

Welcome

Announcements: Thanks to video photographer Fred Dudderar. Thanks to Pilgrim Ministers Jenny, Matt and Andrea. They have all done hard and excellent work on these services. Here is some good news about Andrea! She completed her ministry education and our bishop has just fully authorized her as a lay minister. Congratulations Andrea!

Opening Prayer Stir us to desire the good you promise. Give us courage to follow Christ's ways to it. We pray as we live, in his name, Amen.

Scripture:

John 1: 1-3 These verses refer to Christ's presence in all life, from the beginning of creation until now.

"In the beginning was the Word, or 'Christ'. And the Word, Christ, was with God.

And the Word Christ was God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being."

Then this is from John 8:32. Christ says here that his presence, rooted in creation's foundations, shows up in everyday ways. True freedom emerges as we do the kinds of everyday things Christ did for and with people. He said, "I am the way the way the truth and the life. In me you know the truth. And the truth will set you free."

And in John 17 Jesus said this to God in a prayer for his followers. "Bless them with truth. Just as you, God, sent me into the world to live blessed truth, I now send them to live."

Sermon

Let's talk about truth. One spring day in 1985 I drove to make one of many visits to a dying church member. I normally put my hand on a dying person's arm for a few moments, and say a prayer and a blessing.

But the nurses warned me to stand far back from this patient. I had to triple gown before entering his room, and wear a face mask and latex gloves. He had a new, vicious virus. No cure existed. No treatments existed to manage it. Speculation ran wild about how it could infect people. It was AIDS. Every visit scared me. Would I catch it? Would I spread it?

While driving to the hospital that day an interview with Dr. Michael Osterholm came on the radio. He was the Chief Acute Disease Epidemiologist in the Minnesota Department of Health. In the interview he clearly explained what he knew about AIDS. That is, he relentlessly, yet calmly spoke awful truth. Dr. Osterholm spoke the awful truth that the virus would keep killing people until there was a vaccine or at least a treatment. He spoke the truth that it would kill even though some scared, impatient people claimed the worst was behind us. He also spoke this awful truth: He said that because even people like him didn't yet know very much about AIDS, it was still in control. We were not.

Then encouragingly, he also spoke truth about the known things we could do back then to protect ourselves and each other. He did not give opinions and wishful thinking. He spoke only known facts.

In carefully speaking these tested truths about AIDS, Dr. Osterholm also, silently, yet eloquently spoke foundational truths of creation itself. For example, his words made

clear the unavoidable, foundational truth that random evil is present in creation. It sometimes causes things to go badly wrong. Then, innocent suffering happens. He exposed the truth that in dark times our fervent hopes for healing can mutate into blind opinions and behaviors that do nothing to help. He called out the foundational truth that we cause worse suffering if we foolishly act as if the evil did not exist.

It is foundational truth that order and structure hold up all creation--and hold us. That truth runs all through John's Gospel. As you heard in the scripture readings, John Chapter 1 says that God is the ongoing source and foundation of everything that exists. It says we best understand God's foundational truth through God, when he became a human being, Jesus. We see creation's truth in Jesus and in following him. Then in John 8, referring to himself, Jesus said, "You know the truth, and the truth will make you free." And in John 17 when Jesus prayed for his disciples just before leaving them, he asked God to root them in foundational truth, so that it would keep on guiding and blessing, in them and through them.

In other words, Jesus' words and actions are rooted in Creation's underlying truth. And then, following him roots us in foundational truth that alone strengthens and blesses.

Now, as big as it is, foundational truth shows up in everyday facts. Sometimes they are hard. For example, right now these particular, hard, inescapable facts are rocking us: The virus is present. It is sickening and is killing people. It is hurting countless people in many other ways. It will take a long time to stop the virus. Our feelings and personal opinions have no effect on it. We cannot wish it away. The behavior of some people who act like the virus is gone or is not so bad will make it worse. Those hard, everyday facts are rooted in the foundational truth that random evil

will flare up in creation.

It is impossible for us to get away with ignoring foundational truth. It, like God's presence, is everywhere. So, for example, if we ignore truth about the virus, and instead follow our frustration, wishful thinking and ignorance, or if we follow the self-serving lies some people now spout, the truth is that we will cause longer and deeper suffering.

And get this! God, even GOD exists and moves within those hard truths. God did not create evil. But God himself did in fact suffer from it. It crucified him. If even God cannot always escape from the truth that evil and suffering exist, why would people, especially believers, even imagine they can always escape?

From that follows one more hard truth: When people insist on acting against creation's foundational truth not even God can help them.

I say once again that creation's foundational truth shows up in everyday facts. Sometimes these facts hurt us. And, sometimes they bless us. For example, blessed facts are evident in scientists who do know some specific, helpful things we can do now. You have heard and done the facts they tell us: For example, while we cannot yet stop the virus, we can hide from it. Hiding slows it, which protects ourselves and each other from its worst effects. We can also accept the blessed fact scientists tell us that stopping it will take a long time. Acceptance is blessed, because it makes it easier for us to find realistic, creative ways that fuel us with hope, strength and peace for the long road in front of us.

Jesus promised, "You know the truth, and the truth will make you free."

Our road to freedom from the virus follows good biological science, which itself is rooted in the truth of creation's foundational order.

Because Jesus never ignored creation's foundational truth, he proved himself to

be a deeply trustworthy guide, always worth following, and especially through a dangerous dark night. He did not tell self-serving lies. He did not collapse into saying whatever he thought people wanted to hear as a cheap way to make himself popular. He gained nothing for himself by telling truth. Rather, he told truth even when that meant upsetting people. He told truth even when he knew he would pay a price for it. As a result, he and his ways proved themselves and still endure, still able to set us free to be and do the good God works to give all people.

Sometimes anxiety about the threats we now face catches me. In fact, I was feeling anxious when I wrote my opening remarks about visiting the man dying from AIDS. Then this happened: Exactly when I was writing about being afraid in 1985, Dr. Michael Osterholm popped up on my computer. He hosted a Zoom for meeting for pastors about safely re-opening churches. He calmly, clearly explained how the virus spreads. He relentlessly spoke hard facts about unsafe ways to get together that will give the virus to us. He also factually described when and how to get together again in safe ways.

Nothing he said was about him. It was all about science rooted in foundational truth, presented as facts that help us now in everyday ways. That recent Zoom meeting was a repeat of the trustworthy guidance Michael Osterholm spoke on the radio in 1985! It helped me set a course for this long journey. Once again he helped me find calm in truth.

Foundational truth like that gives us so much more than just anxiously sitting around waiting for the virus to go away, when it in fact be with us for a long time. Truth can guide us to re-open with wisdom that lets us protect each other, rather than with the stupidity of going out like suicidal and murderous kamikaze pilots.

Truth, only truth, will let us plan and live with practical courage and mutual blessing for the long haul we are now in.

“You know the truth, and the truth will make you free.”

Prayers

Let us pray. Generous God, you have chosen us, and you do everything you can to stay with us, guide us and shelter us. Give us faith to trust that and in that faith give us courage to live boldly.

Gracious God, whose love and presence have no end, we know that life is beautiful and difficult, sometimes both at the same time. We ask that you support us and protect us through beauty and difficulty. Hold us in the truth that your love is for every last one. Send us out speaking words and doing deeds that bravely carry your truth, grace, and goodness.

We pray for local, regional and national leaders, that they follow only creation's foundational truth.

We pray for those whose daily work it is to heal. For nurses, doctors, all hospital workers, and for medical researchers.

We pray for people whose work threatens them while it sustains us. People who drive busses, make deliveries and work in grocery stores.

We pray that people who are re-opening their businesses and their customers are careful with themselves and with each other.

We pray for students who are ending their academic year, for teachers and for school staff members. Guide them. Bless their important work. Give leaders and citizens the will to energetically support the essential work of education.

Silent.

Trust the foundational truth of God which underlies all creation, and holds you. Find your way through all things by following Christ's command to care for each other. The Spirit's presence holds you up and strengthens you. Amen.

Music chosen by Sam.

Sam closes the service with the Lord's Prayer.