

"The Truth in Christ"

Romans 9:1-5

3 August, 2008

The Rev. Todd R. Goddard, pastor

[Zion West Walworth United Methodist Church](#)

Romans 9:1-5

I am speaking the truth in Christ—I am not lying; my conscience confirms it by the Holy Spirit— I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my own people, my kindred according to the flesh. They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises; to them belong the patriarchs, and from them, according to the flesh, comes the Messiah, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen.

Prayer.

On the eve of the crucifixion of Jesus and after he had grilled Jesus at the request of the Jewish authorities, Pontius Pilot asked rhetorically, "What is truth?" (John 18:38)

His question may have been rooted deeply in his education of the Greek philosophers, who taught that truth must correspond to the actual state of affairs.¹ For Pilot, the actual state of affairs was that the Jewish leaders wanted to find a way to kill one of their own. Pilot was a means to their end; the violence of the cross became the epitome of authoritarian Jewish psychosis.

Had Pilot had the perspective of hindsight and Christian faith, instead of classical philosophy, he would have found the answer to his question, "what is truth?" When Jesus taught his disciples how to organize and strengthen faith after he ascends into heaven, he tell them that he is the personification of truth, "I am the way, the truth, and the life." (John 14:6)

So, it is not so surprising to hear Jesus tell Pilot, "Everyone who is of the truth hears my voice." (John 18:37)

The apostle Paul, who is writing to the church in Rome, knows what truth is. He is a student of the Gospels. He knows the story. And it is fixed by his experience. Truth is confirmed by the Holy Spirit, working through his conscience, he reports in this morning's epistle.

¹ Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Vol.2, "Correspondence Theory of Truth", auth: Arthur N. Prior, p223 Macmillan, 1969.

In the ancient church there were disciples who came from a Jewish background. Others were attracted to Christ from the state religion. In other words, they used to believe that the emperor was God. Yet others, came from numerous other religions, cultures, and beliefs. Together, they were thrown into a great melting pot and were expected to create a community of Christ's disciples known as the Church.

"Why can't we all just get along?"

It should come as no surprise that there were some significant issues to be addressed. The non-Jews viewed the Jews with contempt; after all, it was the Jews who had Jesus killed. To add further evidence, the Jewish uprising against Rome had gone terribly bad and Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 AD.

In a very primitive world, it was easy to believe the Jews got what was coming to them: cause and effect. They were the cause of the uprising, and they suffered the effect of their actions. Finally, it doesn't take too much imagination to understand how those who are deeply conservative when it comes to adherence to the law offend those who never had such constraints.

Jerry Springer couldn't have asked for a better line up for his show, than those first century Christians in Rome.

Sadly, this old saw has been played numerous times throughout history to justify the persecution of Jews.

Those first century Christians in Rome had to be taught how to behave; they had to be taught how to treat their Jewish brothers and sisters, and this became a vital element in Paul's mission to spread the Gospel.

I wish I could take the blame, in place of "my kindred according to the flesh,"² the apostle Paul writes. In fact, Paul believes so strongly, he would even be willing to be cut off from Christ – he'd rather sacrifice himself – than to see the Jews judged wrongly.

Paul correctly reminds them of the history God has with the Jews: God adopted them, made an everlasting covenant with them, gave them the law, taught them how to live and worship. To the Jews, God sent his Son, our Lord, Jesus Christ. Like it or not, recognizing and honoring the historical relationship between God and His chosen people has to go hand-in-hand with being a follower of Jesus. You can't have one and not the other.

² Romans 9:3

This is the truth in Christ, Paul teaches us this morning.

In 2007 one of my most influential professors from seminary died, Dr. Irvin Battdorf. Dr. Battdorf was in his late 60s and used to smack the chalkboard with his cane, the reminisce of childhood polio, to keep our attention. He was a professor of New Testament who knew every iota of the Bible in the original Greek, Hebrew, Arabic, or Latin.

In one of the first lectures of his I ever attend, I remember he drove home this point: If you want to follow Jesus, you must learn what Jesus believed. To learn what Jesus believed, one must live the Jewish story.

Today, when we approach this communion table, we are living that story. We hear an echo of a Passover supper Jesus celebrated in the Upper Room with his disciples, and earlier when he celebrated the miracle of multiplication when he fed 5,000 with five loaves and two fish, as recorded in Matthew.³

Deliverance and salvation is found in the Passover meal. The extravagant abundance of God's grace and love was shared on the Galilean shore. Forgiveness and promise poured forth from the Upper Room.

Jesus, our celebrant this morning, comes from the Jews. He comes the Messiah, the Lord over all. He is the truth. Those who follow him hear his voice. Those who hear his voice know through their conscience and their experience what truth really means.

My beloved, taste and see the truth. Amen.

³ Matthew 14:13-21