

“Truthiness”

“Here is the world; beautiful and terrible things will happen.

Be not afraid.

Because this is what we are about:

We hold hope for each other when hope is hard to find.

We plant seeds that will one day grow.

We are prophets of a future not our own.

We cannot do everything,

But we can do something.

So forget your perfect offering.

There is a crack in everything.

That is how the light gets in.”

Can we talk about truth this morning?...*What does it mean to seek it?*

Can we know it when we find it?

Does it actually matter beyond college philosophy class,

we who are more consumed with the work commute,

or taking care of aging parents,

or the Halloween costume our kids just changed their minds

About for the 5th time, or the memory of our longtime friend or family

member we have lost, the falling leaves making time and memory

Seem so transient, so temporary, so fleeting?

I've been doing some research in preparation, so let's start with some

Quotes we might recognize:

From the Gospel of John: *You shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free.*

From famous feminist agitator Gloria Steinem, in a spin off the Gospel (and thanks to Carol Esler for sharing it this week): *The truth shall set you free, But first it will (bleep) you off.*

From the Catholic writer Flannery O'Connor: *You shall know the truth, And the truth will make you odd.*

From Jack Nicholson's character Colonel Jessep in a Few Good Men: *Truth? You want the truth? Son, you can't handle the truth!*

From author Anais Nin, on the relativism of truth: *We don't see things as they are; we see things as we are.*

And last, from Stephen Colbert, giving us our sermon title:

Truthiness means 'What I say is right, and [nothing] anyone else says could possibly be true.'

*It's not only that I **feel** it to be true, but that **I** feel it to be true. There's not only an emotional quality, but there's a selfish quality.'*

And I could go on, because when it comes to quotes *Truth* is kind of famous.

It's also somewhat of a BIG DEAL in our own Unitarian Universalist faith,

Judging by the fact that there in the opening pages of our hymnal

It says that we, the member congregations, *covenant to affirm and promote the search for TRUTH and meaning...*

And that the number of hymns devoted to Truth outrank those about

Jesus, Christmas, Jewish teachings, and very nearly the theme of LOVE.

Which is interesting, because when it comes to religion nothing

Seems to make us more nervous, more squirmy than someone telling us about the truth of their particular religion. True?

Recently I listened with astonishment to an interview on WBUR With Lisa Miller, a Columbia University professor, Who in her book *The Spiritual Child* notes that each of us are born Naturally spiritually alive and eager to inquire about that church, this temple, that mosque, this graveyard (where do people go?), but by the time we are 6 years old (6!), unless we make an effort to explore the multiple expressions of spirituality in the world, we are more likely (says the Harvard study she cites) to say that our family's name for God (or lack of a name) is more real, more accurate, more true than the name for God that the family uses down the street.

Which perhaps is why Jim Gaffigan, the Catholic comic who recently 'opened' for the Pope at a conference

In Philadelphia, got such a laugh when he said to the crowd:

"It doesn't matter if you're religious or not;

Nothing makes you feel more uncomfortable than some stranger

Going: 'I'd like to talk to you about Jesus...'

'Yeah, I'd like you not to...'

He goes on: *'You could say that to the Pope – I'd like to talk to you about Jesus....'*

And he'd be like – 'Easy man; I try to keep work at work.'

So we're uncomfortable about claiming that we have the right answer

About things, because it means we believe that you don't.
 Well, we're mostly uncomfortable,
 Unless, of course, it comes to politics (how can you vote for that guy??),
 or who we think won the debate on Tuesday night,
 or what actually happened with Deflategate,
 Or which family member is really to blame for the dysfunction,
 Or which partner really started the fight.

So...hmmmm,
 Maybe things are actually more complicated than we think,
 We who at our best are trying to
 Resist the tribal pull of saying my name for truth is better than your name for
 truth,
 and still avoid the wishy-washy slip of truthiness that *that 'hey,*
I can believe whatever I want.'

So we ask again: *What does it mean to seek truth?*
How can we know when we find it?
Does it matter?
 We ask as we sit in our cars with radio blaring,
 Or on the commuter rail with our ear buds blaring,
 Our lives and the world going a million miles an hour,
 Even in rush hour,
 And the internal Google map saying '*Re-routing! Re-routing!*'
 As we bump left and right into so many different truths,
 So many different people, so many different voices,
 Blaring: *be this kind of person! Be that kind of parent!*

*Vote this candidate! Do this career! Do this particular ab workout!
Go to this church! That temple! This guru! Try this best-ever protein
shake! Grieve this way! Grow old this way! Go that way!*

It's overwhelming.

To hear the truth whisper to you in the midst all this requires
Incredible stillness, incredible attunement.

Is there an App for this? No.

But there are examples.

There was a woman, once, who on her way to somewhere
Else noticed a man pushed up against the wall of a building.
He had sores on his cheeks and neck, and his mouth
Was open, as if at any moment he might yell,
Except that he was so thin from lack of nourishment
That his voice barely made a noise, like crackling wind.
As a Christian, as someone who said that the only thing we
Need to know about Jesus is that he ate with sinners and the sick,
Said, "*I can help this man.*"

And so she did, and then she did again, and again, and again.
People were moved by her faith, inspired by her example.
Later in life, she would publish a book about how for decades
She grew to doubt the truth of her Christian faith,
The truth the name given for God, (Jesus is Lord,
God is in heaven).

But she never doubted the doubted the truth
Of her work – to feed, to clothe, to bless the sores, to touch
The untouchables.

Who am I talking of? Of course. Mother Theresa.

And so we begin to wonder: might there be a difference

Between knowing the truth, seeking the truth, finding the truth...

And BEING the truth?

Can faith be form of how we lead our lives, and not a set of things we believe or don't believe?

Might this be what Flannery O'Connor meant when she said:

You shall know the truth, and truth will make you odd?

There is a monk who has spent 30 years in his religious order in Western Pennsylvania.

Wow, we think, he must be really devout.

Until we hear him describe himself as a 'lapsed Catholic.'

Hmmm...his friends say. *"How does that work?"*

And he says, *'Well, I follow my community rule and do what I am supposed to do, even though I don't believe much of it any more.*

'Well,' say his friends, *'then why don't you leave?'*

And he always replies:

"The essence of my vocation is with these kids..."

He says, motioning to streets of Pittsburgh

Where he lives and works with children who live in impossible

Circumstances and are victims of terrible circumstances.

This monk continues to do his work in Pittsburg, PA

As we sit here this morning.

And so we wonder: is there a difference between doubting

The truth of a particular belief, or changing in our beliefs,
All up here in the head, but still BEING, incarnating, living
A certain truth?

That no one should be forgotten?

That even after 16 years we still go to NOLA.

That even after ___ years we can't forget Haiti?

That even though Trump and others have kicked the stories

Off the front page that that the slogan *Black Lives Matter*...still matters?

There is a famous philosopher, at least as famous as philosophers get,
Who happens to be Jewish and an atheist,
And who went to Philadelphia for the first time in his life to visit his friend,
An equally famous philosopher.

His friend says: *'Let me show you Liberty Bell, let me take you to Valley Forge,*

The True hallmarks of this city.'

But oh no. This philosopher, Jacques Derrida,

Said no way. The only true way to get to know a new place,

Or a new part of yourself,

Was for him to walk and walk and walk until he got lost,

And then try to find his way back again.

In the process, he would discover all kinds of things.

Both personally and as a philosopher,

He thought that being genuinely lost and seeking something

Is a crucial part of the journey.

We expose ourselves to the unknown and the unforeseeable,

And we grow.

Truth, said Derrida, is like that.

And so we wonder still: *Is how we so often thought of truth,
Of something to be doubted or argued or gained or gleaned,
Really the question we're asking?*

Don't we wonder instead whether we have the stomach
For the journey – how to live lives of purpose and intention
And solidarity
In a culture that dismisses us with distraction and selfies
And self-actualization via the next trip to the mall?

And haven't we tired of Beliefs – in form of the fundamentalists on the left
And the right who try to scare us,
Or beliefs the form of caucuses who try rally the base,
Or conventions that try to decide on the next, best euphemism
For God?

And instead aren't we more interested in
How we live in the world with hope and not despair,
With a willingness to expose ourselves to the future without
Knowing exactly our way home?

Might it be possible that truth is not a question only for the
Philosophers and theologians and people

Who live in reside in the Republic of Cambridge, MA?

Meaning: might it be possible that truth is not a question of
Belief, but rather of being.

As in: what about how I live my life reveals what I value, what's important
to me,

What is true?

Maybe this is why scripture also says: *by your fruits, you will know them.*

What is your *fruit*?

Does your truth make you odd?

Does knowing the truth of how you should be living your life, and knowing

That you aren't..._____ you off, as Steinem says?

And final word from our sponsor, UUism.

It is often said about us, sometimes even by us,

That we don't know what we believe, or that we can

Believe whatever we want, because we don't have a creed.

This way to heaven, says the sign in most churches. *This way to a discussion group about heaven*, says the sign we might put up.

This used to drive me just a little bit more than crazy.

But I'm feeling more 'meh' now, as in: whatever.

As your minister, I care less how hard we believe, or doubt,

Or say we seek the truth.

I care more what we do, how it makes us odd, how we show

Up in the world.

By our fruits they will know us.

Don't believe in the truth.

Be the truth.

Amen.

