – and returned to my seat for the lessons. Fr. Molison and I looked at each other and asked the same question at the same time. I would like you to listen to the Collect – and then I will tell you our remarks.

"Almighty God, whom truly to know is everlasting life: Grant us so perfectly to know your Son Jesus Christ to be the way, the truth, and the life, that we may steadfastly follow his steps in the way that leads to eternal life; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen."

When I returned to my seat – we both looked at each other and said “How can Mrs. Schori say these words believing what she believes?” We then followed with “Hypocrite!”

- The Prayer Book says the Truth,
- the Bible says the Truth,
- Yet the leader of the Episcopal Church can't see it or believe it.

How utterly insane and how utterly depraved! Even worse – how utterly bound in darkness – because the Truth is not being known and therefore that person is not set free from the bondage of sin. And that means that everyone she leads is following that same darkness!

Please believe me, I am not being judgmental – I simply am relating the facts of Jesus' Words - to the words that Mrs. Schori has given freely to the media and has preached from her pulpits.

St. Paul hit the nail on the head with this analysis from 2 Corinthians 4:3-4 *"If our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God."* In today's Gospel – Jesus let His disciples hear Him praying these most important words to the Father in heaven: *"Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth. As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. For their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth."* (John 17:17-19) My dear friends, to be sanctified is to be set apart, which means you have to be able to know the truth in order to tell the truth! How ironic that the words in Greek encircling the Compass Rose – the symbol of the Anglican Communion are *“γνώσεσθε τὴν ἀλήθειαν καὶ ἡ ἀλήθεια ἐλευθερώσει ὑμᾶς”* –(*gnowsesetheten alethayian kai hay alethaya elayuthayrowsay haymas*) which means *"You will know the truth and the truth will make you free."* (John 8:32)

I share with you that the Episcopal Church is in troubled times. I don't know whether you have heard about the Diocese of Northern Michigan who recently held an election for a new bishop. That election had ONE candidate, just one candidate – the Rev. Thew Forrester – who is not only an Episcopal priest – but a practicing Buddhist! Each bishop and Standing Committee must vote to either affirm or deny this election. Well, there is good news and bad news! The good news is that most of the bishops and Standing Committees have voted NO to his election. The BAD NEWS – the dear Diocese of Western New York's Standing Committee has voted YES – to affirm his election as a bishop. We have yet to hear from the soon to retire, Bishop Michael

Seventh Sunday of Easter, May 24, 2009, Year B

Garrison. One can only imagine what his vote will be. One can only assume that it would be similar to the Standing Committee!

We live in a world, a society, and time when there is confusion between what is truth and what is not truth! How many of you growing up were taught about the tooth fairy? Can I see your hands? How many of you heard about Santa Claus? How about the Easter Bunny? All right, is there anybody here who believes that the Bills will go to the Super Bowl with J.P. Lossman on the roster? Ok – now the big \$54,000 question: were you taught that you should always wear clean underwear in case you were in an accident? I thought so!

Some things we can recognize immediately as myths, but some things aren't as easy to recognize. And it makes some people wonder if anything is really true, and it has led many people to reject the idea that absolute truth exists at all, embracing the concept that all truth is "relative." In other words, what might be true for you is not necessarily true for me. In the spiritual sense, it would mean that I might believe Christianity is true, but it may not be true for someone else. This is "relativism" is being taught in seminaries and universities today – sad but true. People are seeking truths in other places than the Holy Word of God – and many are intertwining their "revelations" into their own form of Christianity – a potpourri of what pleases them – not what pleases Almighty God – and certainly not His Truth. When people ask us why we left the Episcopal Church they always try to veer the conversation to the human sexuality issues of the current day – but that is not the root cause, by any means. The root cause or reason that we and many others are leaving the Episcopal Church is that their truth does not match up with the Truth of Almighty God and His Holy Word – which we hold dear and base our faith upon.

And so, with all this in mind, I ask you - what authority do God and Holy Scripture hold in your life? That is the question – and secondly – who is Jesus – and to what extent do you hold His words – the "red letters" - dear and as Truth in your life?

One choice is **relativism** – to make your truth fit your lifestyle – in which case all truths are valid; meaning that there is not just one way to God – and that any religion is meaningful. Jesus' words from John 14:6 (which of course you know: "*I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life*") were just meant for His people and that you cannot go around persuading others to follow Him. **Tolerance is Lord! Tolerance is king!** With tolerance – there is no judgment – just acceptance and allowance. Oh, but wait a minute – it comes with a condition. Heaven forbid you don't agree with them – then you are labeled as full of judgment and a hate monger - a right wing intolerant! **There is no room for absolute truth within relativism** – and so the weight that Holy Scripture holds is relegated to **a world of weightlessness** – unless it fits with your agenda.

God does not live in a world of relativism! The Bible is full of truth – absolute truth. The words "**truth,**" "**true,**" and "**truly**" **appear in the Bible 429 times.** Jesus says, "I tell you the truth" 80 times in the Bible, and another 20 times Jesus says, "You have heard it said, but I say to you."

The reality of it all is that **God believes in truth. All truth is God's truth.** So if you find something that claims to be truth but contradicts the God of the Bible, it is not truth at all, but error.

The Rev. Rick Warren, (author of the "Purpose Driven Church" and the "Purpose Driven Life") who will be a guest speaker at the Convocation of the Anglican Church of North America in

Seventh Sunday of Easter, May 24, 2009, Year B

June, at which Bishop Duncan will be enthroned as Archbishop of the new church in June, and at which our rector Fr. Ward will be a delegate, has said – (and I paraphrase): “In the search for truth, you need to ask yourself a fundamental question. I don’t care if you’re a Christian, a non-Christian, whether you’re a Baptist, a Buddhist, Jewish, or whatever; every person eventually has to ask this question in life, either consciously or unconsciously:

- What is going to be the authority for my life? What’s going to be the basis for my beliefs and my behavior?
- What’s going to be the guidebook I rely on? What’s going to be the standard by which I evaluate my life? What am I going to base my life on?
- What is my authority; the final authority in my life?

My brothers and sisters, we only have two options:

- You either have the world (Jesus told us we are in the world but not to be of it)
- Or you have the Word, the Holy Word of God.

It is so very important that we begin with the Holy Scriptures rather than our opinion. You see man’s opinion changes all the time. For example: I am a “Baby Boomer.” During the years from 1948 to 1964, 73 million children were born. That’s about 1/3 of all Americans. While my generation was being raised, everyone looked to famed Pediatrician Dr. Benjamin Spock for advice on raising kids, BUT when he was in his 70’s he recanted and made his apology. An entire generation was raised on one way of parenting that studies later confirmed was ineffective.

We live in the ever changing information age:

- The average lifespan of a science textbook is - 18 months, because knowledge is increasing so rapidly.

Please don’t put your faith in something that might eventually **get you to the top of the ladder - only to find that the ladder is leaning on the wrong wall!**

God’s Word has stood the test of time, and has withstood all attempts to destroy it. **The Bible says the Word of the Lord will stand forever, and it has.** The Bible says that it is impossible for God to lie. God does not change – He is the same: yesterday, today, and tomorrow. If you are serious about finding the truth, go the source that never changes and will never go away. Absolute truth can be found if you’re truly serious about finding it.

We live in the times that Paul wrote Timothy about: *"For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths."* (2 Timothy 4:3-4)

My dear friends - we are so blessed. God has delivered us to this place. He has moved us from error into truth, from sin into righteousness, from death into life! We are blessed because we can tell the truth from the fiction. We are able **to tell the truth** from the fabrications of this world. We recognize and stand on the One Truth - the Holy Word of God – and we believe the “red letters” in the Bible that are the True Words of Jesus. We know this, we believe this, and we live this – and that Truth continues to set us free!