

## ***“Honest to God”***

Rev. David Gregory

September 30, 2018

Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost



### ***First reading***

Ephesians 4:15-16 *adapted from the Contemporary English Version*

*Love should always make us tell the truth. Then we will grow in every way and be in the Christ-(consciousness), which holds it together and makes all of its parts work perfectly, as it grows and becomes strong because of love.*

### ***Second reading***

*Ed Bacon in 8 Habits of Love*

*The essence of practicing the habit of Truth is that we have to follow Truth, it does not follow us. Truth does not obey our plans, it transforms our plans, knocking down partitions and making more room to dance in Truth's space. When we open our lives to collaborate with the resonance of the Beloved that flows through us, we grasp the power of Truth.*

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To say that this has been a rough week would be an understatement. It is hard to address the sheer ugliness of it all—that is, without descending into it. There is a dis-integration which has now descended upon all three branches of our government, and it is stunning to behold. To any younger person in our midst I would say that I never thought I would live to see such a thing. But here it is. And it all seems to hinge on the simple question, “What is true?” Our answer to that question will be determined by whose words we believe. And when choosing between two opposing narratives, we will be conditioned by our own experiences, perceptions, and ideals. This is the essence of being human. What do we see? How do we know? What should we do about it, and what kind of person should we be?

I think we'd all agree that we should be truth tellers. But what is the truth, after all? Theologians and philosophers have argued over the course of millennia about the existence of objective or absolute truth. Are there things that are undeniably true, no matter what? And if there are, how do we know? And how do we know that we know? And how do we know that we know that we know? This is the pursuit of an entire discipline known as epistemology. But few of us will ever find ourselves so deeply committed to our philosophical questions that we uncover what we

think of as *the* truth. As a gathered spiritual community, we are not prone to embrace dogma. Rather, we are “living out the questions hand in hand,” as we use our gifts of Spirit, including observation, perception, and intuition. When we are asked, for example, not to believe what is clearly before our eyes and ears, it is time for us to employ our whole being—head, heart, and gut—to guide us toward what is true, honest, loving, and whole. And thanks to the particular insanities that swirl around us, we have plenty of opportunity for practice.

A third primary course in the School of Love is Truth ... as in honesty ... as in candor ... as in transparency. How does one live a life of forgiveness or practice soul-friendship without the bedrock of truth-telling, both to ourselves and to each other? Love should make us tell the truth, according to the Apostle. In other words, we should speak truth in love. This would be our invitation: “In a loving way, tell me what you really think.”

There is an episode of “I Love Lucy” in which Ricky catches Lucy lying through her teeth to one of her friends, and he bets her that she cannot be candid and truthful for a twenty-four hour period. Of course, she takes the bet (otherwise there would be no episode for us to watch). The problem for Lucy is that she will within this period of time have a group of ladies in her living room for a club meeting. “How do you like my new hat?” asks one of the ladies. This question is all it takes for the shredding to begin. By the time it’s over no one is speaking to Lucy, but she says, “I feel so much better. I should have told the truth a lot sooner.”

One might argue that although Lucy Ricardo was speaking her truth, she was not doing it in love, and I would agree. Truth without love is a weapon, and love without truth is toxic. And so it is the task of this School of Love (Community Congregational Church) to marry the two, and to do so in such a way that we become radically loving truth-tellers, or radically truthful lovers, however you want to look at it.

As you head north on Tiburon Blvd., down by the water just before Blackie’s Pasture is a brand new soccer field. I believe I read that this was a two million dollar project, and come next spring, when the sod has taken hold and it is safe to play on, we will see scores of young people out there practicing, and practicing, and practicing. And then will come the competitions, and then more practicing. Wins and losses. More practicing.

We may be navigating some of the stormiest cultural seas to come upon us in several generations, and if there were ever a time for truthful loving, and loving truthfulness, it is now. And what better practice field for this kind of clarity and candor than “church?” Navigating a committee meeting, or choosing a new paint color for the Sanctuary can be treacherous in a group like ours, but if we can speak our truth in a loving way to our soul-friends, and maintain a spirit of forgiveness, the community itself can be transformed. And once transformed, it can become a microcosm, and a model for something far greater than can be contained within these walls. It’s a radical and revolutionary way of being. It can feel like a bumpy ride at times, but the destination is awesome!

We have been trained to think of the church as a divine institution, handed down to us from on high, and that it lives by some higher ethical quality than what has been described as “the secular.” But the picture that emerges from the New Testament is of something far less holy. Jesus squabbled with his family. Paul opposed Peter to his face over his hypocrisy, and he also became so angry with Mark that he sent him packing. Two women in the church at Philippi, named Euodia and Syntyche, were at such loggerheads as to

merit an apostolic rebuke. We don't know what their issue was. Perhaps there was another saint named Lucy who didn't like their hats; the issues are irrelevant. There's something far greater in play than who runs the institution, or whose taste wins out. It's not about who gets more recognition, or who gets their way.

In the Spirit of Love, there is an entirely new way of being, one that has been taught and emulated by great teachers throughout human history: Buddha, Jesus, Mohammed, and the list goes on and on, "Love each other, as you love yourselves." "Love each other, as I have loved you." "Treat one another as you wish to be treated." And I would say, *love each other enough to tell the truth*. Love enough to believe the truth when it's right before your eyes, and in your heart, and in your gut. Love enough to admit the fault whenever it is yours. Love enough to quickly forgive the faults of others.

Like many other schools, the School of Love has a practice field. And we're all on it. Let's keep at it, and pretty soon we'll become the skillful revolutionaries we are meant to be.

May it be so!

