

SERMON TITLE: “Think about What Is True”

SERMON TEXTS: Colossians 1:24—2:5; Philippians 4:8, 9

SERMON DATE: August 3, 2008

SERMON PROPOSITIONS: Jesus is the Truth. Think about what is true.

INTRODUCTION

C.S. Lewis was truly right when he himself observed that we suffer most deeply and profoundly when we suffer not for ourselves but on behalf of those we love.

And Charles Swindoll is right to add that we are never more like Christ than when we do this.

On a recent visit home, I spent time with two men who are among the dearest people for whom I care. Sadly, both of these men are in terrible suffering. One’s suffering is more physical, and the other’s is more psychological. But it is not their differing experiences of their sufferings that I want to share with you; rather, it is their *differing responses* to their sufferings that are most important to them – and to us.

One friend, Steve, is a 41 year-old husband and father of two, wonderful sons. Steve has been diagnosed with terminal cancer. Apart from a miracle of God’s sovereign grace, this sickness will cheat this family’s life together with an all-too-early death.

What is Steve’s response?

What response has he taught his wife and children to share with him?

What would your, my response be?

As we sat together in their living room over many serious conversations, fervent prayers, and desperate readings of Scripture, Steve – together with his wife and sons – repeatedly affirmed, “We truly want God’s will to be done in this, whatever that might be. We most want God to be glorified through this trial and our suffering of cancer. Our greatest fear is not that I won’t be healed of cancer. Our greatest fear is that we will not live through this in the way that will bring most glory to God.”

My other friend will remain unnamed to you, because of the intensely private nature of his psychological sufferings. Life has been unspeakably cruel to this young man. He has had to endure some – too many - of the worst evils that any human can bear. (And all these during adolescence and young adulthood – as if these uncertain and ever-changing times of life aren’t difficult enough under the best of life’s possibilities.)

As we sat together at a bar talking late, late into the night, my friend – the closest to anything like a son that I have in my life – shared with me not affirmations but only

confusions. Instead of bold and sincere statements of faith, he only raised timid and wavering questions of doubt: How can God be good and allow such terrible things to happen in my life? How can I possibly live in His love and grace? If God is sovereign and always accomplishes His will, does it really matter the choice I make? Why should I pray ... what good could it possibly do? And why does it so often feel like these friends at this bar love and understand me better than those I meet in the church?

Perhaps you suffer with the same or similar questions. Or perhaps you're suffering on behalf of someone who has these questions.

Whichever might be the case, what can you truthfully say in answer to such essential questions of our existence?

How would you answer them – or how would you like them to be answered?

Do you believe they could – or even should - be answered at all?

What my friends' stories share in common is not just suffering but truth. We might even say the suffering of truth, the suffering in truth, and the suffering for truth. Behind and beyond the physical and psychological sufferings are the deeper, more profound existential and spiritual sufferings of truth.

Leonardo Boff acutely observes that all of life's problems at their core are theological. Which is a spiritual affirmation that all of life's problems at their core are a struggle of truth, a struggle in truth, a struggle for truth.

Jesus affirmed this reality of life in a parable elegant in its simplicity and unforgettable in its profundity:

Matthew 7:24 “Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. **25** And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. **26** And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. **27** And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it.”

Thankfully, Steve's life has been built on the sure and firm foundation of truth – that is, upon the Lord Jesus Christ. This One Who has made the audacious claim:

John 14:6 Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

But what of my other friend? Upon what kind of foundation, what kind of truth (or lie!) is his life being built?

And what of your life today? And the lives of those you love? What is the foundation upon which your life is growing, changing? And what of their foundations – foundations you may influence for good or bad? Are these foundations secure? Are they strong enough to hold up under the immense pressures of the trials and sufferings that have already come, are happening now, and will surely come again in the future?

On the eve of Jesus' Crucifixion some 2,000 years ago, the Roman Governor Pontius Pilate asked, "What is truth?" Today, we're still asking this same question. But instead of finding an answer, we in our postmodern culture seem to have found only more questions: "Is there one, unifying truth of all reality?" "Is truth reliably fixed and objective, or is it constantly changing and subjective?" "Is it possible for us to know truth – let alone order our lives by it?" As we continue our look into the Apostle Paul's ancient Letter to the Colossian Church, we will discover our future concerns about truth addressed with remarkable clarity and insight. In Colossians 1:24—2:5, we will receive encouraging, satisfying answers to our most foundational, life questions. Together, we will consider what truth is, where it is to be found, and how we may live in its beauty and goodness.

BODY

(v. 24)

Here we see the Apostle Paul experiencing those most painful and profound sufferings, which we have already considered together: suffering not on behalf of ourselves but on behalf of others, suffering not for the sake of ourselves but for the sake of others.

But note that beautiful word of Christian grace that is so commonly overlooked by our over-familiarity with it in the biblical text: "rejoice." This word alone is the sign and signal of the unique importance of all that this holy apostle will tell us about the foundational primacy of truth in our lives.

How can the Apostle Paul "rejoice" in the sufferings he experiences on behalf of and for the sake of Christ's Church?

Do you and I know and experience this kind of repeated joy, on behalf of and for the sake of Christ's Church – our church, Apostles Church?

Part of the answer comes from what Paul tells us next. Namely, that he sees his life and ministry as rooted and continuing in the Life and Ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. Those sufferings which Christ began in His Passion and completed in His Crucifixion on behalf of and for the sake of His Church now continue in the life of Paul – and may continue in your life and mine. This is a momentous perspective, a subversive, alternative worldview. And it is a true. It is truth.

Hebrews 12:1 Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. 3 Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. 4 In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.

Is this our perspective? Can we even begin to imagine it for ourselves?

Paul has been given Someone for whom his life is worthy living, even suffering. He is the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God our Savior. And just as Jesus gave over His life in suffering on behalf of and for the sake of His People, the Church, you and me, so Paul rejoices to participate in the ongoing application of Christ's Passion and Crucifixion in his world. Watch Paul's life. Follow him, as he follows Christ. Look at a life not promoted with merely the right words but poured out majestically in rejoicing works – even works of intentional, voluntary, suffering.

(v. 25)

The gracious calling and power before and behind Paul's life is not his own. He did not advance himself into it. It was not conferred upon him by family, friends, school, synagogue, or state. No, Paul's life calling and the power to fulfill this call are rather divine and divinely given. And they are not given for the self-promotion and self-satisfaction of Paul; instead, they are given to him on behalf of and for the sake of Christ's very own Body, His Church called out from the world.

Of course, it is the purpose of this divine calling and power – rather than the person to whom it is given – that matters most.

What is this divine calling, this divine stewardship given to Paul for the Church?

Let's proceed no further until this answer is clear in our minds: the purpose of God's calling and power upon the Apostle Paul is "to make the Word of God fully known."

I say again: the purpose of God's calling and power upon the Apostle Paul is "to make the Word of God fully known."

What an immense stewardship!

Can we imagine any higher calling? Can we imagine anything requiring more divine power?

Can we imagine this highest calling upon all of our lives, too? Do we experience anything of the divine power needed to fulfill this divine call upon us, as Christ's Church in the world today?

(v. 26)

What in the Word of God must be made fully known to God's People and to His world?

What must be made known is none other than a divine mystery, which has been kept secret for millennia – ever since time dawned on Creation's first day.

And this hidden mystery is “now revealed” by God to His People.

And right here we are beginning to rub raw and throw sparks with the vast majority of those in our Western culture, who subscribe (knowing or unknowingly) to the prescribed canons and dominant voices of either Modernity or Postmodernity.

Briefly, let me explain, as these two points will be essential to understand as we move further and deeper into today's biblical text. These two points concern our questions of: “What is truth?” and “Where is truth to be found?”

The Modernist answers these two questions in these ways:

“What is truth?” Truth is an independent, fixed, stable, absolute, objective reality outside of ourselves but within our reach.

“Where is truth to be found?” This independent, fixed, stable, objective truth must be ascertained through the neutral use of rational investigation. Authority is in human reason, and the rational mind reigns supreme.

The Postmodernist answers these two questions in completely opposite ways:

“What is truth?” Truth is a culturally-dependent, unfixed, dynamic, subjective perspective inside of ourselves and always beyond our reach.

“Where is truth to be found?” Truth is never truly nor permanently found. Truth is at best elusively expressed through ever-changing cultural constructs and patterns, such as human language, individual preferences, family values, religious beliefs, entertainment options, economic patterns, political persuasions, military might, etc. Authority is in the subjective self, and the limited, fluid, uncertain perception reigns supreme.

Obviously, then, what are rubbing raw and throwing sparks between the Judeo-Christian Faith and the Modernist/Postmodernist secular systems happen to be their foundational beliefs about truth.

In contrast to the Modernist and Postmodernist views I just described, the Judeo-Christian Faith answers these questions “What is truth?” and “Where is truth to be found in this way ...

(v. 27)

Are you seeing the unique, subversive answers of the Judeo-Christian Faith and how radically different and opposed they are to those of Modernity and Postmodernity?

“What is truth?” According to the Judeo-Christian Faith, Truth is a Person, Who is revealed by God in His grace and for His glory! This Truth, none other than the Divine-Human Person of the Son of God become Son of Man – our Lord Jesus Christ, is a holy objective, eternally unchanging, and infinitely absolute reality beyond our sinful reach through fallen, human reason. Jesus is not a figment of individual imagination nor a religious myth nor a socio-cultural construct of human language for economic gain and political power. Jesus is the Creator-God of the Universe. He is the Savior-God of His Church. And He is the Present Lord-God and the Returning King-God of this messed-up, upside-down, broken and weary world.

“Where is truth to be found?” Jesus, the Truth, is found not by the supposedly “neutral” mind’s rational investigation nor by the self’s endlessly subjective speculation. Instead, Jesus is the Revealed One. In Sovereign Grace, God the Father- through His Holy Spirit and His Holy Word - chooses to Whom He will make known the Truth of His Crucified, Risen, Reigning, and Returning Son, Who is “Christ in you, the hope of glory.”

Can you imagine a more subversive Message in Paul’s day, in our day?

Do you believe this Message?

This Message and its Ministry get even more exclusive and intensive ...

(v. 28)

What are we to do with this subversive Message, this exclusive Gospel of Jesus Christ?

Our relativistic and pluralistic culture in New York City intimidates and manipulates us into cultural silence, into “keeping it to ourselves.” “You can believe it if you want to,” says our dominant cultural voice, “but you can’t ever suggest that others should believe it to.”

Echoing the important teachings of the Christian philosopher Frances Schaeffer in the last century, Christian philosopher Nancy Percy demonstrates in this century how

the net effect is to relegate the Judeo-Christian Faith to the level of private values, excluding the Gospel of Jesus from the level of public facts.

Let me pause here to remind us all of two, tragic realities that stand behind this kind of dominating, intimidating cultural opposition to the Judeo-Christian Faith:

First, from a philosophical perspective, the Relativistic-Pluralistic cultural agenda violates one of the most basic first principles of logic. Please be patient and follow me here ... This really isn't hard to grasp at all, and the twisted irony will be worth it. What Relativism and Pluralism supposedly object to is any worldview that expresses itself as absolute, exclusive truth, just as the Judeo-Christian Faith clearly and obviously does:

6 Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

So in a nutshell, Relativism and Pluralism say, "No one can claim absolute, exclusive truth." No one can say, "I know the Truth." And certainly not even Jesus can say, "I am the Truth."

But is this not an absolute, exclusive truth statement?!?

Relativism and Pluralism at their core violate the first principle of logic called "the law of non-contradiction." Proclaiming the absolute, exclusive truth statement "No one can claim absolute, exclusive truth!" is woefully and shamefully self-contradictory. Despite the self- and public-promotions of New York Times Best-Selling militant atheists, such as Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens, numerous Christian (Marilynn Robinson) and non-Christian (Terry Eagleton) voices are stripping away their illogical arguments, revealing their naked, immature anti-intellectualism.

The second, tragic reality behind our dominant culture's intimidating and manipulating attempts to silence the Judeo-Christian Faith comes as more psychological and sociological than philosophical and logical.

The deceit of Relativism and Pluralism is a high-sounding concern for the "equal and tolerant" psychological adjustment of individuals and sociological acceptance of groups – all of whom may hold differing beliefs. Thus, this "equal and tolerant" mantra serves to normalize and standardize all individual and communal beliefs in our American society. "All are equal and equally accepted" is the flying banner of Relativism's and Pluralism's motto.

But what happens when some of these individuals and some of these groups claim exclusive, absolute beliefs – as so many (the vast majority, in fact) do?

What happens to the Atheist who denies the existence of God?

What happens to the Agnostic who denies the certainty of God?

What happens to the Theist who affirms the existence of God?

*What happens to the Jew who claims Yahweh is God?
What happens to the Muslim who claims Allah is God?
What happens to the Christian who claims the Holy Trinity is God?*

Again, just a simple appeal to the first principles of human logic demonstrates that Relativism's and Pluralism's "All are equal and equally accepted" simply does not work. For all of these beliefs (and many more besides) are exclusive and absolute. They are not equal. They are anything but. They are all of them exclusive, not relative. And they are all of them absolute, not pluralistic. And they are anything but equally accepted in our American culture.

But as I said, this second problem is more psychological and sociological than philosophical and logical, so let me stay this course. The "virtue" that Relativism and Pluralism falsely claims is a "loving equality and peaceful acceptance" of all individual and communal beliefs. But we have seen that this simply is not true nor what in fact happens. Any and all who claim an exclusive, absolute belief are not regarded as equal nor are they equally accepted.

The ironic, brutal result is that exclusive beliefs are excluded and absolute beliefs are absolutely rejected.

ILLUSTRATION: Eli Garza's philosophy professor who prohibited such topics as "a Judeo-Christian view of abortion" or "a Judeo-Christian view of homosexuality" on the day of her student's critical-argument presentations. She censored these as "too controversial," even while allowing other students to present on topics such as, "residual effects of American slavery," "lasting lessons of the Jewish holocaust," "hidden, gender discrimination in the marketplace," and "global threats of militant, Islamic terrorism" – apparently because none of these are "too controversial"?!? So much for the university as the "free pursuit of truth." Hopefully, that professor learned something about the lasting lesson of Fascism from her student's Holocaust presentation ...

I encouraged Eli to go ahead and present his original, "forbidden" topic, but he caved under the threat of a failing grade. Understandable. The powers-that-be do have persuasive, manipulative, oppressive means to silence our voices.

But she had no power to silence my voice, so I went ahead and presented my topic of concern – namely, this fascist professor - to key administrators and leading professors of that university. Apparently, dismissal of her professorship was chosen – or chosen for her – rather than the acknowledgement and correction of her discrimination.

So much for Relativism's and Pluralism's "virtue" of "loving equality and peaceful acceptance." Their disguise of "tolerance" is exposed as horrifically intolerant of any absolute, exclusive beliefs, including the Judeo-Christian Faith, the Gospel of

Jesus. Their “open-mindedness” is in fact a “closed-mindedness” – what Timothy Keller justly calls “narrow-minded to the extreme.”

Let it be said, then, that Relativism and Pluralism are the most brutal, dominating, silencing cultural agendas that Western Civilization has ever concocted.

At least in the Apostle Paul’s day, the dominating, cultural voices – whether Roman, Greek, or Jewish – would only say to the Christian, “You are treasonously or foolishly or heretically wrong.” And by “only” I, of course, don’t mean “merely,” as these are tough accusations with serious consequences.

But by “only” I mean this: the Western culture of Paul’s day didn’t forbid or negate the Christian’s inherent right to believe – and subsequently, to live - an absolute, exclusive belief. The Western culture of Paul’s day in fact acknowledged the public arena – whether political, economic, philosophical, or religious – as a place of competition between conflicting, exclusive, absolute beliefs. And this is precisely what today’s totalitarian, dominating, cultural regimes of Relativism and Pluralism wish to silence. Through intimidation, manipulation, and coercion, Relativism and Pluralism express enormous power to remove the personal and communal right to hold exclusive, absolute beliefs, as well as to regulate their influence in the public arena of our free, democratic republic – that is, the free marketplace of ideas.

Can you imagine a more disrespectful discrimination, deceitfully disguised as “respectful tolerance”?

So now we must ask our original question that verse 28 answers for us: What are we to do with this subversive Message, this exclusive Gospel of Jesus Christ?

We must proclaim this Message, this Good News of Jesus. Which is to say, we must proclaim Him! In both words and actions, by both our creeds and our lifestyles - as the saying goes, “with our lips and with our lives.”

And our proclamation must be a loving, humble balance of negative warning (for those who would disbelieve and disobey) and of positive teaching (for those who would believe and obey).

Who does your life proclaim?

QUOTE: “Telling the truth about God, telling the truth about Jesus, and telling the truth about the world are intimately connected to each other....Conversely, it is inescapably the case that lying about God, lying about Jesus, and lying about the world are inextricably related to each other. We have learned to lie well.... Truth telling is not easy. But it is freeing.” – Walter Brueggemann, *The Word Militant*

Notice, too, that our proclamation of Jesus is to “everyone.” No one is accepted. You and I do not have the authority or right to decide to whom we will or will not proclaim Jesus. Remember the Great Commission (Matthew 28; Acts 1)?

Moreover, the purpose and goal of our proclaiming Jesus is to present everyone we warn and teach as mature in Christ. That is, in His image (Romans 8:29), not our image, not our church’s image, not our culture’s image, etc.

Do we do this? Can we do this?

Not without God’s wisdom! Proclaiming a subversive message with a subversive lifestyle will surely be risky today, just as it was in Paul’s day. The consequences may be of different degree (social ostracism versus militant death), but they won’t be different in kind (oppressive and restrictive).

Therefore, we must learn not just what Truth is (Jesus!) and where Truth is to be found (the gracious revelation of God’s Word through God’s Spirit); we must also learn how to live this Truth in love, goodness, and beauty in our Relativistic and Pluralistic New York culture.

And again, we must learn this, because admittedly the Church often has failed to proclaim Jesus and live the Gospel in love, goodness, and beauty. We must confess that too many times the Church has made her proclamation of Jesus and life in Him not through humility but through arrogance (i.e., persecution of Galileo and Copernicus); not through service but through domination (i.e., the Crusades); not in honesty, but in deceit (i.e., European religious wars); not in holiness but by sin (clergy pedophilia); not in love but by hate (American slavery and racial prejudice/discrimination).

Many critics today, especially the loud ones the likes of Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens, rightly criticize the Church’s abuses and neglects. But they wrongly go too far, suggesting that what is needed is the total elimination of Christianity – even all Theism (Judaism, Islam, etc. included).

But what is needed is not less but more and truer and deeper Christianity, as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. so wisely proclaimed and lived in his courageous efforts for Civil Rights in our nation.

And this happens to be where the Judeo-Christian Faith is more subversive and most supreme. For the Bible through the teachings and lives of the holy prophets and the holy apostles – and especially the Life and Teaching of Jesus our Lord - has the most amazing, built-in wisdom and ways for our Judeo-Christian Faith’s self-correction of our abuses and neglects. No other belief system in the world – religious or secular – has such a wealth of intrinsic, internal reform (which is why all of our contemporary expressions of political self-government are firmly rooted in the Judeo-Christian Faith).

Quote from prophets by E. Peterson.

But remember that we must present to the world such reforms and corrections of our abuses and neglects not merely with our words of confession and repentance but also with our lives of truth, love, goodness, and beauty. In other words, of all the peoples of the Earth, we are most blessed and most benefited to show love, to demonstrate compassion, to promote peace, to make sacrifice, to share help.

As we then out-love, out-joy, out-peace, out sacrifice, out-serve all others, what fault will they find in our Message and Ministry of Jesus?

Only the fault of their own sinful resistance and hostile unbelief. Only their fear of losing power and control. Only their fear of the hope and possibility of new life in a transformed, subversive way of life in Jesus and His Gospel.

Even though the Judeo-Christian Faith has been and always will be a minority Message and even though the Judeo-Christian Church has been and always will be a minority People, **imagine** what hope for renewal and what true transformation has been and always will be possible in this subversive Jesus and His subversive Gospel ...

You and I are – can be, should be – that subversive hope and subversive transformation in our city.

QUOTE: “The Church is the hope of the world.” – Bill Hybels

(v. 29)

How do we proclaim Jesus and live His Gospel in our city – as a minority people with a minority voice and minority means power and influence?

Let us consider the teachings of Scripture from today’s text and other passages, so that we may cultivate a “Planned Biblical Response.”

First, the wisdom we need comes not from ourselves but from our God as a gracious gift of Promise (James 1:5). Ask God for wisdom (e.g., King Solomon). It is to us to seek this gift of grace through faithful obedience. We may seek this wisdom through four, primary means of grace:

- 1) The Word of God
- 2) The Spirit of God
- 3) The Providence of God – “Listen to your life.” – Fredreick Buechner
- 4) The Church of God – “What is the wise thing to do?” – Andy Stanley

Second, accept upfront the Bible’s honesty that proclaiming Jesus and living His Gospel will be arduous work, involving agonizing suffering and even outright persecution (v. 29; 2 Corinthians 4; James 1; 1 Peter 1). Remember, we follow a Crucified Lord!

Third, believe the Bible's Promise that Christ's Resurrection power through His indwelling Spirit empowers us to proclaim Jesus and live His Gospel (John 14-16; Acts 1; Romans 8; Ephesians 5). Remember, we follow a Resurrected Lord!

Fourth, remember for whom you are struggling (2:1): Jesus and His Church (local and Universal, known and unknown).

Fifth, Regard your struggle as a struggle for love in the truth, for Love in the Truth (2:2).

For what else is worth living, if not for love and truth?

For what are you ultimately living?

As they say, "Whatever is worth living for is worth dying for." Now that is a Gospel perspective on life (Mark 8:34)!

Sixth, have bedrock confidence in the Person and Work of Jesus Christ (2:3).

ILLUSTRATION: Jesus is the Wisest Person. – Dallas Willard

Do you believe this?

What rivals for supremacy (Colossians 1) does Jesus have in your life?

Seek the "hidden treasures of wisdom and knowledge" in Jesus, and you shall find them, for they will be given (revealed) to you (Jeremiah 29; Matthew 6). Test God on this one – take Him on; He loves it (e.g., Moses in Exodus 33, 34).

Seventh, beware of deceitful, counterfeit "truths" concocted by fallen human reason and imagination (2:4) – and empowered by satanic, spiritual forces (Ephesians 6; Colossians 2).

Note the absolute language of "no one." Not a parent, spouse, boy/girlfriend, best friend, boss, neighbor, professor/teacher, doctor, psychologist, philosopher, writer, musician, artist, entertainer, journalist, politician, economist, philanthropist, etc. All these will attempt to delude you, but none should be successful.

Eighth, understand that the ultimate battle is for the control of your mind. Whatever you believe is true is what you will live. "Thoughts rule the world," as R.C. Sproul warns us. So the battleground is the human mind (Romans 12).

What do you believe? In other words, what is your worldview? How well do you understand your worldview? How well can you share it with others? How we can you defend it from others?

May I pause here to share two, brief pastoral words – one for all of us and one for some of us?

First, to all of us: Love God with all your mind. Remember that this is the Great Commandment (Deuteronomy 6; Matthew 22). So, give God the best of your cognitive powers.

Second to some of us: A pastoral word to you who are intellectually gifted ...

QUOTE: "Good philosophy must exist, if for no other reason, because bad philosophy needs to be answered." - CS Lewis

God the Holy Spirit has naturally and supernaturally gifted you to be both advancers and protectors of truth – in the Church and in the world. Whatever calling the Lord places on your life, whatever vocation you pursue, give it your all. We in the Church desperately need you to warn and teach us about all manner of theology, philosophy, politics, economics, medicine, psychology, arts, etc. And those in the world need your warning and teaching, too, even if it goes naively unnoticed or maliciously oppressed.

Ninth, know you are not alone (Hebrews 12). The proclamation of Jesus and living the Gospel is not just a mere individual attempt; rather, it is more of a communal affair. We proclaim Jesus and live the Gospel together – a subversive message in subversive community. So value and commit to the church (Hebrews 10). There is safety in numbers, as the wisdom goes (1 Peter 5).

Tenth and finally, we end where we began, finishing where we started: rejoicing (2:5). Rejoicing through our sufferings, entering into the Crucifixion of Jesus, leads to even greater rejoicing in our glory, experiencing the Resurrection of Jesus!

By persevering in grace through our sufferings in proclaiming Jesus and living the Gospel, we, the Church, mature in our “good order” and “firmness of faith in Christ.” As Paul will tell us in the remainder of this letter, we principally will experience this “good order” and “firmness of faith in Christ” in our relationships (with our spouses in marriage; with our children in parenting; with our employer and employees in our work).

CONCLUSION

Our culture in New York City, reflecting the greater culture of our present-day nation is facing a “Crisis of truth.” We have seen that the central questions are “What is truth?” “Where is truth to be found?” and “How are we to live this truth?”

The Judeo-Christian Faith affirms that Jesus is the Truth. We are to proclaim Him and live His Gospel. Facing the church, facing us, in New York City, then, is a belief, confidence, and trust in this Truth of Jesus and His Good News Message.

Just consider the importance of this Truth for our lives and living by remembering the two, very different responses of my two, very dear friends:

Steve's worldview: God-centered, Judeo-Christian, cultivating the graces of peace, joy, courage, perseverance, faith, hope, and love.

My other friend's worldview: human-centered, secular-postmodern, imposing the nihilisms of despair, anxiety, doubt, restlessness, alienation, and confusion.

Do I need to ask which worldview is most dominant in our culture today?

How many theologians and philosophers – Christian or not – must warn us of our cultural – and consequently, personal - crisis of despair? (Albert Camus, Gabriel Marcel, Frances Schaeffer, etc.)

SCRIPTURE: “Think about what is true (Philippians 4:8).”

QUOTE: “Stop regarding as superfluous something so essential in human life and human relations as thought....What we are suffering from is not a void but inadequate means for thinking about everything that is happening. There is an overabundance of things to be known: fundamental, terrible, wonderful, funny, insignificant, and crucial at the same time. And there is an enormous curiosity, a need, a desire to know.... The mind isn't made of wax. It's a reactive substance. And the desire to know [savior] more, and to know it more deeply and to know other things increases as one tries to stuff peoples' heads.... The right to knowledge [droit au savoir] must not be reserved to a particular age group or to certain categories of people, but one must be able to exercise it constantly and in many different ways.” – Michel Foucault, “The Masked Philosopher”

THINK ABOUT WHAT IS TRUE.

This is what the Apostle Paul is saying to the Colossian Church in his day and to Apostles Church in our day.

QUOTE: “How can we know what kind of mind we have?...spiritual mindedness is the chief, distinguishing mark of a believer ... it alone leads to life and peace ... how vital it must be!” – John Owen, *Thinking Spiritually*

I leave you with some good questions to help you think about what is true:

What do I know about Who God is? Who or what before me is unlike God?

What do I know about what God is doing, has done, and will do? Who or what is living against what God is doing and promises to do?

Listen in narrative-theological categories of Creation, Fall, Salvation, and New Creation (read Total Truth by N. Percy).

The Jews and Greeks of Paul's day knew the biblical meta-narrative story ... do you? Read a book to get an overview: *The Invitation* by Eugene Peterson.

What do I know the Bible teaches to be true that I must trust and obey? Who am I trusting? Who am I obeying? What am I believing, trusting, obeying that is NOT true?

What wise counsel may I receive from mature Christians of the Church (dead/alive, known/unknown, etc.)? What wisdom am I neglecting, hiding, despising? What wisdom have I lived well before? What wisdom have I witnessed others live well?

What truth remains shrouded in impenetrable mystery? How do I need to rest in God through faith?

Thinking about what is true is not an exercise in bald reason; we are created and called to use our creative imaginations, too.

QUOTE: "The old world is not a given; it is a fraud. Another world is possible – in our imaginations. We listen and imagine differently.... Another world is possible – in our practice. We are only a few, but we are some. We can do little, but something. As we stay within the cadences of our defining utterance, we begin to enact another world. Foolishly, we enact obedience to a daring claim, obedience to a possibility; we specialize in cold water and shared bread, in welcome speech, hospitality, sharing, giving, compassion, caring – in small ways – and in setting the world fresh.... We refuse dominant versions of reality, seeing the flow of newness and acknowledging the chance. We are indeed a sub-people ... sub-verse, sub-verted, sub-verting, ... sub-tle. We are on the ground, underneath official versions. Our subness is rooted in our pain, because you cannot fool pain; in our hope, because hope comes without permission. But after our pain and after our hope, the rootage of our sub is in God's holiness, a holiness we have seen and trusted, Whose Name we know, a holiness untamed, thick, abrasive ... newness unashamed."
– Walter Brueggemann, *The Word Militant: Preaching as Subversion*

Imagine your life, our church, our city as we think more and about what is true, as we live more and more what is true.

Imagine the hope of a resurrected marriage.

Imagine the hope of a godly boy/girlfriend, fiancé, and future spouse.

Imagine the hope of raising godly children in the Lord.

Imagine the hope of a restored relationship that has been broken.

Imagine the hope of deep, meaningful friendships in our city.

Imagine the hope of renewed health in soul and body.

Imagine the hope of holiness victorious over your secret sin.

Imagine the hope of a satisfying vocation and fulfilling job.

Imagine the hope of racial reconciliation in our city.

Imagine the hope of economic opportunity for the poor.

Imagine the hope of legal justice for the oppressed.

Imagine the hope of a respectable, honest, and trustworthy government.

Imagine the hope of an open, uncensored public square of competing ideas.

And most of all, imagine the hope of Apostles Church as a people of white-hot worship, maturing spirituality, holy lifestyles, loving relationships, sacrificial giving, committed service, and humble witness. Imagine ourselves as a church our city loves to hate and hates to love ...

The powers that be and that are ever-becoming in our city and nation don't want you to imagine such new life, such societal transformation. The battle is for control of your mind. The battleground is your mind.

So think about what is True. Think about Truth. That is, think about Jesus and His Gospel.

Hear Him!