

After much discussion, debate, and research, the Oxford Dictionaries Word of the Year 2016 is *post-truth* – an adjective defined as ‘relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief’. The Donald Trump regime has, in its short life, become famous for issuing statements which are blatantly false, calling them truth – and issuing what they call “alternative facts.” They give statements designed to ignite peoples’ passions, caring not for the consequences of spreading lies and misinformation.

Contrary to the ways of Donald Trump, our readings teach us the way of Christ. Today, we get a lesson in Truth.

In the reading from Isaiah, the Israelites are outwardly doing everything according to God's will – to an outsider, they seem prim and proper, praying and fasting and sacrificing, all is neat and orderly. They come before God – and are confounded by a lack of response from God.

To God, they are in deep rebellion. Though they are religiously following his dictates, they are also practicing evil – they are harming those around them. Their religious practices are to impress themselves and their neighbours, not approach God. They compete with each other, take advantage of others and ignore the plight of those in need. They are not following God's ways, rather, they are acting – they are pretending – they are performing to impress. Their worship is not truthful – it is a lie.

God's ways are ways of life, not ways of performing.

We can “play at Christianity”, having our rituals, self-sacrifices, and fights over how pious and great we are – or we can truly follow Christ in loving our neighbour, loving our family, caring for those in need. Loving is a precondition to God paying attention, not rituals and behaving properly and doing things in a correct and accurate way. The rituals are a means to an end, not an end unto themselves. They are to help us follow in our Fathers' ways, not give us an excuse to avoid them.

The Psalm reinforces the behaviour that God is looking for: Happy are those who walk with Jesus, who delight in His ways: they are gracious, merciful, righteous, they deal generously, give to those in need, and are just.

They are rich and secure – not worldly wealth like the 'prosperity gospel' people would tell you, but heavenly wealth and security – they are rich in the ways of God.

Which leads us to the people of Corinth. Oh, those Corinthians! How like our society they must have been. Paul fears the Corinthians have completely misunderstood the gospel. Full of their own gifts and accomplishments, they are behaving like people who think they can save themselves by their own efforts, their rituals, their piety. They need to remember their salvation is via Jesus death on the cross, a **defeat** according to worldly standards. From this defeat comes the complete transformation of reality and history. We must humbly rely on the spirit and have the cross at the centre of our life. Pursue God's wisdom, the wisdom of love and self-sacrifice and caring and kind-heartedness, not the wisdom of 'success'. Pursue the cross – in fact, carry our cross in Truth.

Paul had the cross at the centre of his life. As he told the people of Corinth:

“I did not come proclaiming the mystery of God to you in lofty words or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified. I came to you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling.”

Paul was scared when he came to Corinth. He did not know how he would be received. As Paul tells the Corinthians in his second letter to them: “Five times I received forty lashes less one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from

robbers, danger from my own people, danger from unbelievers, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, cold and exposed.”

He fully realized that one of these trips could lead to his death – in fact, the one he took to Rome did. He continued on despite that expectation – he carried his cross, his possible death, with him and persevered.

Paul took Jesus' message to heart: “You are the salt of the earth; You are the light of the world. Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.”

In these readings, we are being taught today about three inter-related aspects of discipleship, of walking with Jesus. They converge upon the concept of living with integrity: living in Truth. They challenge **us** to take Jesus' words to heart, just like Paul did.

The first aspect is regarding our worship and spiritual disciplines. Our disciplines are valuable IF they lead us to walking with God. They are meaningless if we walk our own way regardless. They are not an end unto themselves – they are a method to walk towards God. What we say we believe, what we pray, how we talk, needs to be reflected in our actions – else, we are hypocrites.

The second aspect is proclaiming the truth. Paul shared that he was terrified – yet he went to Corinth, and told them the message of the cross – that God wants to reconcile the world to Himself, that His original blue-print had humanity walking with Him in community, and that He is working to re-establish that – and He comes in this time-where-lots-is-very-wrong, and rescues us from it through His death and resurrection, and heals us, and Jesus is still working with our loving Father to bring this about – Paul shared this message with them, and many were baptised and turned to Jesus. Just as Paul shared this message, if we truly believe Jesus, if we truly accept our identity, we are to be Images of God not only here for this hour, not only in the privacy of our homes, but everywhere, all the time. This means, like Paul, being scared and sharing the good news anyway. It means loving others enough to walk with them and share the love of Christ with them. It means loving them enough to be gracious, merciful, righteous, deal generously, giving to those in need, being just. It means depending on the Holy Spirit to guide us in how to care, how to love, and though we may be scared, reaching out in faith – not faith that we will be successful, or that we won't be hurt – but faith that, in Christ, we are doing the right thing. We carry our cross with us.

You have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit that is from God, so that you may understand the gifts bestowed on you by God. Accordingly, by the spirit, you will speak words of love out of the mind of Christ.

Jesus said:

“You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot.

“You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.”

The third aspect of living with integrity is to pursue God's ways. Jesus said: “I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.” Let us have our righteousness be not a ritual righteousness, but a righteousness of love. A righteousness beyond the requirements of the law, to the hearts of people in need.

Jesus goes beyond the Scribes and Pharisees, beyond the Old Testament law. The law says “don't kill”; Jesus says “don't hate.” They say “don't have extramarital sex”; Jesus says “don't lust”. They say “tell the truth when you give an oath”; Jesus says “tell the truth period.”

Through Isaiah, God said:

I want you to:

- stop injustice,
- end exploitation,
- let the oppressed go free, and
- to break what binds people.

I want you to:

- share your bread with the hungry, and
- bring the homeless poor into your house;
- when you see the naked, to cover them,
- and not to hide yourself from your own flesh

Then your light shall break forth like the dawn,
and your healing shall spring up quickly;

God will surround you.

Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer;
you shall cry for help, and He will say, **Here I am.**

If you stop being evil, but
live in love,
you will be light.

The LORD will guide you continually, and
you shall be called the one who knows the way to live.

Worship in Truth.
Proclaim the Truth, carrying your cross.
Pursue God in Truth.

We are the people of truth.

As Paul found when he met Jesus, all of this depends on us meeting Jesus and giving our life over to Him. Jesus said “I am the Way, the Truth – and the Life.”

He is our salvation. Amen.