

Pentecost 10 (Proper 13)
August 5, 2012
Text: Ephesians 4:1-16
Theme: "Truth is Love"

One of the most important tenants of Christianity is "truth." That which divides believers and unbelievers is fundamentally truth. God speaks truth and anything that is not of God is a lie. Most of the difficulties we have in the realm of religion are centered in this very fact. Luther was famous for asking his students and his opponents, "What does the Word say?" What do you hear from someone who does not agree with you theologically?

"Well that's your interpretation." But I'm not interpreting anything. I'm just saying what the Word says. Jesus used bread and wine and said this is my body and blood. I don't think that needs any interpretation. Jesus said that he was the way, the truth and the life and no one would see the Father except through him. Again, he seems clear to me. But, from his days in the Garden of Eden, the devil has continued to deceive and confuse human beings. He twists us up in knots and confuses us with partial truths and tempts us to disobey. He loves his work and he is very good at what he does, but he does not and cannot change what God says in his Word.

In the Old Testament reading, the people in the wilderness believed that God had led them into the desert to starve to death.

Where did they get that idea? Granted there was not a Jewel on the corner, but God had worked amazing miracles to rescue them from the grip of Pharaoh. What would lead them to believe that God would ignore them now? That was simple a lie from the pits of Hell. Instead of ignoring them, God proved the lie false and rained down bread and quail from heaven.

Jesus faced people who wanted proof that he was who he said he was. They wanted a sign because his word was not good enough. Jesus said that truth is that the bread in the Old Testament was the sign that pointed to the truth. He is the truth. He is the bread of life. Only he can fill us up and give us eternal life.

Many people do not like Jesus saying things like that. He is so pointed and specific. Here is what is right and here is what is wrong and there is no discussion. The truth, contrary to what Pontius Pilate says, is not debatable. But how we use the truth is important. Is the truth our key to unshackle slaves? Or is the truth a club with which we beat sinners?

Paul tells the Ephesians that the truth is that Christ has made us one body through his death on the cross. It is nothing we must do or create. It just is because of what he did. We are already, right now, one body with every other person on this earth who believes that Jesus is Lord and Savior. That is the truth.

We speak the truth if we are filled up with his love because that is congruent with being who we are. God has loved us with his own son, so we love God with all our hearts and minds and souls. And then we love one another and we speak the truth to one another because the truth unshackles us from sin. Truth is not given to punish us but to free us.

We lie for all kinds of reasons. Sometimes we lie to protect ourselves from perceived consequences. Sometimes we lie to get an advantage. There always seem to be good reasons for lying but remember that truth sets you free, even if you don't like the truth. Lies always work against God because they are incongruent with truth and truth is part of godliness, so then, in the end, lies always work against us as well. Speaking the truth in love is not "a" way of speaking the truth, it is the "only" way of speaking the truth. If we lie we do not love. Truth is love.

I wrote this sermon outline months ago, but the world has given me a wonderful object for this sermon just this last week. Look at the outrage over Don Cathy's comment about his company, Chick Filet being a company that encourages family values. Further, he says that he defines family Biblically – that is a man and a woman. At one point, he went on to say that when we shake our fist at God and tell him that we know better than he does, we are

inviting disaster. That's all he said. Why are people so angry? Is it perhaps because his statement of the truth that we all know shakes the foundations of the lies so many are telling? Is it perhaps that believing the lies makes it more comfortable for us because we do not like incongruity?

I don't like everything God says. But it is the truth. I don't always live congruently with God but when there is a lack of alignment, it is I that am misaligned and not God. I do not feel a need to argue with the multitudes of lies that the world tells and God certainly does not need me to defend him but I am here to call you to remember that whatever God says is the final truth and when we live outside the truth we live incongruently with God.

If you or people you love are living in lies today, don't hear me wrong. I am not judging you or them. I spend plenty of time myself wandering through a maze of lies. What I am saying to whoever is caught in a life of lies, is that I know the anguish of living in a lie and there is a better way because the truth sets you free. Only when we immerse ourselves in truth are the lies held powerless before us. I don't have to excuse, explain or rationalize my sin because it is forgiven and so it powerless in my life. I don't have to defend my sin even when I continue sinning because I know that I cannot overcome it. I am comfortable saying I sin because I am human BUT

I am forgiven and that forgiveness is what will eventually empower me to overcome that sin. The Gospel is the key to my salvation not my own willpower. The Gospel is truth and the Gospel is love. So truth is love, and finally, no matter what false stories you believed and no matter what dark paths you pursued, you are a forgiven and free child of God right now and forever more.