



**TRUTH AND CONSEQUENCES**  
**John 12:12-19, Rev. 7:9-12**

“Socrates is a hero in the academic community because he gave his life for what he believed in. He did not ask if he was successful – only faithful to the truth that gripped and shaped his soul and spirit. He said, ‘I love my city Athens – but I will not stop teaching that which I believe is true. You may kill my body – but I will obey God rather than you.’ He did not consult Gallup polls or popularity spin doctors. As he is handed the cup of hemlock to drink he didn’t say, ‘Is Plato texting this message for all the world to know?’ There are truths that are so deeply woven into human life and existence that they cannot be stopped. Socrates was labeled a criminal – a lawbreaker – in an effort to discredit the truth he stood for.”

“Some of the greatest names of the Old and New Testaments were notorious lawbreakers and criminals. Moses was a murderer and King David an outlaw. Isaiah and Jeremiah were both accused of treason and conspiracy. And then we have those three good Jewish boys – Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego – who refused to bow down and submit to an earthly king – and were thrown into the fire. It was the beginning of civil disobedience and divine obedience.”<sup>1</sup>

George Washington, Alexander Hamilton, Thomas Jefferson, and John Quincy Adams were all traitors in the eyes of British law. Yes, we as a nation stand on their disobedience. There was a higher loyalty and truth that they had embraced.

Right here in the great state of Pennsylvania our history tells of the witness of the Quakers and others who refused to obey the Fugitive Slave Act. Then we have the witness of the abolitionists – fueled by their religious faith – to oppose the institution of slavery.

Thank God for those who opposed both religious and civil laws to mold us to be the people and nation we are today. Truth and the consequences of truth mold and shape us all.

I have often turned to the great hymn written by James Russell Lowell, “Once to Every Man and Nation:”

“Once to every man and nation  
Comes the moment to decide  
In the strife with falsehood

For the good or evil side  
Some great cause – some great decision  
Offering each the bloom or blight  
And the choice goes by forever  
Twixt that darkness and that light.”<sup>2</sup>

**Joshua 24:15** declares, “Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve.” The psalmist testifies, “the Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?”

The Apostle Paul commands, “Be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of his might put on the full armor of God.”

Further, G. K. Chesterton writes:

“O God of earth and altar – bow down and hear our cry,  
From all that terror teaches from lies of tongue and pen,  
From all easy speeches that comfort cruel men,  
From sale and profanation of honor, and the sword,  
From sleep and from damnation, deliver us, good Lord.”<sup>3</sup>

Jesus shares, “You shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free.”

Yes, truth requires diligence, courage, character, and sacrifice. That is why churches filled today – are almost empty on Good Friday. We want to rush from the cradle to the empty tomb – without stopping in between. The truth can be crucified. Only those who stick around – discover it cannot be defeated. Unless you are baptized into his death and burial – you will not know the cosmic victory of the resurrection.

During the Holy Week drama, Pilate was honest enough to ask “**What is truth?**” It is regrettable that he did not seek the truth with the same effort he expended to achieve military and political power. Instead of washing his hands – he might have submitted himself to be washed in the water of baptism. He might be remembered a little differently in the Apostles’ Creed – and in the annals of history. Truth was as demanding and elusive in Pilate’s day – as it is this day.

The events of Holy Week – from Palm Sunday to the cleansing of the Temple, the washing of our feet, the Lord’s supper, the betrayal of his disciples, the arrest, the mockery of justice, violence, loneliness, rejection, public humiliation, the agony of suffering and death – **comes to all of us**. The events of Holy Week allow us to tell our story. So for the past 2,000 years the church has kept this drama and story alive for a reason – so you can enter the story – so you can encounter the Jesus truth – the Jesus way – the Jesus life – and so discover your own life.

One of the great challenges we face is that from the moment of our birth we live in a world of deal making. Deal making becomes foundational to our lives. We see this at work in Harrisburg, Washington D. C., and it even is alive inside the church walls. It

even comes home to roost in our own house. Satan wanted to make a deal with Jesus. Jesus says, “**No Deal.**” Judas makes a deal with the high priest. The high priest makes a deal with Rome. Deal-making continues to this day and moment.

Most commentaries share with us that there were as many as 12 different gates or roads leading in and out of Jerusalem. There were probably 12 different deals or agendas going on on how to best use this opportunity for their own kingdom or cause. Jesus knows there is only one road – one way – one truth he must follow and fulfill. As one colleague shares, “Jesus heard the roar of the crowd – saw the deal makers – but was not taken in by it. He remained in control of his vision and the Father’s will for his life.”<sup>4</sup> How about us? How do we remain true to the truth we have professed in Christ? How do we stand up to the crowd and cynics of our time? If you don’t know the truth – there are forces out there that will gladly give you their truth. If you don’t have an identity – someone will gladly give you theirs. If you don’t have an authority or foundation to stand upon – someone will gladly invite you into their sinking sand. If you don’t know who you serve – you wind up serving or being enslaved by something that is not worthy of your life and soul. If you don’t worship the living God – you don’t stop worshipping – you just wind up worshipping everything and everyone.

I know there is that temptation to just accept the status quo – or just simply shut our eyes – and pretend none of this even exists. **That is a bad deal.** You have surrendered even before the battle begins. Thank God for all those who we began this sermon with today – who did not shut their eyes – but put their hands to the plow – and responded to the truth they encountered and that gripped their souls.

Many years ago Joe Garagiola was a major league catcher. Late in his career – he enjoyed mentoring young pitchers who had just been called up from the minor league to the major leagues. He particularly remembered one such rookie. An injury to the team’s ace reliever caused him to be called upon in a tight game. The bases were loaded – and one of the best hitters in baseball – Stan Musial – was now at bat. He gave the signal for the fast ball – the pitcher shook it off. He called for the curve ball – but once again he shook it off. He called for the slider – he shook it off. He called for the change-up – but once again he shook it off. Joe is frustrated. He calls for time – and runs out to the mound. He said, “I called every pitch in the book – what’s up? What do you want to throw?” The pitcher replied “**Nothing Joe. I just want to hold onto the ball as long as I can.**” We have all known those moments in life when fear grabs hold of us.<sup>5</sup> We want to play it safe.

However, Jesus did not save the world by playing it safe – or from a safe address – but from a cross.

The next time you find yourself caught in the deal-making culture and the compromise it demands of us – embrace the cross. Remember the values – the priorities – the sacrifice required of a disciple of Jesus Christ. Remember, he will never ask you to do anything he has not done or modeled himself. Pray for the mind and

attitude of Christ Jesus to be in you. He promised to sustain you – and someday he will vindicate you.

Today, I asked for the pulpit hangings to be red. It is used to represent those who have been martyred for the faith.

As the reading from the book of Revelation reminds us today – the palm branch for the early church was a sign of martyrdom and sacrifice. When you leave church, consider what it means for us to be carrying it.

One of my greatest disappointments with the evangelical movement is that so many are only looking for a political and economic Messiah. As Phillip Yancey reminds us “issues that confront Christians in our secular society can be addressed and faced in the legislative arena. Our democratic form of government gives us the privilege to do so. We should vote. But we dare not invest so much in the kingdom of this world that we neglect our main task of introducing people to a different kind of kingdom – based solely on God’s grace and forgiveness.” Jesus did not say “All people will know you are my disciples if you pass laws” – but rather “**if you love one another.**” You see Christ and Caesar met in the arena – and Christ won. Jesus did not say “The gates of hell shall not prevail against government” – but rather “the gates of hell shall not prevail against my church.”<sup>6</sup> A false understanding of the Messiah can cause us to follow the wrong crowd and path. Except for the teaching ministry of Dr. Charles Stanley – there is little in television evangelism that you find anchored to biblical truth. You will hear a great deal about wealth, prosperity, self-esteem – but little about sacrifice and obedience. Jesus came to save people from the greatest enemy – the most serious bondage – the bondage of sin and death. Today you must decide – Christ or Caesar!

Don’t hold onto the ball too long. Today, as we join our voices in praise to Jesus – we need to ask ourselves if we, too, sing and rejoice because of who He is, or because of **who we want to make him be**. The cross reveals his truth.

He came not the way of Caesar – but the cross. These will be my closing words today:

“By the light of burning martyrs  
Christ, thy bleeding feet we track  
Toiling up new Calvaries  
With the cross that turns not back  
New occasions teach new duties  
Ancient values test our youth  
They must upward, still and onward  
Who would keep abreast of truth.”<sup>7</sup>

Truth has many consequences.

May God grant us courage to follow him!

Amen and amen!

Reverend Eric S. Ritz  
March 28, 2010 – Palm Sunday  
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## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup>William Sloane Coffin, **THE RIVERSIDE YEARS: Volume 2**, Westminster/John Knox Press, Louisville, KY, 2008, pages 151-152. The first two paragraphs are indebted to Dr. Coffin.

<sup>2</sup> James Russell Lowell, Hymn, **“Once to Every Man and Nation,”** verse one.

<sup>3</sup> G. K. Chesterton, Hymn, **“O God of Earth and Altar,”** Internet, accessed 3/23/2010, verse 2.

<sup>4</sup> Thanks to Dr. John Killinger for this insight.

<sup>5</sup> Thanks to my mentor and colleague, Dr. Thomas Lane Butts for this marvelous story.

<sup>6</sup> Philip Yancey, **THE JESUS I NEVER KNEW**, Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, MI, 1995, page 247.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, James Russell Lowell, Stanza 3.