

SLIDE 1

The Power of Truth  
John 15:26-16:15  
May 12, 2024 West Valley Presbyterian Church

Last week we reflected on what Jesus told us about the inner nature of God, and reflected on the source of peace. While Jesus was physically with us, God's peace was his peace; and once the Holy Spirit came, God's peace can also become our peace through the work of the Spirit.

This week we are continuing through the Farewell Discourses towards the end of John's gospel. We are going to look specifically at what Jesus tells us about the source and the power of truth. Hear now the word of God as it comes to us from John 15:26 – 16:15.

SLIDE 2-12

"When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father—the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father—he will testify about me. <sup>27</sup> And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning.

**16** "All this I have told you so that you will not fall away. <sup>2</sup> They will put you out of the synagogue; in fact, the time is coming when anyone who kills you will think they are offering a service to God. <sup>3</sup> They will do such things because they have not known the Father or me. <sup>4</sup> I have told you this, so that when their time comes you will remember that I warned you about them. I did not tell you this from the beginning because I was with you, <sup>5</sup> but now I am going to him who sent me. None of you asks me, 'Where are you going?' <sup>6</sup> Rather, you are filled with grief because I have said these things. <sup>7</sup> But very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. <sup>8</sup> When he comes, he will prove the world to be in the wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: <sup>9</sup> about sin, because people do not believe in me; <sup>10</sup> about righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; <sup>11</sup> and about judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.

<sup>12</sup> "I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. <sup>13</sup> But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. <sup>14</sup> He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you. <sup>15</sup> All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will receive from me what he will make known to you."

Here ends the reading of God's holy word. Join me in saying, "Thanks be to God."

Pontius Pilate apparently didn't think much of truth. We can almost hear the sneer in his voice when he's questioning Jesus. He says, sarcastically, "You are a king, then!" Jesus replies, "You say that I am a king. In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me." And Pilate retorts, "What is truth?"

That was a snarky question; but it's still a real question. What is truth? That's even more of a question now, with artificial intelligence becoming more and more prominent in the websites we look at. For instance: these days, when I Google a question, the first thing that usually pops up is an AI-generated answer. That first answer is NOT a reference to research that a qualified person has done, and another qualified person has checked for accuracy. These days I have to push aside the computer-generated answers and drill down to see if I can find something that is certified as accurate. Now I know I'm old; but artificial intelligence really concerns me. If a person lies to me, I can test what they said and see for myself if they were telling the truth or not. But how could I know whether something generated by artificial intelligence is true or not? How could I test it?

What is truth? Well, Jesus says that truth originates in God. And he should know – being fully God himself! Last week we talked about how peace originates in the inner nature of God, and how peace is transmitted from God to us. Truth is similar. In verse 15:26, Jesus is talking about the work of the Holy Spirit, whom he describes as “the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father.” So, truth originates within God. And then the Spirit of truth – the Holy Spirit - leads us into all truth. The truth we are led into is accurate because it originates in God, whose very being is faithful and true. In 16:12 Jesus goes on to say, “I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.” The Holy Spirit receives from the inner being of God – the Father, Son and Holy Spirit - the truth which he conveys to us.

Practically speaking, truth is essential to our flourishing as human beings. Parents everywhere throughout the world, of any religion or none at all, teach their children to tell the truth. And there's good reason for that. Human beings are social creatures. We depend on each other in ways that we don't even think of, every moment of our lives on this earth. Of course we know that babies are dependent on their mothers to feed them and clean them and protect them. But even full grown adults are dependent on webs of other people, whom they might or might not know about. For example, I grow some of my own vegetables in my front yard. Does that mean I'm self-sufficient in terms of food? No indeed! I depend on farmers, irrigation workers, shippers, truckers, road builders, safety inspectors, agricultural scientists, fertilizer manufacturers, stockers, store clerks, garbage pickup, and probably a lot of other folks I don't even know about, for all the food I eat. What each one of us does affects a lot of people. We all do better if we can trust each other. And if we're going to trust each other, we have to tell the truth to one another.

If we don't tell the truth, then we can't trust what the other person says. And if we can't trust one another, then we can't hold together as a society. Those social networks start breaking. And if we can't hold together as a society, well, then we don't live very long. Practically speaking, truth has power. Truth benefits everyone in ways we might not even realize.

Spiritually speaking, truth has even more power. How much more powerful is God, than we are? Well, let's see, maybe a hundred people, in one point in time, in one area of California, on one planet, in one solar system, compared to the Creator of the entire universe? And if God is unimaginably more powerful than we are, then how much more powerful is God's truth than our

own understanding of it? Jesus describes the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of truth, twice, in this passage. And he should know, because he is part of the Trine God. God's truth will prevail, because God's very being is truth. It is not possible for God to lie.

Now, if the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Truth, as Jesus says, and if that same Holy Spirit has also been given to us as Jesus' followers, as Jesus also says - then how can we ever think that it's OK to lie? It's just not OK! If God does not lie, and if we belong to God (which we do), then we also should speak only truth. Jesus says that when the Spirit of truth comes, that he will guide us into all the truth. The Spirit of Truth makes known to us what he receives from God the Son and God the Father. He doesn't speak on his own; he speaks only what comes from the Triune God. And as such, God's truth has power far beyond what we expect or imagine. Even if it's imperfect humans who speak God's truth.

For example, the disciples spoke the truth about what they had heard Jesus say, and what they had seen Jesus do. The Spirit of truth was poured out upon them, at Pentecost, which we will celebrate next Sunday. The Spirit of truth was also poured out upon the people who heard them and responded with belief in Jesus. The disciples spoke the truth; and within 100 years, there were Christian churches all over the Roman world. God's truth prevailed over unbelief. God's truth prevailed over persecution. His truth did then, and still does, go marching on. No matter what!

Daniel Webster once said, "There is nothing so powerful as truth." Which is true, because truth is of God, and God is all powerful. And I would like to add to that, that sometimes it takes awhile for truth to prevail! For example, even after the Civil War, it took almost another hundred years before the truth that all human beings are created equal, was codified into law throughout this country.

#### SLIDE 13

Take a look at the woman on the bulletin cover. She looks like she maybe has severe arthritis, or perhaps circulation problems? It doesn't matter. Nothing is going to stop her. The truth is that she is a child of God, as we all are; that she is endowed by her Creator with certain inalienable rights, as we all are; and she therefore deserves the same rights as any other citizen. That truth had power, and eventually it prevailed.

Or, consider another example: how scientific advances happen. For 8 of the 11 years that I was a chemist, I conducted research in a lab and wrote papers about it. I worked with colleagues, and we all built on each other's work. If I had lied about the result of an experiment, my colleagues would have figured that out pretty quickly. Suppose, for instance, I published a report saying that a certain catalyst worked well to convert biomass to liquid fuel at a certain temperature and pressure. My colleagues would want to build on that, which would mean that they would try to reproduce what I had done, and take it a step further. And if they couldn't reproduce the results I reported, I would probably have been fired. Scientific progress absolutely does depend on the truth. Here again, truth has power, and it eventually prevails.

Or, consider the power of truth in family relationships. Ancestry.com and related DNA websites have made it a lot easier to find out who you are genetically related to – and there might be some surprises. You might have relatives you know nothing about, perhaps half siblings or cousins. Or perhaps someone was adopted and never knew it. Sometimes there are long-buried secrets which have been brought to light. Truth has power; and in DNA data banks also, truth eventually prevails.

We can see the power of truth in our history; in our science; in our relationships. And where does truth come from? Ultimately, truth comes from God; Jesus tells us that the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth, guides us into all truth. It's always possible for us to lie; God always gives us that choice. But don't make that choice. However convenient a lie may be when you're in a tight spot, ultimately a lie will be found out. Ultimately truth is more powerful than lies, just as God is more powerful than Satan. And ultimately, truth will prevail.

So let's turn to God and pray that his truth will always dwell in us, and will prevail in us.

Almighty God, who sent the Spirit of truth to guide us into all truth: rule our lives by your power of truth, that we may be truthful in our thoughts, in our words, and in our deeds. May no fear or hope ever make us lie in our speech or in our actions. Cast out from us whatever leads us or tempts us to lie. Bring us all into the perfect freedom of your truth, which will one day prevail, through Jesus Christ our Lord, in whose name we pray. Amen.