

We belong to the Truth

By Elizabeth A. Eaton



“Let your word be ‘Yes, Yes’ or ‘No, No’” (Matthew 5:37).

When I was a girl, dinner table discussions in our family were lively. We could state our position on an issue, but then we had to be ready to back up our argument with facts. In that

pre-Google time, the *World Book Encyclopedia* was often our source. Out came the dark blue volumes. Their very weight and color brought gravitas. One’s presentation could be critiqued, but not the facts—they were printed in the *World Book Encyclopedia* after all!

Those were simpler times, or maybe I was just more naïve. Now we live in the era of “truthiness” and “fake news” and “alternative facts.” One prominent attorney declared in an interview: “Truth is not truth.” I was stunned when I heard that, but even more stunned when I realized he had a point.

We have weaponized facts and forced truth into the service of spin. Often conversations are no longer the exchange of ideas and convictions but barrages of accusations. It is not enough to let our word be “yes, yes” or “no, no.” Now we need to shade and embellish and selectively “factify” our position. And if that doesn’t work, then shout or use ALL CAPS.

Jesus and Pilate have an interesting exchange about truth in the Gospel of John. “[Jesus said]: ‘For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.’ Pilate asked him, ‘What is truth?’” (John 18:37-38). A remarkable claim by Jesus and an interesting reply by Pilate. I wonder, was Pilate earnestly seeking for truth or was he cynically dismissing the existence of truth? Are we, followers of Jesus, able to listen to Jesus’ voice?

So how do we live as people of Truth in a time of spin? We need to return daily to the new creation God made us when we were baptized. Our new life in Christ is our foundation and our horizon, our

beginning and our end. An ancient Celtic blessing puts it this way: “God to enfold me, God to surround me, God in my speaking, God in my thinking.”

In baptism God has claimed us as beloved children joined to the death and resurrection of Christ, sealed by the Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever. Baptism makes a difference and makes us different. We now belong to the Truth. That doesn’t mean we have the Truth or even know everything about truth. The Truth doesn’t belong to us. No, by God’s gracious act we belong to the Truth. We don’t make truth claims—Truth claims us.

How then do we live? In deep humility, profound gratitude and real joy.

Humility: It is God’s good and gracious favor to be merciful to all, even, and perhaps especially, to those with whom we fervently disagree. This is the severe mercy of grace—no one, not even those we determine are beyond the pale, is beyond the reach of God.

Gratitude: God claims us. We are not our own and we are not alone. Paul wrote: “For while we were still weak ... for if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son” (Romans 5:6-10). The deep human struggle for worth and meaning is over. We are the beloved of the Most High, thanks be to God.

Joy: Dear church, we are free! Free to love, free to serve, free to listen, free to be challenged. We can “lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely and ... run with perseverance the race that is set before us” (Hebrews 12:1).

Here is my prayer: There is a lot of noise in this world, gracious God, including our own that lays claim to the truth. Bring us to a place of stillness where we can listen to you. Your truth has claimed us and set us free. Amen. 

A monthly message from the presiding bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Her email address: bishop@elca.org.

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