



Questions from Jesus' Final Week

“What Is Truth?”

John 18:33-38 | March 18, 2018

Introduction: In our journey together this Lenten season we have considered questions that arise from Jesus' final week before his passion. This week's question concerns the conversation between Jesus and Pilate, the Roman Governor.

In the course of their brief dialogue, Jesus states his purpose: “I have come into the world to bear witness to the truth.” Then he says, “Everyone who is of the truth listens to me.” Pilate, in keeping with the despot ruler code of getting the last word, asks rhetorically, “What is truth?” A powerful question. Our texts gives us no indication that Pilate long contemplated it, yet the apostle John brings this question to us as the drama of Jesus' trial nears its climax.

John has brought his reader on a journey of reflection, beginning with the unprecedented announcement that “the Word (of God) became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth” (1:14). John wants his reader to remember Jesus' radical teaching that people can know and be set free by the truth (3:32), that his followers will be sanctified, or set apart, by the truth (17:17-19, and finally Jesus names himself as “the way, the truth, and the life” (14:6).

When Pilate asks his flippant, dismissive question, the answer is literally staring him in the face!

It's radical to think that something like truth could be as concrete as a person, but that is exactly the claim by which we are confronted in Jesus. Truth is not a thing that can be learned and mastered, it's not a thing to be utilized and wielded, not a thing to be made subject even to the most noble of ambitions. No, truth is not that sort of thing at all.

Truth isn't an object to be owned, but a person to be known. And because truth is a person, our vocabulary around truth transforms from the objective to the personal. As a person, truth becomes gentle, compelling, enigmatic, beautiful, ironic, loving, graceful, and faithful in the ways only a known person might be any of these things.

What's more, truth is not just a person, but is the one truly human person; the only begotten of the father; the second Adam in whom the human *telos* is uniquely and supremely disclosed. Truth is God, the creator, worthy of worship and service. If that's who truth is, then when you come face to face with Him there are only two choices. Serve him or kill him. With Jesus there simply is no third way. And in that way we are with Pilate, deciding what to do with truth.

Pray: Almighty God, like Pilate we see you in your humility and easily imagine that we have some power over you. We forget that you endure this cross for the joy set before you. Somehow it is for this very hour that you have come. You broadcast the interconnected relationship of suffering and glory, or joy and righteousness. Deliver us from the accrual of religious facts. By your grace, allow us to grow in intimacy with you who are truth. AMEN.

Read: John 18:33-38

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Discussion:

1. Read John 1:17 – What does it mean that truth came through Jesus? Before Jesus, what was truth?
2. What is the relationship between grace and truth? What does it mean that Jesus is the one in whom grace and truth come?
3. Read John 5:33 – In what way is John a witness to the truth? What does it mean for you and me to be a witness to the truth? How is this witness deeper than facts about Jesus?
4. Read John 16:13 – What does it mean to be guided into truth? Consider your own journey with God. Would you say that you found the truth, or that the truth found you? What's the difference?
5. Read John 18:37 – Jesus identifies those who listen to his voice as those who are “of the truth.” What do you think it means to be of the truth?
6. When have you heard God's voice? What does his voice sound like for you?

Application: Imagine that you are contacted by a reporter that is putting together an investigative biography of Jesus of Nazareth. This reporter seeks to eliminate hearsay and all second-hand accounts, and wants you to give your own account of Jesus' words and actions. Ask the Holy Spirit to recall to your mind the times you have seen Jesus at work and heard his voice, recording your own eye witness account.

Pray: Lord Jesus, you came as truth to bear witness to the truth. You have made God visible and vulnerable, humble and authoritative. Let us find truth in you. Open our hearts to a deeper and more intimate encounter with truth, that is, with you. Make us witnesses. Allow us to speak as only eye witnesses can about your redemptive presence in the world. AMEN.