

Sunday, May 5, 2013
Rev. Diane Monti-Catania

Sermon – “The Way and the Truth and the Life”

I know that the introductory list of virtues and values that I presented two weeks ago was somewhat daunting. I asked you to think about your own values and what was most important to you. I hope that you have had a chance to do that.

Last week, with Reverend Epperson, you explored compassion.

I gave considerable thought to which value to start with today. Initially, I thought that love must be first as the root of all actions.

But the more I thought about it, the clearer it became that first we needed to look at Truth.

Love, without truth, would be less than genuine, but nothing can exist – no virtue, without truth.

While *truth* itself is not often listed as a specific value, I believe that it is the foundation on which our value systems are built.

The word truth in biblical writing means constant, permanent, faithful and reliable. The Greek word for truth is primarily intellectual – truth is something to be known. For the Hebrews, truth was moral and relational, rather than intellectual. For Paul, truth was something to be obeyed – its opposite was malice and evil.

The dictionary tells us that truth is the state or character of being true;

and that true means *real; genuine; authentic* like true gold; true feelings.

This definition works perfectly for our study on values.

Progress toward the goal of establishing a virtuous life, or living our values, begins with the ability to be real – to be genuine – to be authentic.

Oftimes, in our society, we act in a way that we believe is expected – only to feel uncomfortable – less than genuine.

It is only when we can act from our core – from our true self – that our actions can truly reflect God’s love.

This is not an easy thing to do.

It is as if we are covered with layer upon layer of experiences and interpretations that distance us from our genuine selves.

We must peel away these layers to find who we are and what we believe.

Sometimes we believe that we can change ourselves simply by changing our thinking.

While there is some truth to this, more and more research indicates that, when it comes to decision-making, it's not our minds that are in control so much as our hearts.

Our lives are shaped by the desires of our hearts which drive us toward whatever we believe will give us a good life, or happiness.

The problem is that our hearts are not very good at choosing what brings life.

The French philosopher Foucault argued that "Truth is a thing of this world produced only by multiple forms of constraint and that includes the regular effects of power."

We easily fall prey to the attractions of things that promise fulfillment or power, but ultimately disappoint.

I believe, however, that much of our unconscious motivation in life is a striving toward oneness with God.

What we need is a vision of a life that is truly good, and we need that vision to capture our hearts so that it becomes the driving force in our lives.

One author suggested that the only vision that can meet these requirements is the Reign of God, a world ruled by God.

This is the vision of life that was preached and lived by Jesus – a life of selfless love, compassionate grace, challenging justice and forgiving peace.

Those who have given themselves to this vision are unanimous in their claims that God's Reign leads to a life that is truly and thoroughly good. When we let God rule our lives we move into a way of living that is true.

So, how do we turn control of our lives over to God? How do we find our true selves? One way is through worship.

As we gather each week, our music, prayers, liturgies, symbols, sacraments and rituals all speak to us of a different reality - a way of being that is not driven by the quest for power, wealth or instant gratification of our appetites, but is shaped by love, grace, peace and justice.

As we allow this vision to fill our hearts and minds, we begin to recognize that God's Reign really is the source of the abundant life that Jesus promised – not just for us, but for all.

We start to see that surrendering to God – allowing God to rule our lives changes everything. We find that the goodness reaches beyond us as individuals into our families, communities and even the world.

The words and actions that we use in our worship become the vocabulary and habits of our daily lives, teaching us to live as true citizens of God's Realm.

All that is required is that we continue to speak and act in every moment the same way we do in our worship, directing our words and acts toward people the same way we direct them to God in Church.

Think of this. You would likely never act in a hostile or demeaning way to someone in worship. So why would you do that outside of here?

My friends, we come here to learn and to practice being followers of Jesus Christ.

But to do live the truth that Jesus preaches we must take these lessons out into the world.

Jesus speaks of truth repeatedly in scripture. It is the term he uses over and over again to describe the life of a believer.

Again, from John's gospel: *Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, "If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free."*

OK, so if we know the truth and the truth will set us free – we share Pilot's question: What is truth?

Perhaps the challenge in answering this question is that it is too broad. Perhaps it is a concept that needs to be explored individually, before we can pursue it communally. What is your truth?

Who is the real, genuine, authentic you?

Peel away those layers and get to the core of who you are, and then we can come together in community and be the body of Christ. We can learn to live by our values of selfless love, compassionate grace, challenging justice and forgiving peace.

True self is a gem discovered by your own exploration but cultivated and transformed in community. Only when you dare to meet the challenges of living in a world that is full of people who are different than you are and where things do not always go your way, do you come to that glorious place of freedom.

This is the truth that Jesus describes. This is the freedom that Jesus promises.

This is what we are working toward together.

Freedom – from fear and uncertainty.

Freedom – from anxiety and judgement.

Freedom – to live lives motivated by and controlled by God's abiding presence.

Jesus said – The kingdom of God draws near.

It is here. There is no need to wait to enter God's kingdom – it is not a future – an after-death experience.

You can live it now.

Peel away your layers – journey to your core.

Dare to be the person that God created you to be.

Live that truth boldly. Live your truth without apology.

Be the answer to Pilot's question.

We know the way – let's follow it.