

First Presbyterian Church

Cheyenne, Wyoming

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Worship Theme: Truth that Saves Us

Psalm 1, John 17: 6-19, I John 5: 9-13

At this point in my life, I have discovered there are at least two ways of looking at the truth; truth being defined as the reality and fact of life. The first way is the "looking in the mirror truth;" it brings both laughter and tears to my life. When I get up in the morning and look in that reflective glass, I can hear Clint Eastwood's famous words go through my head: "Go ahead, punk, make my day!" Un-intimidated by any threat on my part, the mirror still speaks the truth and tells me, "I am overweight, out of shape, am slowly going bald, and getting more wrinkles in my face. Or, in summary, the truth of the mirror is "Bob you are getting old; could dry up and just be dust in the wind any day now." Ugh! This can be a depressing truth if I let it be the only truth that runs my life. Of course, the truth is that I am getting older. But, this also means I am still alive, which then cheers me up. However, when this thought causes me to smile while looking in the mirror, the wrinkles are even more amplified. "Dag gum it anyhow." Do you ever suffer from this "looking in the mirror truth?" Truth from a mirror can be an honest reflection of reality, but at the same time it may be a brutally discouraging truth.

Thankfully, there is also another way of looking at the truth that saves, redeems and gives meaning to my life at any age. This truth I have found reflected in a relationship to God in Jesus Christ and the written word of God, the Bible. This is the truth I hope you have found. I pray that the just baptized baby, Hayden Elizabeth Homann, will find this truth, too; especially as we the church and her parents fulfill the vows of baptism to teach her about Jesus Christ. Today's scriptures overflow with this saving truth. It is a truth that makes me smile and not even worry about any wrinkles or old age as the grin comes across my face. In fact, the older I get, the more I relish the time I have to enjoy and appreciate a relationship to God in Jesus Christ and the written word of God, the Bible. I greatly prefer this saving way of looking at the truth.

Let's reflect on this saving truth as it is found in the written word of God in Psalm 1. It is a song that contrasts two different kinds of truth. It begins on a happy note of truth. "Happy are those" it says. "Blessed are those" is more accurate. Blessed means God and his lavish love and grace are behind the blessing. To be blessed by God means to have a relationship with him. The psalmist then goes on to advise and warn us who are blessed by God and have this rich relationship to him; "do not follow the advice of the wicked, or take the path that sinners tread, or sit in the seat of scoffers." For the Psalmist, the wicked, the sinner and the scoffers are those who deny the saving truth they need God or that God exists; therefore they have no relationship to him. The truth of this matter is that when we "fail to trust God and to make a connection with God as the source of life, we cannot be 'happy'" in the truest sense of the word. It is not surprising that contemporary societies like ours of 'isolated selves' consistently fail to produce people who are 'happy,' even though these societies are among the wealthiest, healthiest, and most educated in human history." The irony is

that “what generally marks maturity among contemporary North Americans is self-sufficiency. Wanting or needing help, whether from others or from God is taken as a sign of weakness or instability. The effect is to produce a society of isolated selves. The irony is tragic—the pursuit of self-fulfillment yields self-alienation.” The truth is that such societies perish—will be blown away like the chaff of a wheat harvest, because they are not connected to the source of life, God. The Psalmist advises and warns us that the wicked, the sinner and the scoffers are those who deny the truth they need God or that God exists; have no relationship to him and are neither happy nor blessed.

TNIBC, Vol. IV, pg. 687

Ah, but for the happy or blessed who are in a relationship to God, “they are like trees planted by streams of water, which yield their fruit in its season, and their leaves do not wither. In all that they do, they prosper.” What a wonderful saving truth this is. According to the psalmist, the streams of water that bring nourishment and growth are filled with the law or instruction of God. The blessed know the truth that they need to be fed by the written word of God where God teaches us how to live a blessed life with him. The blessed know that a prayer life or constant communication with God is so nurturing and sustaining. The blessed know that coming to worship God, to praise God in community can be so uplifting and affirming. The blessed know that they are not alone and cannot live life apart from God and other people. Their dependency upon God is their strength, for there is no greater source of sustenance of life than God. In this relationship they prosper, not necessarily in any material sense, but in the truth that God is always with them; in good and bad times to protect and guide them. The happy or blessed can only know this by their relationship to the God and their being watered by the stream of his instructions, of his saving truth.

When I am overwhelmed with the problems of life, it feels like the streams of my reserve strength are being sucked dry. It is then that I realize, again, the truth of two things. First of all, I have been trying to handle life all on my own. My self-sufficiency has kicked in to overdrive and I am beginning to perish. The other awareness I have is that I must get back in touch with God and allow his life giving streams of water or saving truth to fill me again. You are a part of that nourishing stream of water, too. When I stand up here and see you looking back at me in worship services, hear you singing praises to God and joining me in prayer: The reserve streams inside me begins to flow again, and this old tree feels renewed—despite what the mirror told me that morning. I need God and you to do this weekly for me because I often become one of the wicked who thinks they can do life all by themselves. Again, the truth that saves us is that we must realize that we have to be dependent upon God for our strength for there is no greater source of sustenance of life than God.

As we learn from the Gospel lesson, this nourishing and sustaining stream of water or saving truth also contains Jesus’ prayer for us. We have the saying, “there must be something in that water,” when unusual or special things occur. Well, what else is in this water or saving truth is a three part prayer that Jesus prayed before he was put through a trial, was brutally beaten and crucified for our sake.

In the first part of the prayer, Jesus speaks to God on our behalf. Jesus entrusts the hope for our future to God in prayer. Jesus recognizes the truth that we live in this world, a world where our well being is constantly threatened through environmental,

political, economic and spiritual evils. Jesus also recognizes the truth that we cannot save ourselves from such destruction most often caused by our own sinfulness. So instead of entrusting our future to us, Jesus entrusts our future to God. "Jesus final words before his last hours are not last-minute instructions to the community about what it should do in his absence; instead, his words turn the future of the community over to God," who is the source of saving truth. In Jesus' prayer for us, he models the saving truth of how we are to understand" that our lives rest in and depend solely on God's care. [TNIBC](#), Vol. IX, pg. 797.

In the second part of the prayer, we overhear the intimacy of Jesus' relationship with God. Jesus calls God, 'Abba, Father, or in the common vernacular, "Daddy." The saving truth of this part of the prayer is that God and Jesus are one with each other. Again, Jesus models for us where we are to turn for our life giving streams of water: Where we are to turn when our lives are endangered: Where we are to ultimately entrust our lives. In Jesus' last hours of his life, he turns to the One who sent him and loves him. The saving truth is that in the same manner, so must we turn to God. [TNIBC](#), Vol. IX, pg. 798.

In the third part of the prayer, Jesus prays that God will sanctify or make us holy so that God will then give us everlasting life. The saving truth here is that by God's grace in Jesus Christ, if we but trust in him, we are made holy and are given a salvation that begins now and will last forever. Jesus prayed to God to give this gift to us. Jesus prayed that we would know the same love of God he and God shared with each other. How has this prayer been answered for you? There sure is something in this nourishing and sustaining stream of water or saving truth of God. [TNIBC](#), Vol. IX, pg. 798. I suspect that not everyone who encounters this nourishing and sustaining stream of water or saving truth of God agrees it is the truth. Our times are called a "postmodern world," a phrase I dislike for several reasons, where truth has become a relative thing to many people. People are too often deciding that whatever is truth to them is the truth, despite any facts or reality to the contrary. This has been a problem many times over throughout history. This was a problem our first century A.D. Epistle lesson addressed. Like our world today, people then were asking, "How can I know that what the psalmist and the gospel of John have declared as the saving truth of God is indeed the truth? What kind of testimony is there or who are the witnesses to prove that this saving truth of God is true? "How does one come to accept the testimony of a witness? Is it the set of the jaw, some particular look around the eyes, the steadiness of voice, a particular matter of credentials? Anyone who has served on a jury knows the difficulties of sorting through conflicting evidence, weighing the testimony of one witness over against that of another. These are matters that demand care and measured judgments. Wavering and doubt are necessary by-products of the process."

By contrast with this cautious approach, I John allows no room for indecision or uncertainty. The writer is quite direct in what he says. Those who are unable to make a decision about Jesus and chose not to believe that he is Son of God have rejected God. "Those who do not believe in God have made him a liar by not believing in the testimony that God has given concerning his Son.... whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life." Like the wicked, the sinners and the scoffers of Psalm 1,

tragically, not everyone who encounters the nourishing and sustaining stream of water or saving truth of God agrees it is the truth. [Texts For Preaching—Year B](#), pg. 340

Fortunately, the testimony or the witness to the saving truth of God found in 1 John goes way beyond any human beings words, actions or judgments. The writer boldly states: “There are three that testify: the Spirit and the water and the blood, and these three agree. If we receive human testimony, the testimony of God is greater; for this is the testimony of God that he has testified to his Son.” The nourishing and sustaining stream of water or saving truth of which 1 John speaks come first of all from God. It is not dependent upon questionable human beings. The Holy Spirit of God itself brings the saving truth that Jesus Christ is our Lord and Savior to our hearts and minds. It is beyond human control. As 1 John says, “Those who believe in the Son of God have the testimony in their hearts. And this is the testimony: God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life.” It was God himself in Jesus who became flesh and blood or water and blood to teach us, and die for us. He was the only one who could cleanse us of our sins. It was God alone who raised Jesus from the dead. All this testimony or witness to the saving truth does not need human words or actions. It is directly from God himself and is the truth that saves us.

So as we look into the mirror of our souls, what truth do we see? Do we see a wrinkled drying up sinner or scoffer who doubts the saving truth? That would be so sad. Or, do we see a reflection of what the today’s scriptures described? Do we see ourselves as blessed trees planted by streams of water, which yield their fruit in its season, and their leaves do not wither because we have a relationship to God in Jesus Christ and have trusted in his saving truth? That would be so redeeming and give joyful meaning to our lives. This is the truth I pray we all see, believe and follow.