

jiSermon for 26 September 2021 @ Bethesda UMC/Baltimore

Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Scriptures: Esther 7:1-6, 9-10; 9:20-22; Psalm 124; James 5:13-20; Mark 9:38-50

**“Truth”**

When I was in Sheppard-Pratt, a young man was pointed out to me in the dining hall who had, according to hearsay, tried to put out his eye. I never saw a bandage, and he was on a more restricted hall ... but our scripture for today came immediately to mind, and I've never felt comfortable with it.

Why did Jesus talk like that?

Let me hear some ideas from you.

(Pause for responses).

In John, Jesus says, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life.” How shall we take that?

Let me come from the question another way. Most of us depend a lot on doctors. Trust is important between doctor and patient.... but don't most of us have stories about other treatments than simply surgery, or medication, that express our belief that healing is, like prayer, and relationships, and picking up the pieces after a tragedy and going forward into a constructive future .... It's mystical, and based on inner feelings and all sorts of other things ... including scripture.

Maybe Jesus talked like this text at some point. Matthew has him say some pretty mean things about the Pharisees. I remember being in a chaplain's class with a rabbi who said, “We Jews think the Pharisees were some pretty good people.”

What is truth? I read a couple of headlines over articles about 9/11 that asked why we heard so little about why the radical Taliban were so angry @ us ... the U.S. We have a lot to learn about our dealings as a nation ... Why didn't we ask? A lot of people have been angry at us...

As you've heard me say before, what excites me about this moment, this mood, in our national history is the way things about our past are being openly discussed, more than ever before.

This makes church such a dynamo of healing, if we practice our faith and, yes, argue about it.

At our pre-Annual Conference planning yesterday, we heard about one proposal that would allow congregations to leave the United Methodist Church based on different view of sexual orientation. The two presenters were on zoom .... One was Rev. Ms. Deb Scott, pastor of Lovely Lane United Methodist Church, which is a Reconciling congregation, as we are. The other was a man representing the Wesleyan fellowship that is more traditional and doesn't want to change the language about human sexuality in our Book of Discipline. Deb Scott said a beautiful thing

when asked how the two representatives of this protocol for amicable separation were both for it, both standing there friendly to one another. She said something she'd learned from the field of marriage counseling. There was this couple who was working with a counselor, and they were having hard going. Finally the counselor said, "How about if each of you ask the other what he or she could do to help the other do what she or he really wanted to do?" Change from telling all the problems the other partner presents you, to asking what you could do to help overcome them.....

Again, I ask what you think. Last Sunday we talked about not having enough people to fill the jobs of running church life. I asked if we could talk about splitting responsibilities, so two people could hold one office. I asked what it would take to get people who hadn't served here, start volunteering. We didn't solve anything. During "Joys and Concerns" @ the 10:30 service we'll ask Clo Newton to give us a report on Nominating Committee.... I believe I'm right we need to have our annual reports to the Conference completed by 1 October, which is this coming week. In other words, to stay functioning under the United Methodist system, what do we have, and what happens if we don't have enough ... Then truth has a different ring to it.

That's about as close as I can come for today on answering why Jesus ... or somebody who was running church like she or he thought Jesus would've run it, just a few years after he left town and became more of a spirit than a body to us....

Let me stop again. This is our church. Not mine. Not even really ours, in fact. It's the Lord's house .... It's mystical ... after all these years practicing, I can't say it as well as you, guessing out loud in this time and place .... Truth is coming into our space .... Owning up ... Blessing one another ... Thinking out loud ... Not my telling you how to think, or believe ... letting you see a little about how I put things together, but not too clear, because I'm not clear more than you ...

I had a friend tell me, "Don't tell them what they should believe. Let them hear you asking questions.

Preach to me. Tell me the truth.

Truth.

Jesus. Amen.