

7th Sunday of Easter – B
LSB #526
Text – John 17:17

Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.

WHAT IS TRUTH?

The truth hurts. That's what they say.

A pastor, who was known for his lengthy sermons, noticed a man get up & leave during the middle of his message. He returned just before the service ended. Afterwards, the long winded pastor asked the man where he'd gone during the sermon. "I went to get a haircut," was the reply. "Well, why didn't you do that before the service?" the pastor asked.

"Because," the man answered, "I didn't need one then." **PAUSE**

The truth often does hurt so it's just the normal response for people to run away from it. Yet that's totally counterproductive to Jesus' request of our heavenly Father in the sermon text, "Sanctify them in the truth." God is working to set us apart, to make us holy, in the truth, yet the truth hurts so we are frequently confronted with a struggle.

What is truth? Is it something harmful, or something helpful? Why do we often have such a negative, knee jerk reaction to it? In his infamous remark at Jesus' trial, Pontius Pilate scoffed at the very thought that there might be such a thing as truth. In our culture a person is intolerant if they don't agree that everyone can decide on their very own personal truth.

Jesus claimed that privilege for Himself, alone: "I am the Way & the Truth & the Life." If you believe in God as Creator no one else has the right to determine the truth because no one else can bring something into being out of nothing. The devil can

deceive us about reality, & he can corrupt it, but try as he might he cannot create & he cannot define what is real.

Even in our very limited powers, it's much easier to destroy than it is to create; much easier to tear down than to build up; much easier to corrupt than to make holy. All of us are guilty of those destructive & selfish attitudes. That is the truth which hurts. If Satan uses any bit of the truth it is always & only to hurt us, & to further his purpose of destruction. Our heavenly Father, on the other hand, always uses the truth to build up & to make holy, even if that truth hurts initially.

Enduring that hurt, even from God, is not easy. At least when medical doctors operate they use an anesthetic so we don't feel the pain of the slicing scalpel. The emotional pain we feel because of sin, & because of God's discipline, is another matter. The only anesthetic provided to us is the Word of God & it takes a mature faith to use that as such. ***PAUSE***

What is truth? Is it harmful, or helpful? If you look at it from a Christian perspective it can only be something that is helpful, because Jesus Himself declared that He is the Truth. However, it is still true that the truth hurts. It hurts because our sinful nature does not want to die, yet dying to our sins is a huge part of the Christian life.

Peter wrote about the pain the truth brings in his 1st epistle, "Instead, [Jesus] entrusted Himself to Him who judges justly. He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, so that we might die to sins & live for righteousness..." Our Savior knows what it is to die to sin because He bore all of our sins in His body upon the tree. He knows how the truth hurts.

But with self-centeredness too often we act as if Jesus died for our sins so we can go & sin some more. Jesus told the woman caught in adultery, “Go & sin NO more,” not some more. Of course, Jesus is aware that we are incapable of eliminating sin from our lives, but He died on the cross that we might at least fight the battle, instead of joyfully waving the surrender flag.

We fight that battle against sin, we die to sins & live for righteousness, by repenting of our sins, & by leaning upon the Words & promises, upon the truth, of Jesus Christ. That is the anesthetic given us for pain & suffering in the battle against temptation & our sinful nature. As Peter wrote, “[Jesus] Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, so that we might die to sins & live for righteousness,” & then Peter added for, “by His wounds you have been healed.” All the emotional pain & suffering you’ve ever been a victim of can be healed by the wounds of Jesus. That’s what God’s Word promises. The question is, “Do you believe it?” **PAUSE**

Have you ever wondered how the Apostle Paul could write, “More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings”? And Paul suffered far more than most of us could imagine, but He rejoiced because he truly found healing in the wounds of Christ. He found enough healing that he not only recovered from his wounds, he went back for more.

Dying to our sins is much of what sanctification is about, & our Father in heaven does that through the truth, not through white lies or through bold-faced lies, but through the painful news of the truth. If you are daily in the Word of God suffering does produce endurance, endurance produces character, & character produces hope.

That is sanctification, & though much of it involves dying to sin, which is painful, not all of sanctification is suffering. It’s our sinful nature that looks at it that

way, & it's Satan's lie to us as well. Being made holy, being set apart for our Father in heaven, can also be a joyful, invigorating & tremendously meaningful process.

Walking into the building this morning, the weather conditions reminded me of my 1st mission trip to Tijuana. It brought back memories of being excited to wake up at 6:00 AM for loading lumber & tools onto the trucks. Briefly I relived the anticipation of waking up each new day to the sound of Mexican Rock music blaring away from the drug rehab center next door.

The sense of purpose was electric. The dedication of the entire team was exemplary. The joking, the laughter, the camaraderie, were so genuine & unforced it was like living & breathing the very Word of God. And do you know what was going on? It was our Father in heaven sanctifying us in the truth, & it wasn't the least bit painful. We call those mountain top experiences, & if you've lived through one, you know how incredible they are. One of our church members got married yesterday. In just 12 more days some of our students will graduate from high school. In July another mission team leaves for Nicaragua.

Those mountaintop experiences are also God at work making us holy in the truth so we can not just die to sin, but also live for righteousness. In the end that's what God created you & me for, to be holy & living in the center of His will. The suffering we experience in this life makes the joy stand out so we take it less for granted.

Putting the two together, dying to sin & living for righteousness, is to live out the truth. We are sinful & unclean, yet forgiven & holy in our heavenly Father's sight.

That's a paradox we can only reconcile in Christ. He alone holds the two together, saint & sinner, clean & unclean, mountaintop & valley, the lie & the truth.

By our union with Christ we are no longer of this world, even though daily, we're dragged down by it. Our sinful nature is of this world. Our saintly nature is of the next. We face the constant dilemma, is truth helpful or harmful? As Jesus Himself stated, "For this purpose I was born & for this purpose I have come into the world – to bear witness to the truth."

The truth is that although we have nothing of our own to deserve God's mercy He has paid the price & He has forgiven our sin. We need to recognize both facets of that truth & believe that Jesus is our Savior from sin. As the reading from 1st John said it: "And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, & this life is in His Son."

So an elderly woman walked into the local country church. A friendly usher greeted her at the door & helped her up the flight of stairs. "Where'd you like to sit?" he asked politely. "The front row please," she answered. "Oh, you really don't want to do that," said the usher. "The pastor is really boring." The woman asked, "Do you happen to know who I am?" "No," the usher said. "Well, I'm the pastor's mother," she replied indignantly. "Do you know who I am?" asked the usher. "No," the pastor's mother said. "Good," he answered, "Let me show you the front pew."

The truth hurts. That's what they say. But if you believe in Jesus Christ as your Savior from sin, the truth also heals, because the truth never ends with our failures. The Easter season is about the resurrection of Jesus from the dead & it's with that joyous news that the Truth leaves us. We are being made holy by the Spirit of God as He sanctifies us in the truth. Amen.

Jesus, You are the truth; Your Word alone true wisdom can impart; You only can inform the mind & purify the heart. You are the Way, the Truth, the Life; grant us that way to know, that truth to keep, that life to win whose joys eternal flow. Amen.