

“You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

In one of the most stunning moments in the life of Jesus, he stands before his judge Pontius Pilate who asks him, “What is truth?” “You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” But “What is truth?”

Jesus is a nobody from a nowhere town in rural Palestine. He owns nothing, he hangs around with nothing people. He may once have earned his living working alongside his father as a carpenter but during the years of his ministry we see him DO nothing we’d call work. He eats often. He celebrates weddings, he mourns at funerals. He goes along with others as **they** work fishing.

He walks all over the countryside and he talks. He speaks. **That** is his work. He brings a new reality into being by speaking.

The first few lines of the Gospel of John are the lens through which we hear everything John has to say. It says, “In the beginning was the Word  
 and the Word was with God  
 and the Word was God.

<sup>2</sup> The Word was with God in the beginning.

<sup>3</sup> Everything came into being through the Word,  
 and without the Word  
 nothing came into being.

What came into being

<sup>4</sup> through the Word was life,  
 and the life was the light for all people.

<sup>5</sup> The light shines in the darkness,  
 and the darkness doesn’t extinguish the light.

Jesus speaks peace and he speaks healing. He speaks resurrection from death to new life and he speaks forgiveness. Jesus speaks and the words he speaks **are** truth that change the world.

Now this “Word, this nobody Jesus is such a threat to the political authorities that this judge, Pontius Pilate will sentence him to death for the crime of speaking truth into the world. “You will know the truth, and the truth will set you **free.**”

Pilate recognizes the threat that truth always is.

If people know they are free they can’t be manipulated. If people know they are free they won’t be controlled by fear. If people know they are free they don’t need to worry or hoard anything, not money, not food or acclaim; not good works or pride. If people know they are free they will be free to love each other, to love God and love their neighbor. If people know they are free the whole pyramid of power, and control, of hierarchy and racism and all the isms, it all collapses.

Pontius Pilate and those clinging to power in all times, recognize the danger in the truth that we are free. And so they try to undermine the impact of that truth saying, “What is truth?”

They say, “You can’t trust that source. It’s fake news. It’s not **my** truth.”

The Reformation spoke truth into such a time. Luther sparked the Reformation in 1517 when he nailed 95 statements to a door. 95 statements full of words proclaiming the truth that God’s love was not for sale; that the church had gone astray and was misleading people. Luther wanted his beloved church to remember the truth it had forgotten; the truth that leads to freedom; the truth that can not be bought or sold or earned or lost. That pearl of great price that is worth selling everything for.

But that truth, the truth of **that freedom** is dangerous. It’s threatening to those with power who want to manipulate us. It’s true in every time and in every place. Which is why the church must be ALWAYS reforming. Always returning to the truth of Grace alone, Faith alone, Word alone, the motto of the Reformation. We are saved by grace alone through faith alone and this is known through the Word alone.

This is the saving truth that changed Martin Luther’s life and began a reforming movement within the Christian church: that no human being is made right with God by being good or following the rules, but that we **are** good and acceptable and worthy of being loved **because God said so**. God’s opinion on the subject of you and your worthiness has been made crystal clear on the cross, once and for all. Jesus, Son of God, suffered with us and for us on the cross, and through this great love we have been clothed in Christ’s own righteousness and have been reconciled with God. Amen! Thanks be to God.

This amazing grace is the foundation of our faith. But it’s **so amazing** we can hardly believe it. God’s gift of grace is so beautiful, so expansive and lifegiving that we spend our lives making up rules, laws, excuses and exceptions to explain it away.

It is God’s pure promise that should set us free but it pinches us. In confirmation we talked a lot about “pinch and promise”; the difference between law and gospel; between the gift of the truth that God gives us to guide us, “the law” that pinches us so that we can receive the promise – Grace that God wants us to live in. And we talked a lot about how they can sound the same sometimes. God’s grace is free gift but it pinches because we don’t think we are worthy or at least not worthy **enough**. Or we think we’re worthy but maybe not our neighbors. We are suspicious of free gifts because we believe “you get what you pay for.”

God’s grace is so counter to our tendency to earn our way in the world that we can’t believe it. It pinches us. And so we return time and time again to hear the **promise**, the truth of God’s grace freely given here in Words, in bread and wine, in the open acceptance of everyone regardless of any distinctions

Robert Capon writes, “Grace is something you can never get but can only be given. There’s no way to earn it or deserve it or bring it about any more than you can deserve the taste of

raspberries and cream or earn good looks or bring about your own birth...A crucial eccentricity of the Christian faith is the assertion that people are saved by grace. There's nothing you have to do. There's nothing you **have** to do. There's nothing you have to **do**.

The grace of God means something like: Here is your life. You might never have been, but you are because the party wouldn't have been complete without you. Here is the world. Beautiful and terrible things will happen. Don't be afraid. I am with you. Nothing can ever separate us. It's for you I created the universe. I love you. There's only one catch. Like any other gift the gift of grace can be yours only if you'll reach out and take it. Maybe being able to reach out and take it is a gift too."<sup>1</sup>

May you live in the truth that God has already given you everything you need to be free. May this love of God in Christ Jesus continue to free us, and to reform our lives and our churches **for the sake of our neighbors**.

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Farrar Capon in *Wishful Thinking*