

# TRUTH TELLER

People need the truth.  
People don't always want the truth.  
But people always need the truth.

Sometimes we need it spoon-fed to us in small doses.  
Sometimes we need to hear it spoken gently  
by someone we know to be a friend.  
Sometimes we need it right between the eyes.

But we need the truth.  
I need the truth  
because without it, I live a lie.  
Worse than that,  
I become I lie;  
I become something that is false and twisted inside.  
And worst of all I don't even know it.

I need the truth.  
The truth that tells me  
what is right and where I'm wrong.  
The truth that convicts me of my selfishness and my sin  
and that challenges me to be a better man.  
The truth that shows me how far I am from being like Jesus  
and that, at the same time, assures me that God has not given up on me.

I need the truth.

I need the truth and so do you.

Each week we have been asking why Jesus had such a powerful impact  
on the world.

The reason I want to share with you today is this:  
Jesus told the truth.

**John 1.14:** The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. We beheld his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Jesus was full of grace and truth.

Last week we spoke about grace.  
We didn't use the word,  
but that's what we spoke about.  
Being a friend of sinners  
and loving people the way Jesus did.

This week we're talking about truth,  
but we started with grace.  
That's because grace should come first.  
You know the old statement:  
People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care.

But Jesus didn't come with grace only.  
He also came with truth.

Why?  
Because real change does not occur in our lives  
unless we deal with the truth about  
who we are,  
what we're doing and  
why we're doing it.

**John 8.31-32:** Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

What sets us free to live a new and better life?  
The truth that is found in Jesus.

After being a pastor for thirty-six years,  
and being invited into the secret lives of people,  
I am convinced there is no deep, authentic spiritual growth in a person's life  
until they are willing to be honest with God and with themselves.

Some of you are familiar with the 12 Steps.  
A deeply spiritual path for living a life of wholeness and integrity.  
Built on Christian principles.

The first three steps are about turning your life over to God.

You admit you have a problem you can't control.

You come to believe there is a higher power.

You turn your life over to your higher power.

The very next step is what?

**Step 4:** Make a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

Search for and deal with the truth about

what we have done,  
how we've been living,  
the mistakes we've made, and  
the damage we've done.

I am convinced that no matter

how much you pray, read the Bible, serve, or attend worship;  
if you are not willing to look at the truth about yourself and  
be honest about that truth,  
you will never become more like your MasterTeacher Jesus.

Russian author Fyodor Dostoyevsky's understanding of human nature  
was deep and insightful.

Much of it he gained through his own struggles, failures, and redemption.

In *The Brothers Karamazov* he writes,

**Fyodor Dostoyevsky:** The important thing is to stop lying to yourself. A man who lies to himself, and believes his own lies, becomes unable to recognize truth, either in himself or in anyone else, and he ends up losing respect for himself as well as for others. When he has no respect for anyone, ...in order to divert himself, ...he yields to his impulses, indulges in the lowest forms of pleasure, and behaves in the end like an animal, in satisfying his vices. And it all comes from lying—lying to others and to yourself.

Hide from the truth of who we are;

refuse to be honest with ourselves;

hide from the truth about how we're living;

live in the shadows instead of walking in the light,

and we will degenerate into something we can never be proud of.

So, Jesus came with grace and truth.  
He loved people like no one else.  
And he told the truth like no one else.

To be like him,  
we must be men who give grace, and  
we must be men who speak the truth.

Here's the trick.  
Speaking the truth doesn't mean we have carte blanche to say  
what we think we need to say.  
It means we have a responsibility to say  
what a person needs to hear.

Sometimes people need a truth that comforts them.  
Sometimes they need a truth that encourages them.  
Sometimes they need a truth that challenges them.  
Sometimes they need a truth that confronts and convicts them.

It depends where they are in life.

A mother who has lost a child  
needs a different word from God  
than a man who is thinking about selling his soul for a promotion.

A guy who cares nothing about spiritual matters  
but goes to church because it makes him look good  
needs a different word from God  
than the man who is striving with all his heart to follow Jesus  
and who beats himself up because he loses his temper occasionally.

Jesus spoke different words to people depending  
on where they were in life.  
And to be like him we'll have to be sensitive to where people are  
and the word they need to hear.

**What Words Did Jesus Speak?**

## 1. WORDS OF COMPASSION

Look at this verse in Mark's Gospel.

It illustrates how beautifully Jesus combined grace and truth when he spoke to large crowds.

**Mark 6.34:** When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he was moved by compassion because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things.

When Jesus saw the masses he saw them –  
we talked about this a couple of weeks ago –  
he saw them as sheep without a shepherd.

No one had watched over their souls.  
No one had told them how to discern truth from error.  
No one had taught them how to walk in paths of righteousness  
or how to find green pastures and still waters.  
No shepherd had told them what they needed to know to walk through  
the valley of the shadow of death and fear no evil.

And catch this –  
The same compassion that caused Jesus to heal the sick and feed the hungry  
caused him –  
what does it say –  
to begin “teaching them many things.”  
Jesus' heart of grace moved him to speak spiritual and moral truth  
into the lives of people who needed to hear it.

So, Jesus taught beautiful truths  
that comforted and encouraged people.

Truths like the ones found in

**Matthew 6.25-30:** Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. ... Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your

life? And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith?

The most important word in that passage?  
Father.

This was a new and revolutionary concept  
that people could see God as their Father.  
Rarely in the Old Testament,  
God is referred to as the Father.  
When you find God described that way,  
it usually indicates his relationship to Israel.

But individuals did not call God Father.  
That changed with the teaching of Jesus.

He revealed that the God of the universe  
relates to us as a loving Father.  
A Father  
who believes we are valuable,  
who cares for us,  
who wants to provide for us,  
who wants a relationship with us.

So, we don't have to worry about tomorrow  
or fear the future.  
Because God cares about our lives  
and he has promised to meet our needs.

In fact, God is a Father who loves us when we fail and when we sin  
and yearns to receive us to himself and forgive us.

You know the story of the prodigal son.  
“Prodigal” means wasteful.  
The younger son takes his inheritance early

and squanders everything he's been given.

And when he returns,  
disgraced, ashamed, filthy with the odor of swine and the stench of sin,  
how is he received?

**Luke 15.20-24:** His father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. The son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son." But the father said to his servants, "Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found."

You don't have to be perfect, get it right, or clean yourself up.

You just have to come home.  
Your Father is waiting for you.  
He wants you.  
He loves you.

Remember what we said last week  
that if we want to be like Jesus,  
we don't start off telling people who they should be.  
We tell them who they are.

You are loved.  
You are wanted.  
You can be forgiven.  
No matter what you have done.

Because the Father loves you.

That was Jesus' word to the masses –  
it was a word of compassion.

That's where we begin with others.  
That's the truth we start with.  
You are loved by God.

More than you know.  
More than you can imagine.

Take comfort,  
God loves you.

But there was more to the message of Jesus than that.  
He also spoke

## **2. WORDS OF CORRECTION**

God loves us the way we are.  
But he loves us too much to leave us that way.

So Jesus confronted people with their sin  
and their need to get right.

In John 8 we read about a woman who was caught in adultery.  
The Pharisees and teachers of the Law drag her before Jesus  
and make her stand before a crowd while accusing her of immorality  
and threatening to stone her to death.

First, Jesus defends her and says,

**John 8.7:** Whoever is without sin, let him throw the first stone.

Slowly, the crowd disappears and Jesus says to her,  
“Neither do I condemn you.”

Those are the words of compassion we just talked about.  
But he doesn't stop there.

**John 8.11:** Go, and sin no more.

That seems a little, tough, doesn't it?

I mean, there she was, this poor woman,  
 having been shamed before a crowd.  
 Probably used and abused by men most of her life.  
 And just five minutes before, she was terrified that she was about to be  
 stoned to death.

Boom, no sooner is she saved from that,  
 than here's Jesus saying, "Stop sinning."

Not, "I know you've had it hard.  
 I know you've had to make some difficult decisions."  
 Nope.  
 There's none of that.  
 Just – stop sinning.

It may sound harsh,  
 but do you know what it really is?

It's Jesus telling this woman:  
 You can change.  
 You don't have to be a victim of what's been done to you.  
 You can overcome your past –  
 the abuse you have suffered and  
 the mistakes you have made.  
 With God's help you can become a new person  
 and you can live a new life.  
 Another example is found in Luke 12.

In front of a large crowd, a man calls out to Jesus,

**Luke 12.13:** Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.

If I had been Jesus,  
 I probably would have thought to myself,  
 "Be careful, man.  
 For a guy to air his family's dirty laundry in front of so many people,  
 he's bound to be hurting."

What does Jesus say?

**Luke 12:15:** Look out! Beware of greed in all its forms, a man's life does not consist in  
 the abundance of his possessions.

In other words,  
 “Buddy, you’re in danger.  
 You’re in danger of believing that what’s in your wallet  
   is more important than what’s in your heart.  
 Maybe you’ve been done wrong,  
   but don’t let it make you wrong inside.”

These are words of correction.  
 But they are also words of compassion.  
 Sometimes the most compassionate thing you can do  
   is help someone recognize what they don’t see about themselves.

What did a shepherd do when he saw a sheep getting too close to a cliff?  
 He took his crook and grabbed the animal  
   and pulled him away from danger back to a place that was solid and safe.  
 Maybe it hurt a bit in the moment,  
   but it kept the sheep from destruction.  
 That’s what truth that corrects us and convicts us can do.  
   Keep us safe,  
   bring us back to where we need to be.

One more.

The paralyzed man  
   who’s been lying by the pool of Bethesda for thirty-eight years,  
   waiting for his turn to be healed.  
 He was there because people believed from time to time  
   an angel would stir up the water  
   and the first one in would be healed.

Jesus asks him, “Do you want to be get well?”  
 The man responds by telling Jesus all the reasons he hadn’t been healed.  
   People don’t wait their turn.  
   I don’t have anyone to help me get into the pool.  
   People only care about themselves.

Finally Jesus cut him off and told him to

“Get up. Take up your mat and walk.”  
And he did!

That’s where we often end the story.  
But there more to it.

Later that same day, Jesus runs the guy down in the temple,  
and of all the things Jesus could say to him,  
here’s what he goes with.

**John 5.14:** Later Jesus found him at the temple and said to him, “See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you.”

Wow!  
This poor man has been paralyzed for thirty-eight years.  
He’s been on his feet, healed, for maybe a couple of hours.

And the first thing Jesus tells him is,  
“Look, you think you’ve had it bad all these years?  
You better get your life right  
or what you’ve been through will be a walk in the park  
compared to what may happen to you.”

C’mon Jesus, let the guy feel good for a few hours.  
I mean he’s been paralyzed for 38 years.

What could he have been doing that’s all that bad, anyway?  
He’s been paralyzed for crying out loud.  
He hasn’t been out there robbing banks or car jacking old ladies.  
Maybe, I mean maybe,  
he whistled at some good lookin’ gals as they walked by,  
but other than that,  
give the guy a break, will ya?

Nope, not Jesus.  
Just, “See you are well now.  
Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you.”

I’m guessing Jesus saw in him a spirit of bitterness and resentment.  
That would be understandable.  
But it wouldn’t be healthy

or something God could bless.  
 So Jesus corrects him not to condemn him,  
 but to make him as whole spiritually  
 as he now is physically.

Why did Jesus speak difficult truths into the lives of people?  
 Because people need the truth in order to grow spiritually and emotionally.

Yes, we need love and understanding and grace.  
 But if we are going to grow spiritually,  
 at some point we must deal with the truth  
 about who we are and what we're doing and how we treat other people.

Why did Jesus at times speak truth so straightforwardly,  
 even maybe a little harshly?  
 Because most of us will do all we can to avoid the truth we need to hear.

American journalist Herbert Agar put it well:

**Herbert Agar:** The truth that makes men free is for the most part the truth which men prefer not to hear.

How does this apply to us?

We have to be careful with this one.  
 Some of us love correcting and convicting others.  
 We get off on it.  
 It makes us feel righteous and superior.

If that's you,  
 you probably don't need to speak many words of correction and conviction.  
 Because God never reveals truth to us about someone else's life  
 so we can shake a finger in his face and tell him how bad he is,  
 but so we can put an arm around his shoulder and tell him how good he can  
 become.

When we speak words of correction

they must always come from a place of genuine concern for that person.  
But there **will** be times when we will need to tell the truth  
to the people we care about.

Why?

Well, remember where we started this morning.

People need the truth.

To grow, to change, to become free of a past life,  
to become more like Jesus –  
we will need someone to tell us the truth.

If I know the truth you need to be a better father or husband  
if I know the truth you need to succeed at your work  
or to overcome worry  
or to get right with God and be at peace with yourself,  
and I don't tell you?

If I don't confront you that you're drinking too much,  
that your language doesn't represent our Lord well,  
that you seem caught up with money and stuff and things,  
am I your friend?

See, I can love you a long time before I find the right moment to tell you  
the truth you need to hear.  
But if I never tell you the truth you need to hear,  
can I say I love you?

You're full of grace.

Good for you.

You think that makes you like Jesus?

No, Jesus came with grace and truth.  
And if you want to be like him,  
you must be a person who gives grace  
and who speaks the truth.

Both.

My best friends are the ones who call me on my stuff.

They're the ones who love me enough to say,  
 Dude, you're screwing up.  
 Your attitude stinks.  
 That's not Christlike.

My best friends are the ones who love me enough  
 to take a chance on offending me by correcting me  
 because they care for me and the health of my soul.

### **3. WORDS OF CASTIGATION.**

If we need to be careful with words of correction,  
 we really need to be careful when it comes to words of castigation.  
 That means reprimanding someone.

This didn't happen much between Jesus and his disciples.  
 But it did happen.

He rebuked them when they wouldn't let the little children come to him.  
 He reprimanded James and John when they wanted to call down fire from heaven  
 on some Samaritans who had rejected Jesus.  
 When Peter tried to stop him from going to a cross,  
 Jesus said, "Get the behind me, Satan."

Picture this: Andrew the disciple goes home one evening,  
 and his wife says, "So, how'd it go today with Jesus?"  
 And he says,  
 "You know, just another day.  
 He yelled at us because we wouldn't let some kids crawl all over him.  
 He rebuked James and John when they wanted to defend him.  
 And he called Peter the devil.  
 Same ol' same ol' I guess."

You hear this and you think,  
 "I don't know what to do with that."  
 I read this and I think,  
 I love this guy.  
 He's real,  
 he's human,  
 he's passionate.

But Jesus saved his real ire for the religious leaders of the day.

Why?

Because they were misleading people about who God was.

They used their positions of authority

to do harm to the people that God cared about.

They were false teachers and false prophets.

And they were doing damage to the people Jesus had come to save.

If you think Jesus never said anything if he couldn't find something good to say,  
you don't know Jesus.

Jesus was incredibly patient and caring

with people who couldn't get it right.

Sins of the flesh,

he never acted like they were a small thing.

But people in authority – religious or governmental –

who harmed those under their care –

they are the ones Jesus really went off on.

Teachers claiming to speak for God,

who were false shepherds –

he could not have castigated and rebuked them more strongly.

**Luke 23.15, 23-27:** Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and ... you make them twice as much a child of hell as you are. Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. ... Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like white-washed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of the bones of the dead and everything unclean. In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness.

And he goes on, 7 woes –

Woe means affliction, grief, distress –

7 woes upon the teachers of the law and the Pharisees,  
the religious leaders of Israel.

Again, we have to be careful here.

But when those in authority

misrepresent God and  
mislead people and do damage to their souls,  
whether they are leaders in government or leaders in the church,  
it's wrong to be silent.

I commented on this guy in a sermon last year in the Loft.

### Clip: Jesse Duplantis

Of course, God told him to get a new jet.  
He can't be expected to stop for gas every now and then.

I made a little joke about him and a nice woman sent me a sweet note  
saying that my comments could be divisive.

I told her we were going to have to disagree on this one  
because lying to people in Jesus' name,  
and getting poor folks to pay for your fourth jet,  
is exactly the kind of thing that Jesus would have condemned.

Same with all these health and wealth, name it and claim it preachers  
who teach people that the Christian life  
is about praying for material wealth and professional success  
instead of taking up a cross and serving others.  
There are other offenses even more serious.

When you think of the sexual abuse of children  
that not only occurred but was covered up and in some ways enabled  
by the Catholic Church for decades all over the world.

Pope Francis just stated that in some places  
priests have kept nuns as sex slaves  
and forced them to have abortions.  
Two weeks ago this was announced,  
and hardly made a ripple.

Last week the Chronicle did an expose  
on the Southern Baptist Convention

and how when abuse was brought to its attention,  
it refused to warn churches about pastors who had done horrible things to  
minors so that they were rehired by other congregations.

When religious leaders protect themselves and their institutions  
instead of their people,  
it's not wrong to speak up and condemn it.

I leave next Tuesday to go to General Conference.  
You may know that the United Methodist Church is going to vote  
on whether we are going to change our sexual ethics.

You have never heard me talk about LGBTQ persons with anything  
but tenderness and compassion.  
Because many people who identify that way  
have been wounded and harmed  
before and after having same sex attraction.  
I have said that we must protect their dignity and their physical safety.  
And this is something we should never even joke about.

But when it comes to leaders and bishops  
who teach doctrines that are contrary to what the Bible teaches and  
who mislead people when their souls are at stake;  
when it comes to leaders who claim to speak in the name of God  
and who lie to people about what the Scriptures teach,  
I will speak out against what they teach  
and against their leadership.  
I have and I will.

Some people love me for it.  
Some people despise me for it.  
You guys don't know it,  
but I might be the most hated man in the United Methodist Church.

But it's not a virtue to be silent  
when people with authority, speaking for God,  
mislead the precious souls that Jesus came to save.

When your political candidate demeans people  
or when your party is hypocritical and disingenuous  
to be silent because he's your guy  
of it's your party,  
that's not virtuous.  
Your highest affiliation is to Jesus.

And when there's evil,  
when powerful people do wrong, and  
when religious figures do damage to the body of Christ,  
it's not Christlike to be silent.

He spoke out.  
And at times if we are to be like him,  
we will have to do the same.