

“The Truth that Chooses You”
Reformation Sunday – 10.30.2022 – John 8:31-36

In honor of our Confirmands I'd like to share a devotion from Bp. Steven Charleston: “When the leaves begin to fall, drifting to ground on the palm of an unseen hand, when the air turns cold, and the night seems to come sooner every evening, then the holy truth within you will start to emerge, a quiet companion for your thoughts a memory of faces you knew long ago. We are each messengers of a story only we know, keepers of a wisdom entrusted to us since childhood. That vision returns each year, set adrift like leaves to swirl and dance in the wind, covering the world with a coat of many colors, restoring your dreams to the earth from which they came.”

I hold a clear memory of sitting on the edge of a dark stage in Columbus, Georgia, with an actor who was becoming a friend – a girl named Judi Ann Coles – whose best resume entry was that she and her brother were the models for the original Campbell kids who graced millions of labels for cans of Campbell soup back then. We were talking about how hard it was to grow up and find out where we fit in the world – both of us from stable backgrounds with good educations – and yet both of us yearning for one thing: acceptance. Acceptance for who we were when we were being only – who we were. No façade, no masks, no fulfilling others' expectations. Just us. As we were then, and as we were hoping we would be.

I had just finished college, and got my first paying theatre gig with a company of “Godspell” - a Broadway musical about the life of Jesus. We were touring around the southeastern U.S. – with a non-union company because (for those of you who know the show) Jesus and his disciples were depicted as kids playing dress up, imagining how they would grow their lives into something of meaning, and Jesus was wearing a Superman tee shirt. It was one of the more creative depictions of Jesus the world had seen at that time, and the producers were afraid that the “Bible Belt” of the south would not accept that they were seeing a new picture of God's love – because it didn't quite mesh with the picture of Jesus on their Sunday School walls. The producers weren't bound by strict union rules, so, if the audience didn't accept the show, they could shut us down without notice, send us all back to New York City, and cut their losses.

Some folks loved the show (I was one of them.) Others could never accept the *story*, because of the *package*. And I found myself in a living parable about growth and new ways of doing old things and the excitement and absolute resistance that change always causes.

How do you think the Roman Catholic church felt about what brother Martin Luther was suggesting to the only church the world had known for 1500 years? Can you imagine what the buzz was at the Vatican when the Pope and his Conference of Cardinals got news about this cheeky little German monk who was trying to make some fairly hefty changes in the way they were doing business? Who the heck is this guy? What business does he have posting 95 Theses “suggestions” and inviting **us** to debate with **him**? Doesn't he know that the money we take in is funding more churches for poor illiterates across Europe and beyond? Besides, this is working really well for those of us who have the power and hold the purse strings...

Their reactions to the Reformation were probably pretty close to what Jesus of Nazareth was getting from the Pharisees and Temple priests and scribes – you know, the folks in charge of religion in Jesus' time – and it was not a welcoming of something fresh and new into their comfortable system that both supported their faith life and their elite lifestyle. Why would they choose to be part of disrupting a religious system that had been working for generations? We are God's chosen people, they might say. And God has given us this land and this Temple. Who the heck is this guy? What business does a carpenter have interpreting the Law and teaching our Holy Scriptures? He's from Nazareth for goodness sake! Why should we listen to him?

Why would the Jews listen to Jesus? Why would the Church listen to Luther? Why would the world listen to you – or to me? Well, because we are free to choose. We get to choose what is

truth *for us* and we get to choose what truth will *shape us*. But sometimes, it can feel as if we have no choice – that someone else is living our life and keeping us from experiencing it for ourselves. And at times like that, we forget to choose.

Teacher, author, and thinker Seth Godin recently posted this in his blog: “When abundance showed up, first in manufactured goods, then in information, it all seemed like a simple win. More of what we want, thanks. But of course, more of too many things is too much. We are leaving the age of information and entering the age of choice. Not just choosing what we’ll consume, but who we will become. Who will we connect with, lead, trust, honor, dignify, isolate or believe? And how will we choose to walk through the world and what will we leave behind...”

As human beings who believe in Jesus Christ and hold to Martin Luther’s ideas, we have some pretty incredible truths on which to base the choices we are making and will make. For example, How will we work in a world gone hybrid? What is our community built upon? Where do we go to find relationships and how hard must we work to find meaning in our loves and our lives? How shall we envision a church that invites everyone to seek God? And what is it worth to us to share what we have with those who are different from what we are?

The world is grappling with Truth these days – and there are endless ways to choose your life, your passion, your God. But in this place, we proclaim that our truest identity begins in baptism and carries us through our whole life of faith. It’s a huge Truth for all of us, as today we welcome Bentley through the waters, and as our 8 Confirmands say “yes” and affirm that the promises made by someone else on their behalf are now part of who they are forever.

And know this: *The world will call you many things. The world will try to rename you. But today we echo the voice of the Triune God and call you beloved child. When we see you begin to wonder if this name is really yours, we promise to remind you, to help you remember.* Because this is Truth. *You already know in your heart who loves you without conditions; who accepts you just exactly as you are and for exactly who you will chose to be; and who will call you into the very things where your greatest source of joy intersects with the needs of the world.* So take a stand and make a mark with your actions and your life. Choose your truth for almost everything you will believe and say and do. But please know that you are already held in the arms of Truth with a capital T because by grace God has chosen you.

This is the Truth that is sometimes hard to believe. Almost as if it is too good to be true, but what we are reminded of each time we come to the table, as it takes root and forms us from the inside out.

Steven Charleston again, “The old day has gone to bed, the new day has yet to awake. In the in-between times, in the mysterious night, what has been encounters what will be. They dance beneath the starlight of what might be. All things are possible. Miracles do happen. Life is forever unfolding. The sacred is the mysterious night that we cannot control or comprehend. Enter into it. Let go of what was. Let go of what will be. Abide in the in-between times: the what might be of starlight and dreams. Something new there is waiting to emerge.” Fear not, for these truths have already made you free. Amen.

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Resources: October 2022 posts, Bp. Steven Charleston; *We forgot to choose*, Seth Godin blog 10.15.2022; “*Calling at the Crossroads*,” Bryan Sirchio; *Always Tell the Truth*, Bp. Regina Hassanally for Day1 10.30.2022