

*“Witnessing to the Truth”*

The Good Friday Narrative I read at the beginning of this service helps us remember the horrible events of the betrayal of Jesus by Judas, the denial of Jesus by Peter, the false charges against Jesus and his unfair trial, the torture and execution of our Lord on a cross, and his burial in the tomb. **What was the purpose of all of that suffering?**

The answer to that question may be hinted at in the middle of that narrative. In **John 18:37b**, Jesus was responding to Pontius Pilate and said, *“I was born and came into the world for this one purpose, to speak about the Truth. Whoever belongs to the Truth listens to me.”* Then Pilate asked him in *verse 38*, *“And what is Truth?”*

The answer to our question about what was the purpose for all of the suffering of Jesus is the same as the answer to Pilate’s question of, *“And what is truth?”* As we consider the answer to both of those questions, it might be helpful for us to review what the Gospel reported about *“Truth”*. The Gospel of John has many references to *“Truth”*. I encourage you to listen closely for those Scripture quotations, which include the word, *“Truth”*. At the conclusion of the Prologue of the Gospel of John, which we studied during Advent in preparation for Christmas, **John 1:14** states, *“The Word became a human being and, full of grace and Truth, lived among us. We saw his glory, the glory which he received as the Father’s Only Son.”* Jesus, the *“Logos”* – *“Word”*, which became *“flesh”*, was full of *“Truth”*!

In **John 1:17** the gospel author wrote, *“God gave the Law through Moses, but grace and Truth came through Jesus Christ.”* *“Truth”* is a gift from God in Jesus!

Jesus debated about his identity and authority with the religious leaders in **John 5:33**. Among the arguments Jesus made about the witnesses to his identity, he pointed out, *“John (referring to John the Baptist) is the one to whom you sent your messengers, and he spoke on behalf of the Truth.”* In the first chapter of the Gospel of John, it is reported how the Baptizer testified to Jesus being the One, who was coming after John – **the Lamb of God – the Son of God. The “Truth” in Jesus reveals he is the Messiah, the Lamb of God, and the Son of God! Jesus Christ – he is the “Truth”!** Part of Jesus’ identity is also as the *“Source of Life”* and the means through which we have the opportunity to live the New Life of the Fulfilled Kingdom of God.

Following the Last Supper, Jesus prayed a long prayer to the Divine Parent for the sake of his disciples. **John 17:17-19** is part of that prayer. Jesus prayed, *“Dedicate them to Yourself by means of the Truth; Your Word is Truth. I sent them into the world, just as You sent me into the world. And for their sake I dedicate myself to You, in order that they, too, may be truly dedicated to You.”* The *“Truth”* is the means through which we become dedicated to God. The *“Truth”* is God’s *“Logos”* – the *“Word”*. Remember, in the Prologue of the Gospel of John we are told **Jesus is that pre-existing “Logos” – “Word” which became “flesh”**. Our Savior dedicated himself to fulfill his purpose to sanctify his followers through the *“Truth”*.

How can we know Jesus Christ is the *“Truth”* through which we are sanctified or made right with God? How can we trust that this *“Truth”* is the Ultimate Expression of God’s Suffering, Sacrificial, and Self-Giving *“Agape”* Love through which we are given the gift of a New Life and Relationship with God? We find many places in the Gospel of John where the author or Jesus pointed to his miracles, especially his raising of Lazarus from the dead, as evidence he was sent by God to be the embodiment of our Divine Parent’s Suffering, Sacrificial, and Self-Giving *“Agape”* Love for us.

Our Easter Reading, in combination with its parallels in the other New Testament Gospels, give testimony to an even greater work of God, which was done to **Reveal the “Truth”**. It began with some of the women seeking to carry out the burial duties of anointing their Master’s body with spices. After the women found the **open tomb** and the body of their Teacher missing, they went to the male disciples to report the situation. **In John 20:2, Mary Magdalene said, “They have taken the Lord from the tomb, and we don’t know where they have put him!”**

Nevertheless, Peter and the disciple, whom Jesus loved, (perhaps John the son of Zebedee) ran to the tomb of their Beloved Leader, after learning it was empty. The younger disciple was evidently faster, so he arrived at the entrance of the tomb first and looked in but did not enter it. Then Simon Peter arrived and went straight into the tomb. The Beloved Disciple entered the tomb. They both saw the burial cloths, which had been wrapped around our Lord’s body, but they did not find his body! The author of the Gospel of John said he believed after seeing the empty tomb

and the grave cloths left behind. Did he believe because of the discarded cloths in Jesus' tomb? When Jesus raised Lazarus, the cloths were still wrapped around him. **Those cloths in Jesus' tomb provided powerful evidence, which argued against Jesus' body having been stolen.** Nevertheless, the two went back to where they were staying, unaware of the full meaning of the empty tomb. Up through this point, those disciples never seemed to recognize or understand the **"Truth"**, especially given Jesus repeatedly tried to tell them about his Death and Resurrection and the content of the **"Truth"** alluded them.

We aren't told that Mary ran back to the tomb with Peter and the Disciple whom Jesus loved, but clearly, she did return, because our Reading tells us she remained at the tomb, when Peter and John left it. She was still overwhelmed with grief and was crying outside the tomb. Then, she witnessed the presence of two angels in the tomb. Mark and Matthew reported there was only one angel but Luke agrees with John in saying there were two angels. I suspect Matthew merely copied what Mark had written, while Luke, who had a copy of Mark, also had a source closer to the actual event and knew Mark's account was incorrect. Additionally, the author of the Gospel of John was an eyewitness to what Mary reported. The two angels said to Mary Magdalene in **John 20:13, "Woman, why are you crying?"** The implication of the question was she had no need for grief, but she had not even considered the possibility his body had not been stolen, for her response indicated this. The remainder of the verse states, **"They have taken my Lord away, and I do not know where they have put him!"** Evidently, she became aware someone was behind her, so she turned and saw Jesus standing there, except, she did not recognize him. In **verse 15** he also asked her, **"Woman, why are you crying?"** John tells us she thought this man might be the gardener and she said to him in the remainder of the verse, **"If you took him away, sir, tell me where you have put him, and I will go and get him."**

It was then that the Risen Lord finally broke through to **Reveal to Mary Magdalene the "Truth"; he had been raised!** The Risen Jesus did this by calling her by her name, **"Mary!"** She turned to him and said, **"Rabboni!"** which is the Hebrew word for **"Teacher"**. From what Jesus told her, his resurrection would have several steps, which were not yet completed. His body was still one of a man, who had been dead for several days, so he said in **verse 17, "Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet gone back up to the Father."** The Risen Christ continued and gave her the first call to share the **Revealed "Truth"**, saying, **"But go to my brothers and tell them that I am returning to Him, Who is my Father and their Father, my God and their God."** **Emboldened by being called by name and receiving the "Truth", Mary Magdalene went and told the disciples!**

Unfortunately, the male disciples refused to allow the testimony of Mary to open their minds and spirits to the **"Truth" that Jesus Christ was indeed raised from the dead!** Clearly, they refused to believe our Savior was raised because Mary Magdalene was a woman. **The "Truth" that God gave up the Only Son to free us from our bondage to ignorance, sin, evil, and death because of our Divine Parent's Suffering, Sacrificial, and Self-Giving "Agape" Love for us was still impossible for them to comprehend.**

What about You? Have you come to recognize the **"Truth"** that our Savior, through his Death and Resurrection, gave us liberty and victory over the powers of ignorance, evil, sin, and death, because he was and is the Ultimate Expression of God's Suffering, Sacrificial, and Self-Giving **"Agape"** Love? **"Yes"**, we can say and think, but have we deep within our psyches and spirits heard the Risen Jesus Christ call us by name, as he first did with Mary Magdalene? **If we have, then the "Truth" is Revealed and our lives are transformed!** For, we are no longer controlled by the world's way of desire for personal advantage and conflict, nor by our fears and grief. Instead, we are to follow the example and command of Jesus Christ by becoming examples of and agents of God's Suffering, Sacrificial, and Self-Giving **"Agape"** Love.

**Furthermore, like Mary Magdalene, we are called to invite others to share in this New Life through the "Truth" – our Crucified and Risen Lord!** Unfortunately, the place of women in the world, during Jesus' life and ministry demanded great courage from her to give her testimony. The Synoptic Gospels were unwilling to report Mary was the first witness. **How will we respond to the barriers, which get in the way of our testifying to the Crucified and Risen Jesus – the "Truth"?** Amen.