

What is truth? These three words form the missing line from our gospel story today. They are the very next words that come out of Pilate's mouth after Jesus explains his entire purpose to Pilate. Jesus says, "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." Well, this week I found myself asking Jesus, right along with Pilate, "Jesus, what is truth?" Because certainly I want to belong to the truth. And I want to know the truth. And I'm quite aware, like all of us, that truth itself is becoming increasingly difficult to discern in our world. I want to ask Jesus, what is truth in a post-truth world, in a world of fake news and disinformation, alternative facts, and of course my favorite, truthiness? What can we count on reliably as truth with a capital T today? A lot of people claim to know, but do they?

In 2016, the Oxford Dictionary proclaimed that the word of the year was post-truth. And its use has only increased in frequency since then. And let me say outright that all of us and people on the left and the right contribute to what we call post-truth. But let's unpack this for a moment. You can probably relate to the comic I saw recently that showed contestants on a stage for a game called The Facts Don't Matter. It looked like the jeopardy stage. The caption underneath was the game host saying, "I'm sorry, Jeanie. Your answer was correct, but Kevin shouted his incorrect answer over yours. So, he gets the points." The comment gets at one of the many problems we're facing today when it comes to the challenge of discovering and discerning the truth. In this example, it's the problem that those who shout, who are the loudest and the most pervasive voices are the ones who are heard and believed.

Another problem we have is that we too often exchange truth for cultural relativism in which feelings or simply personal perspectives and beliefs become the arbiters of reality. It's the doctrine that replaces, "I think, therefore I am," with, "I believe, therefore I am right." And that's, I think, related to the concept of truthiness in which something is true because it feels true or is conveyed in a way that makes us feel like it's true.

There's also the problem related to the censoring of ideas because they're not culturally sensitive enough, popularly referred to as a cancel culture. This means that if what someone has to say is considered too insensitive, it will be censored, and the backlash will be severe so much so that unpopular truth may not be voiced at all anymore. In politics, we know it's not new for politicians on all sides to lie and massage the facts, but when the media is complicit in spreading the lies as facts, particularly in our hyper partisan culture, then lies and the culture of post-truth are given much broader platform and even have a global reach so much so that fact-checking itself is under fire and considered partisan.

And then we have the problem of just too much information making it hard to find and discern the truth. And that stinks in large part to the internet. On the internet, any opinion under heaven can be posted and shared and made to appear true. You can literally Google any concept, no matter how outlandish like the Earth is flat, and you'll find websites and videos with authoritative sounding proofs to backup and confirm the notion. And social media is a fast and effective way to spread disinformation. And the social media sites like Facebook actually we know make money off of disinformation and divisive content. A recent study actually found that young Americans have a really hard time discerning between legitimate news and fake news sites. Finally, today we have entire media networks set up just to drive a particular narrative regardless of the truth or veracity of their content, which not only drives up their profits, but gives them incredible power to benefit from lies.

And so, the list goes, right? And if you're like me, this list, this problem of post-truth culture makes you feel pretty anxious. We're in trouble, aren't we? We really are. This is a serious issue. So what are we to do as followers of Jesus? How do we respond given our current context? Well, I have five suggestions based on scripture. First one, number one, we need to let go of fear by grounding ourselves in faith and renew our trust in God. Today is Christ the King Sunday. Today is a reminder that our lives and our world do not ultimately rest in the hands of fallible humans but in God. It is God's kingdom that we ultimately belong. This fallen

world will pass away, but the kingdom of God stands forever. So, take hope.

Number two, we need to remember whose voice we're called to listen to. Scripture calls Satan the deceiver and the father of lies in contrast to Jesus, whose purpose is to testify to the truth. Jesus tells us in John 8 that the devil does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. But we read today in John 18 that those who belong to the truth listen to Jesus' voice. The voice of Jesus will never lead us astray. And the book of Revelation ultimately tells us that all lies, evil, and even death itself will be done away with forever by the power of God in Christ.

Number three, shut out and shut off, or at least curb the time spent in social media outlets, social media sites, all the different avenues, the media outlets, the avenues that we know disinformation is likely to be promulgated. We all know the likely culprits on all sides of this. They're usually overtly partisan. Why as followers of Jesus should we spend time or money boosting these kinds of corporate and partisan interests? Why should we do that? We probably need to remove ourselves from this playground, I'd call it a playground of lies, which today is less about physical location than digital, visual, and electronic ones.

Number four, it is more important than ever then to ground ourselves in the words of scripture and the gospels themselves. One way to sharpen our discernment of truth in the world is to be immersed in the words of ultimate truth found in the Bible. When we spend time in prayer listening for the voice of God, the Holy Spirit, when we read God's words, our spirits become more attuned with God's truth.

Next Sunday, we're going to begin the season of Advent, a time we as Christians have set aside for hundreds of years to prepare our hearts and minds for the coming of Jesus, which we celebrate at Christmas. And so I invite all of us to take on the daily practice of reading the Bible and spending time in prayer. Put it in your schedule. Choose a book of the Bible or a devotional online or in book form. Open up your copy of the Book of Common Prayer. Just pick something and find your mind renewed by this practice.

Last one, number five, finally, pick up the Bible. Jesus tells us in John 14 this, "I am the way, the truth, and the life." For us as Christians, the most important thing we can do then in this fifth step is to just recommit ourselves to follow the footsteps of Jesus. It's commitment to what he did, to what he said, to love the way he did, to serve the way he did. What is truth? What is truth in a post-truth world? It's the same truth today that it was 2,000 years ago when this question was posed to Jesus. On this Christ the King Sunday, know that Jesus points us to the truth. His life, his words, and witness to God's kingdom stand above and beyond the lies of our fallen world. And his kingdom stands forever, and it will never be shaken. Amen.