



“Let your word be ‘Yes, Yes’ or ‘No, No’, anything more than this comes from the evil one” (Matthew 5:37).

On Saturday, September 1, 1928, in Newtonville, Massachusetts, Bruce Stewart and Dorothy Leighton made the most sacred of vows to each other as they entered into the covenant of marriage. I am certain that on that day, my grandfather was aware of the seriousness of his vow “to join with Dorothy and share all that is to come.” I am certain he knew that at times it would be challenging to live in an intimate relationship with another person, having to iron out differences through endless compromise and acts of empathy. What I am certain he was not prepared for, however, were the last fifteen years of his dear wife’s life when “all that is to come” meant an exhausting journey into chronic illness rendering Dorothy nearly bed-ridden while slowly taking her life.

For 15 years, my grandfather never left her side. He was not only her caretaker, attending to all of her needs, but he was her lifeline, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. In all of those years, never once did I hear my grandfather complain about his “job.” He just did what he did because he loved her and he had made a sacred vow to her 55 years earlier. There was no way of knowing how much that vow would cost the day it was made to my grandmother. Still, my grandfather kept it faithfully.

People of faith know that a promise made in the presence of God is not a thing to be taken lightly. If you don’t believe me, listen to the words of the psalmist.

“O Lord, who may abide in your tent? Who may dwell on your holy hill? Those who walk blamelessly, and do what is right, and speak the truth from their heart; who do not slander with their tongue...who stand by their oath even to their hurt” (Psalm 15:1-4).

I don't know about you, but I'm not seeing a lot of truth-telling in our world today. I'm not seeing much in the way of promises kept. It seems that all we hear are stories of oaths taken and oaths broken; promises made and promises broken. For a variety of reasons, far vaster than can be discussed here, truthfulness has become a rare commodity in our world. Words have been trivialized and weaponized, whether spoken or tweeted. Words have been uttered as if God isn't present or worse, as if God doesn't matter. As a person of faith who not only loves his God, but loves his country, this reality breaks my heart.

In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus describes the shape of life lived in community where repentance, forgiveness, and love take center stage; where life is defined not by vengeance, animosity and lies but by blessing and truth. Even the writer of Ephesians reminds us that within the body of Christ, we are to *"put away falsehood...speaking truth to our neighbor, for we are members one of another"* (Ephesians 4:25).

Put another way, every word that comes out of our mouths should speak truth. Every syllable formed on our lips should be spoken as though in the presence of God – because they are.

Despite the apologists who justify the speaking of lies by claiming that "truth isn't truth", you and I know better. We know that truth is worth whatever price must be paid. We know this because the God who has claimed us and named us in the waters of baptism is the same God who paid the ultimate price for truth in the cross of his Son. St. Augustine once said that all truth is grounded in God and therefore all truth is holy. If that's the case, then we have no choice but to believe that truth matters; that oaths matter; that vows matter.

My grandfather was not the most religious of people. But his life, grounded in the selfless reality of promises made and promises kept, has communicated more to me the reality of God than my entire library of theology books. His life, grounded in truth-telling and his belief that the keeping of promises is a sacred duty at whatever the cost, has profoundly shaped my life. For the gift of that life-lesson, especially in these times, I will forever be grateful.

Peace and Love,
Pastor Doug