

THE PRESERVATION OF THE TRUTH: The Fifth Great End of the Church

“What is truth?”

Do you know who asked that question? It was Pontius Pilate, on Good Friday, as he stood in judgment of Jesus. It seems appropriate that as we approach Holy Week, and as our study of the Great Ends of the Church winds down, that we look ahead a bit, and see Pilate standing on the balcony, washing his hands of the blood of this innocent man whom he has turned over to the crowd which is crying, “Crucify him! Crucify him!”

But before that, in his interrogation of Jesus, Pilate had asked Him, “So you are a king?” Jesus replied, “You say that I am a king. 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.” Then Pilate asked Jesus, perhaps rhetorically, “What is truth?”

We live in a day and age when truth is easily distorted. Don't think so? Turn on your television set.

Watch a few commercials. Listen to the claims for some of the products advertised. Particularly the diet products, and the exercise equipment. If that stuff worked, we'd have a nation of thin, fit, people. Instead, obesity is our new national ailment, and it even affects our children.

Think you know the truth? Turn the channel to a news broadcast. Start with FOX, then go to CNN, then Aljazeera, then BBC. Is it the same truth? Is the truth the same?

When we go into a court of law, we place a hand upon the Bible and we are asked to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. As though there were a difference. Well of course there is. Sometimes we hide the truth to protect the feelings of others.

How many times have we said, “You look great!” when what we really wanted to say was, “What is wrong with you? And did you buy that outfit at a yard sale at the Beverly Hillbillies?”

How many times have we said, “I'm fine” when we were hurting, sick, sad, at our wits end?

In the light of that, if the church is supposed to preserve the truth, what is the truth we must preserve?

Well, early in John's gospel, he writes: “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us full of grace and truth.” (1:14)

A little later, John wrote: “grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.” (1:17)

Jesus Himself said, “If you abide in my word, and you are truly my disciples, you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” (John 8:31-32)

By the way, "Know the truth, and the truth will set you free" is the motto of the university where I did my undergraduate work, which was actually founded by a Presbyterian minister.

In His great high priestly prayer, in the Garden of Gethsemane on the night in which He was betrayed, Jesus prayed to His Father, saying, "For I have given them the words that you gave me, and they have received them and come to know the truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me." (John 17:8)

That is the Truth: that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, sent into the world to be the savior of sinners.

When He was preparing to leave His disciples, Jesus said to them, "Let not your hearts be troubled, you believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many dwelling places. If it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you, and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will receive you unto myself." Thomas asked Him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?"

Jesus answered Him with these words: "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father but by me." (John 14:1-6)

That is the truth we are called to preserve: that Jesus is the Son of God, and that He is the way, the truth and the life, and that no one comes to the Father except through Him.

In a world where there are plenty of people who believe in a universalist doctrine that everyone is going to heaven when they die, in a world in which people are following all kinds of religions looking for the truth, that is the truth we must preserve.