

“The Truth Sets You Free!”

Jesus began our Scripture in a very refreshing way! He said, *“Now, to what can I compare the people of this day?”* That question is still applicable! Jesus’ comparison for the people of his day was, *“They are like children sitting in the marketplace. One group shouts to the other ‘We played wedding music for you, but you wouldn’t dance!’”* Then it is understood the opposite group of children yelled, *“We sang funeral songs, but you wouldn’t cry!”* Everyone complained about how others were not controlled by their actions, words, or desires. Jesus was saying Jewish society was acting like petty complaining children!

Today, the media and many politicians constantly seek or create controversy. **They are not encumbered by the truth.** If one is able to keep people in the dark or to constantly divert their attention from what is important, then they are more easily controlled. For example, you may have seen reports of an angry crowd blocking the entry of some buses carrying alien detainees – the vast majority of them were children with a few of their mothers. Those detainees made long and dangerous journeys from their Central American homes because they were seeking to be freed from the dangers caused by high levels of violence from gangs. Unfortunately, some of the children were physically or sexually assaulted during their journeys. For years there has been a steady flow of such children refugees but recently a large influx has overtaxed detention facilities. During the administration of George W. Bush, the President signed into law a humanitarian bill, which required more processing, care, and time before the determination of child refugee cases. However, the angry protestors, who are seeking to immediately have the children dumped back across the border with Mexico, most likely voted for President Bush and Republican congressmen, who helped create the law. It is the carrying out of the provisions of that law, which the angry protestors are now trying to prevent. Meanwhile, those children, who have gone through such dangerous and difficult journeys, are being yelled at and are forced to go through additional and unneeded traveling because angry adults are blocking the entry of their detention buses to a temporary overflow detention center.

Frankly, such hypocrisy was common for the Pharisees, the Teachers of the Law, and the Sanhedrin – the Jerusalem Council because they continuously sought to intimidate the public into accepting and following their inconsistent view of reality. The Pharisees and Teachers of the Law, along with their fellow legalists, believed only they were worthy of God’s Love and Forgiveness. They denounced John the Baptist, who frequently fasted and abstained from strong drink, as being someone under the control of a *“demon”*. They challenged Jesus, who ate and drank because he did so with everyone, even those rejected by the religious elite. The people said of him, *“Look at this man! He is a glutton and wine drinker, a friend of tax collectors and other outcasts!”*

Jesus’ response to such challenges was, *“God’s Wisdom, however, is shown to be true by its results.”* **Truth is somewhat illusive. Jesus equated “God’s Wisdom” with truth** but his adversaries – the Pharisees and their allies were usually most concerned with being in control – having power or authority over others. Jesus’ reference to the truth reminds me of something else he said on this subject, which is found in the Gospel of John. In John 8:31-32, it is reported, *“So Jesus said to those who believed in him, ‘If you obey my teaching, you are really my disciples; you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.’”* *“God’s Wisdom” – “the Truth”* was embodied, demonstrated, and lived by God’s Own Son, Jesus the Christ!

The *“truth”* was shown as Jesus ate and drank with all those folks the legalists considered sinners. His Good News of God’s Self-Giving and Sacrificial Love frees us to be in the New Relationship with our Divine Parent, with one another, and with all people! This New Relationship and Life is based on God’s Forgiveness, Healing, and Welcome – God’s Self-Giving and Sacrificial Love. Such New Life is one which is freed from bondage to the legalists and their control. It liberates us from being judgmental and from anything or anyone else, seeking to control us. **Then, we can be in true relationships with God, one another, and with all people – anyone whom we meet!**

Because Jesus embodied this **“truth”** in himself – his way of living and relating, the least powerful and those rejected by the religious elite and Jewish Society were the quickest to respond to him – to feel his and God’s Love, Forgiveness, Healing, and Reconciliation. That is why it is reported, **“At that time Jesus said, ‘Father, Lord of heaven and earth! I thank You because You have shown to the unlearned what You have hidden from the wise and learned. Yes, Father, this was how You were pleased to have it happen.’”**

After celebrating how God’s Purpose was and is being carried out, Jesus went on to invite those, who were in need of his liberation and freedom, to receive it through him. He said to the crowd, **“Come to me, all of you who are tired from carrying heavy loads, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke and put it on you, and learn from me, because I am gentle and humble in spirit; and you will find rest. For the yoke I will give you is easy, and the load I will put on you is light.”**

Responding to all of this Alan Brehm writes, “Jesus announced that he had come to set people free from their burdens. He came to free the people who, no matter how hard they tried, could never live up to the rigid requirements of the religious perfectionists. The rule-makers went around declaring everybody but themselves impure and unclean for some reason or another.”

Brehm continues, “But there are other burdens that keep us from freedom that God intends for us all. Fear is a burden. We fear loss or pain or worse. But fear keeps us locked in a prison cell where our only companion is what we fear the most.” Brehm says, “Anger is a burden that some of us carry. Most of us never learn that anger is normally a response to being hurt. But anger keeps us miserable, in turmoil, stuck in a place where we re-live that hurt — over and over again. Pride is our preferred form of perfectionism. We don’t just want to ‘keep up with the Joneses’; we have a driving need to be ‘better than’ the Joneses. But that nagging insecurity that it’s never good enough is always around.”

Brehm specifically comments on how the “need to control not only my life but everybody else’s becomes a burden that will crush anyone who tries to carry it.” Brehm states, “When we try to live that way, we rob ourselves of joy, and love, and life. The wisdom of the ages has taught us that the burdens that we carry only trap us in prisons of our own making. The only way to live — to truly live — is to let go the illusion of control — whatever it is you’re trying to control. Jesus said come to me, lay down your burdens, and I will give you rest.” Brehm concludes, **“When we lay down the fear and anger and pride that imprison us, we can open our hearts to receive joy, and love, and life, and rest.”** (thewakingdreamer.blogspot.com, “Lay Down Your Burden” by Alan Brehm)

So, given Jesus offers us **freedom from the carrying of our burdens – “rest”**, what are you and I called to do? Elisabeth Johnson suggests, “It is not that Jesus invites us to a life of ease. Following him will be full of risks and challenges, as he has made abundantly clear. He calls us to a life of humble service, but it is a life of freedom and joy instead of slavery.” Johnson concludes, **“It is life yoked to Jesus under God’s gracious and merciful reign, free from the burden of sin and the need to prove oneself, free to rest deeply and securely in God’s grace.”** (workingpreacher.org, “Commentary on Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30” by Elisabeth Johnson)

Perhaps, one could say our call from Jesus needs to focus on what he said, **“Take my yoke and put it on you, and learn from me, because I am gentle and humble in spirit; and you will find rest.”** He tells us to live the way of life he lived – embodying self-giving and sacrificial love. We are to learn this New Life and Relationship from him – from his healing and relating, from his teachings and, especially, from his commandment recorded in the Gospel of John, **“As I have loved you, so you must love one another.”** **The “Truth” which will set us “free” is the best life – the one of “God’s Wisdom” – of God’s “Rest” is the one of self-giving and suffering love.** Live in the true Freedom we have in Christ! Amen.