

Honest to God
Courage to Continue Series: Honesty Theme
Jubilee Mennonite Church
September 30, 2018

Purpose: As people of reconciliation, we are called to an honest accounting of who and what we are when we undertake the work of healing.

Message: Honesty in living, living righteously together, calls us to take the truths of who and what we are seriously, living out the way of Christ for all.

Big Idea: *Honesty is a way of being that presents ourselves as we are in the way of Christ, naming what needs to be named, and working toward full healing going forward.*

Honesty is the grandfather teachings is a way of life analogous to righteousness and forthrightness in the Judeo Christian tradition. The Hebrew concept of Hesed captures this well;

חֶסֶד (*hě·sěd*): n.masc.; ≡ Str 2617; TWOT 698a—**1.** LN 25.33–25.58 **loyal love**, unfailing kindness, devotion, i.e., a love or affection that is steadfast based on a prior relationship (Ex 34:6, 7

Scripture: 1 John 1:1-10 [I will read]; Psalm 19 [please read]

Synopsis: We live in what many are referring to as a “Post Truth” society. We see it with great regularity. Facts, ways of being, accusations and behaviors are explained away and otherwise justified by spin, denial, and changing the subject entirely. The value of honest living, of allowing your word to be binding and to engage seriously when people have a grievance with you, never a popular thing, has gone by the wayside. But as people of reconciliation, called to take seriously Christ’s reconciling work, we do our best work in living the values of honest well, allowing right being point toward the way of the kingdom, even beyond our words.

1 John 1:1-10

We declare to you what was from the beginning,
what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes,
what we have looked at and touched with our hands,
concerning the word of life—

² this life was revealed,
and we have seen it and testify to it,
and declare to you the eternal life that was
with God and was revealed to us—

³ we declare to you what we have seen and heard
so that you also may have fellowship with us;
and truly our fellowship is with God
and with his Son Jesus Christ.

⁴ We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

God Is Light

⁵ This is the message we have heard from him
and proclaim to you, that God is light
and in him there is no darkness at all.

⁶ If we say that we have fellowship with him
while we are walking in darkness,
we lie and do not do what is true;

⁷ but if we walk in the light
as he himself is in the light,
we have fellowship with one another,
and the blood of Jesus his Son
cleanses us from all sin.

⁸ If we say that we have no sin,
we deceive ourselves,
and the truth is not in us.

⁹ If we confess our sins,
he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins
and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

¹⁰ If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

Congregational Interaction:

What does the notion of honesty bring up for you? What are the qualities that come to mind? What makes a person honest? What about righteous? What does that look like? Who do you think of to fill this role? How do these connect?

We live in a “post truth Society”. That’s the phrase that gets floated around the ether. What this is trying to capture is the notion that people construct who and what they are, and the reality that they know to be true by who they are, what they say, and the realities they choose to empower and endorse as real. Living as we do with the phenomena of “fake news”, originally meant to differentiate between the news that is journalistically reported and that which uses journalistic techniques to tell stories that we want to hear to support an agenda underneath it, we must acknowledge that our world is being shaped, for good or ill, one tweet at the time. What is important isn’t the reality of the situation, but our perception of the situation, and how things get spun publicly for consumption and how it all looks to the personal audience on Facebook. This happens in our world, it happens in our lives personally, it happens in church and by the church. We are far more invested in the image of ourselves that we are invited to “curate” to better reflect who we are. We want to show our best selves whenever possible—the one without the messy house, messy life and unrealistic ways of being in the world. Often the scariest thing that we can do is to invite someone into our lives to the point where we are forced to show precisely how messed up our lives are (what ever brand of mess happens to be your brand of mess).

There is nothing new about this. People have been putting on airs and covering up who and what they are for centuries. It is human nature. It is just that now we have the tools to publish our preferred image to the world, and consume only our preferred image of the world for the first time. Most of the time, we think of honesty solely as a reverence for the truth and being fastidious about sticking to that truth, come what may. But that sort of simple reverence for the truth, as important as it is, is but the most literal form of honesty. Telling the truth, passing on what we know to be true, is the most fundamental use of truth. The real question is, what happens when you know truth and apply within your life to impact how you live from day to day. This is something else entirely; it is a way being that is influenced by and held by the truth applied in our lives. We all have our truths; the things we know about our selves—who and what we are deep down; the stuff we don’t say, the deep truths of God’s love that we know and profess, but sometimes struggle to live out into the real world. We can know something to

be true—deeply so and completely so. But that doesn't mean that it automatically transfers into who and what we are and how we live.

That's where honesty comes in. When the grandfather teachings commend honesty to us, it is this sense of realized connection to and representation of the truth that is us. As a concept, it has a whole lot more to do with righteousness than it does solely to raising your hand when asked whether or not it was you who chopped down the Cherry tree (as with George Washington). The honest person is the person who can see the truth, even about themselves, even about who and what we are, and live out of that truth in a practical and yes, honest (truthful) way. The Hebrew text uses the word HESED for this—translating broadly as faithful love, honesty, and love. Honest living is one of those qualities that we see in people largely in the lack of honesty in their lives as much as it does the presence. We can each play a role, work at being someone that we are not for a little while until it all catches up to us in many ways, most notably spiritually. Because it is awfully hard to change behavior and grow into something new when we are leading our lives dishonestly. Growth in the spiritual life takes place not by acquisition of something new. It isn't like the acquisition of new information, which some call "spiritual capitalism" where we invest properly and acquire something that makes us different. 12 step programs know this; it's why there is so much time spent simply on being honest with ourselves (which is a needed first step) in order to be honest with others, and restore that realistic sense of self of knowing your limits and living within them. Our Growth is only discovered by the release of our current defense postures, by letting go of fear (what will they think of me) and our attachment to self-image (who is it that I think I am). God could not risk giving truth to proud and power hungry people; they will always abuse it. Truth shows itself when we are free from ideology, fear, and anger, seeking God in order to do God's will.

One of the fundamental truths we can know about ourselves is to come into contact with our own Sin, and truth be told, it is something that we Mennonites are not terribly good at. The notion of sin is not one we like to hold out; perhaps preferring short comings instead. We may hold up redemption and reconciliation with God as good things in general, but something that we ourselves don't have massive use for. But, as the writer of John's first Epistle writes here, we know our sin and that is what puts us into relationship with the biggest Truth that there is; that we are all fallen short, keep falling short, and we are reconciled to God in Jesus Christ. This is

the big truth, but as with all truths, it invites us to know its weight, be changed by its weight and live accordingly in response to its weight. We know that all of this of sin and salvation is true, deeply so, yet more times than not we as church bodies spend far more time manufacturing a happiness with the world and ways we are in it (inside the church and out) than we are being honest with ourselves; with God; with each other about who and what we are. What would happen if the church wasn't the happiest place in town, but rather the most deeply and completely honest? I think that we would be surprised what we learn along the way.

We are invited into reconciliation as a way of restoring an honest way—a righteous way of being with our indigenous neighbours. We bring ourselves to the table; all of ourselves, and we are invited to share that with whom we have much shared history, but not much righteous shared living. We know this. We realize this deep down in our bones. The work of being people together is the work of setting aside what has been and working honestly with each other, acknowledging that wrong has been done (most of the recommendations for churches is fundamentally that—acknowledging a trouble history) and to live with honesty in what comes as a result. In order to do this, we need to begin with the honesty of what we know to be true about ourselves: that we don't know all that there is to learn and God who created us all calls us each to live with as much full honesty as we can manage knowing that much of acknowledging. Sin is not about attributing blame, finding responsible party, or particularly applying legalistic guilt as much as it is convicting us of our incomplete nature and inviting us time and again by God's mercy into God's grace—the biggest truth there is.

Honest living asks us to say "I don't know" just as often as we come with absolute certainty. Because it leaves enough space for God's way to enter, to invite us to live the ways we know to be true as we are—broken, sinful people in a broken sinful society, called time and again to the work of coming together in Christ to be gifted with honesty. May we each have the grace to live fully into God's grace, living with full honesty, hope and promise for that which is to come. May it be so, now and always, Amen.