

What happens when you tell the truth? That depends, doesn't it? Sometimes the truth is welcomed; sometimes it isn't.

Can you think of a time when you were really upset with someone, because they had done something hurtful to you, and later, when the truth came out and you heard the full story, you realized that it was just a misunderstanding, not a deliberate harm? That is welcome truth. As we heard in last week's Gospel lesson, Jesus and the disciples went around telling people that God was near and offered healing and forgiveness—that was welcome truth. Many people responded joyfully and were restored.

On the other hand, many times people don't want to hear the truth and may even attack the messenger. While we don't know the exact cause of the horrific condominium collapse in Surfside, FL two weeks ago, deep structural issues came to light as long ago as 2018. Why were they not addressed? Who did not want to hear and act on the truth?

The Gospel passage today doesn't feel very full of good news. It's about the death of John the Baptist. But it serves as an important reminder about the place of truth when you are following God. John was a truth teller. He confronted Herod Antipas with the truth about his marriage to Herodias—it wasn't lawful under Jewish law. Herod's family was a mess—Herodias was the daughter of one of Herod's brothers, and she married her uncle Philip before having an affair with her uncle Herod and then marrying him. Her first husband Philip was still alive. Meanwhile, Herod had divorced his wife, which irked his former father in law, who launched a devastating war on Herod and his territory.

Fun stuff! John preaches repentance and right living. He denounces Herod for marrying Herodias, which is wrong on so many levels and causes harm to so many people. Clearly Herod is not following Jewish law or the will of God. Herod responded by having John arrested. He didn't want to hear the truth, and he didn't want John to spread the truth about him among the people. But while Herod was repelled by hearing the truth, he was also attracted to it. We are told that he saw John as a righteous and holy man, and that Herod protected him—apparently from the malice of Herodias, who had it in for John. Moreover, Herod liked to go and listen to John, for John was not afraid to speak the truth, something that very few people dared to do in the presence of this powerful and capricious man. There was something compelling about John's message, about the God that John offered, about the chance to live cleanly and in right relationship . . . maybe there was a chance that Herod's heart could have been changed?

But Herodias was looking for her chance. At Herod's birthday party, his daughter danced in a way that delighted him—we can infer that it was a sexualized dance—and Herod offers her anything she wishes. She consults with her mother, who asks for John's head on a platter—a new dish for a fancy banquet. And Herod can either protect the holy man and break his promise to his daughter, or else kill the prophet in order to “look good.” He knuckles under to social pressure and kills John, a man innocent of anything but telling the truth.

This story is a flashback; Herod now hears of the deeds that Jesus and his disciples were doing, and decides that this is John, raised from the dead. It must have struck terror into his heart. It serves here as a prefiguring of what is to come—Jesus will also be arrested and killed; Jesus will actually be raised from the dead. Coming on the heels of the successes that the disciples have had, healing and casting out demons, it is also a warning that be a conduit for God’s power and truth will have consequences. People will be healed; others will take offense and seek to harm or kill you.

It also offers us, perhaps, a measure to gauge how much we are being vessels for God’s truth. Are people being healed? Are evil spirits being cast out? And are people taking offense? I think these all go together. If we aren’t agents of healing and making people upset with us, then perhaps we’re not engaged with God’s truth as deeply as we ought to be.

There are many ways we are called to stand up and speak truth to power these days. And called to listen to the truth that others speak to us. As a nation, we must grapple with the embedded culture of racism that we are part of and profit from. It is difficult truth, but it is also truth that will allow us—all of us—to grow and heal and create a just society—welcome truth.

There is other truth that we desperately need to embrace and speak to power—and that is the truth of the climate crisis. In June, we had a three day heat wave of temperatures in the upper 90’s. Portland, Oregon temperatures hit 116 and caused 107 deaths. The village of Lytton, British Columbia reached 121 degrees before being destroyed by wildfires. These are not weird flukes; they are clear signs that the world is heating up—we are in crisis. AND it’s only going to get worse from here. This is scientific truth. It is also God’s truth, and we have a responsibility to accept it and speak it. There is no room for “business as usual.” Our house is on fire!

While that truth is awful and depressing and overwhelming, the other part of God’s truth is that we can and must act. Speaking and acting on the truth in community will create hope. First thing we need to do, is to stop those who are literally pouring gasoline on the fire. Fossil fuel companies continue to build new infrastructure for gas and oil, which are killing the planet. The Line 3 tar sands pipeline is under construction in Minnesota, and is a Herod’s family mess of evil. It would cut through pristine lands of the Anishinaabe peoples—and 800 wetlands, 200 lakes and 22 rivers-waters where wild rice grows, a staple of the seven tribes. It violates treaty rights and heaps further violence on indigenous tribes. It would connect to the Alberta tar sands oil project, which have turned miles of boreal forest into a barren toxic wasteland. It would support increased production and use of oil when we must turn to renewables or face extinction. The same company that oversees this project, Enbridge, also has built an unneeded gas compressor station locally in S. Weymouth, in an environmentally overburdened community, despite massive local and state protest. It has already failed six times, putting residents at risk.

We must speak up. Native-led protests have been on-going in Minnesota. Protesters have been subject to harassment by helicopters, arrests, and a blockade of their camp. In June, people of faith from all over the country joined native peoples and environmental activists for the Treaty People’s Gathering. It

resulted in the shut-down of operations for two days and arrests of 179 people. But you don't have to go to Minnesota to make your voice heard. Did you know that one of the national offices of Enbridge is right here in Waltham? On June 29th, in the middle of the heat wave, sixty people went to the Enbridge office to speak up, calling on Enbridge to stop its evil ways. Stop building the Line 3 pipeline; disable the compressor station. Thirteen people sat outside the office for 24 hours to get the message across.

It's time to speak up. To your family, your work mates, your congress people. To Enbridge and BP and Shell. To the banks and insurance companies that finance and insure these awful projects—JP Morgan Chase, Liberty Mutual, Blackrock, maybe your pension fund or favorite university's endowments, or this church's endowments. There is an organization called Stop the Money Pipeline—to cut off the financing. We have power to speak up—to the powers that are making these decisions to keep building and profiting from fossil fuel infrastructures. Do they care more about their paychecks and bonuses than the world their children and grandchildren will have? Do they not know that there is another way? To heed truth and turn and be healed and do right? How many of them are uneasy, like Herod, and actually want to be held accountable?

As followers of Christ, as inheritors of the path of John, we are called to stand up and proclaim the truth of God in the world. This truth is OUR healing. What good is our own private money and security when our whole society is facing destructive climate changes and the deepened injustices that go along with it? The other part of God's truth is that there is hope. There are many people, many communities and organizations who are creating powerful soul-feeding initiatives that are addressing climate change. For some hope, watch the film [Kiss the Ground](#). We have a huge opportunity to reverse the climate disaster by building up healthy soil, by growing organic food and supporting native habitats—reconnecting to the ground beneath our feet, cherishing it and using every square foot to grow plants that do amazing restorative work. This is good truth that you can speak and act on in your own yard or neighborhood park or church grounds. Turn your grass into a new Eden.

Now is not the time to be complacent; nor is it the time to be resigned or overwhelmed or despairing or afraid of offending someone. We have work to do and truth to speak! And the great thing is when we do it together, we not only amplify our message, we support each other, gain hope, and have fun!! It's true. And yes, there are costs. John the Baptist and Jesus remind us of that. But speaking truth and standing up to evil are the way to life.

Where will you speak the truth? To whom? In not us, then who? If not now, then when?
Let us pray. **Amen.**