

To Tell the Truth

[Matthew 10:26-39]

K Karpen, Sunday, June 19, 2005
Fifth Sunday After Pentecost
Father's Day

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The wise people who develop and revise the Revised Common Lectionary, the 3-year cycle of scripture readings used in thousands of churches each Sunday, really hit the nail on the head this week. The first thing I noticed this week when I opened my copy of the lectionary to June 19 was the heading: Father's Day. The second thing I noticed was a Gospel reading with a few choice lines about fathers. How nice. Until you read them:

"For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother," says Jesus. "Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me," says Jesus.

So I thought, "Well, maybe this is a good day to focus instead on the Old Testament selection in the lectionary, Genesis 21. Sure enough, it's got a father theme: It's about Abraham, father Abraham, driving his young son Ismael away and leaving him in the desert, all with God's encouragement. But maybe better that reading than Genesis 22, where God invites Abraham to sacrifice his other son, Isaac. So much for God's family values. And so much for Father's Day.

Fortunately, there is another theme to be gleaned from today's Gospel reading, the theme of telling the truth:

"So have no fear of them; for nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered; and nothing is secret that will not become known," says Jesus. "What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops." Do not be afraid to tell the truth, Jesus is telling us, too.

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The truth has been in the news a lot the past several weeks. I mean the idea of truth and of course the absence of truth; the lack of confidence we are developing about the truth because of relativizing of truth & twisting of truth & the manipulation of truth. I'm referring, of course, to the issue of Tom Cruise and Katie Holmes.

Is Tom Cruise really head-over-heels in love with Katie Holmes, as he is proclaiming from the housetops and the couchtops and even the top of the Eiffel Tower? Is this an over-the-top publicity stunt? Do you care?

The really strange thing about the Tom Cruise—Katie Holmes thing—and I'll get off of this in a minute—is that most people don't believe it. The more housetops & couchtops it's proclaimed from, the fewer of us buy it. The thing is, if it's not true in

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a whisper, it's not true on the housetops. The thing is, if it's not true in the dark, it won't be true in the light. I feel badly not believing Tom & Katie. Why would they lie to me? Worse, why would I even think that they would lie to me? But it's a bigger problem than Katie & Tom.

We, in our culture, have been developing a more and more distant relationship with the truth. But we hunger for truth. We thirst for truth. As Tom Cruise cries out in an earlier character (not himself) "I want the truth," and Jack Nicholson yells back, "You can't handle the truth!"

I was already feeling cynical about all this last week when the details of the "Downing Street" memo came out in the news. I've been clinging to the hope that the "truths" proclaimed from the housetops in the run-up to the war in Iraq were at least believed by the people doing the proclaiming, true or not. But if it's not true in a whisper, it's not true from the housetops.

The spectre of a president lying to us doesn't really scare us or surprise us anymore. We've come a long way from the day when Abraham Lincoln could ask the question: "How many legs does a dog have if you call the tail a leg?" and expect the answer '4,' since calling a tail a leg doesn't make it a leg.

But there is still something precious about the truth, maybe more so than ever, as it becomes harder to come by. Maybe we have reached a moment when truth can only be whispered. When truth can only live in the dark. Outside the light. Outside the glare of attention.

What Jesus is telling us is that God has an interest in truth. There is a sacred element to truth. That there is a holy and subversive power behind what simply is. Whatever simply is. And that holy and subversive power does not depend on what our definition of "is" is, to quote another truth-challenged president. "You shall know the truth, and the truth will set you free," Jesus says elsewhere.

So often we people of faith forget that simple element of Jesus' message. The truth. Whatever the truth may be. Jesus didn't come to sell us some particular story-line, but to open us up to the simple, life-changing power of the truth; truth with a small "t;" truth with all the humility of Jesus himself; truth that must be whispered in the dark before it can be proclaimed in the light.

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So, my message to you today is quite simple, and I want to keep it simple. Tell the truth. Though it so often seems like we can't handle the truth: try us. God says we can. Tell the truth.

Though you may think your life will fall apart if you tell yourself the truth, God says it won't. Tell the truth. Be subversive. Though you may be the only one in your family. Though you may be the only one at your school or in your office, tell the truth. Even if in a whisper. With the humility of Jesus. Tell the truth.