

John 16:12-15
Trinity Sunday
Sermon Series: Stretch Marks
When I Confess One God and One Truth

Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church
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¹² “I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. ¹³ But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. ¹⁴ He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you. ¹⁵ All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will receive from me what he will make known to you.”

Grace and peace to you from our risen Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Have you ever heard the tale of the blind men and the elephant? The fable tells of six men in India who went to find an elephant so that they could learn what it was like. Being blind, they were left with what their other senses could deduce. The first man touched the side of the elephant and deduced that the elephant was very much like a wall. The next, reaching out and finding a tusk, decided that the elephant was more like a spear than a wall. The other four, encountering the elephant’s trunk, one of its legs, an ear, and finally its tail, thought that it was more like a snake, a tree, a fan, or a rope. Each of them clung to their own opinions based on their own, limited perceptions and although all of them were partly right in the end, all of them were wrong.

The moral of the story is that when it comes to God, we humans are very limited in our perceptions. There are many different “takes” on God, different religions, if you will, that attempt to define God and varied though they may be, they all attempt to describe the same “elephant” something so great and vast of which they have only felt a very small part. It’s a warning against absolute truth, a caution against exclusivity in religion, and due to the pervasiveness of the ideals of tolerance and relativism in our modern-day culture, it’s an argument I wouldn’t be surprised to hear that many of you have already encountered and still others of you undoubtedly will. Can you really say there is just one objective truth? Aren’t all religions really teaching the same basic things? How could anyone ever claim to know with certainty who God is or what the truth is?

These next four weeks, we’re going to be looking at some of the stretch points or stretch marks of our faith. Now, *Stretch Marks*, I understand, is a rather unconventional title for a sermon series. If you have stretch marks on your body, it’s probably something you don’t show off all that much, something you might not be that comfortable talking about. It’s unfortunate, because they usually come from something completely natural and wholesome, rapid growth during our formative years, pregnancy, even muscle growth from exercise. The one cause they all in common is growth. When we consider our faith, there are a number of questions that we have to wrestle with. They’re things that sometimes we may not be all that comfortable talking about. But when we do talk about them, wrestle through them, and discuss them with each other

it leads to spiritual growth. That growth may leave marks or evidence in our lives, but that is nothing that we need be ashamed of.

Can we confess that there is only one true God and that His truth is absolute? The problem with the illustration of the elephant in the fable is the assumption that all the people comprising the various religions of this world are experiencing the same God. But even a passing glance at the basic tenets of those religions reveal that that cannot be the case. Christianity and Islam cannot be harmonized. Hinduism and Mormonism are not compatible. All religion does not “basically teach the same thing.” Many religions in fact directly contradict each other or are diametrically opposed to one another.

So what are we to do? The smorgasbord of ideas, especially “religious” ideas, is a confused and confusing buffet. That’s problematic, because truth in religion is not a matter of mere taste. It is a matter of temporal and eternal fate. It’s a matter of who we are, where we came from, and what happens to us when our bodies cease to function. So the truth is, we need to know the truth! Has God left us alone to struggle in our search for it? If so, we wouldn’t be much better off than the blind men attempting to describe the elephant. Thankfully, that isn’t the case. God has provided a means through which the truth—all the truth we need—is communicated to us.

In our Gospel lesson this morning we have God’s promise that He will guide us into the truth. It’s an excellent text for Trinity Sunday because in it, Jesus talks about God the Father, Himself (God the Son), and God the Holy Spirit. First of all, He reminds us that everything He has shared with us comes from the Father. The Father has known truth—the truth—from eternity. He knows that human beings are lost in their estrangement from Him both now and in eternity. He knows that the cause of that estrangement is our sinfulness and that our sin in addition to separating us from Him also blinds us to our lost condition. In answer to those truths He sent His Son into the world to release us from that lost condition opening our eyes to the Truth.

Jesus, God the Son, came into this world to share and to fulfill God’s truth and He accomplished precisely that. Far beyond ethics and morality, Jesus proclaimed a message that spoke of God’s love for His creation and especially for mankind. He preached a message of law and gospel, sin and grace, repentance and forgiveness. The eleven apostles to whom He was speaking in our Gospel text were among those who had heard more of His teachings than anyone, and yet He told them, **I still have so much more to teach you, more indeed than you can now bear.** He had already taught them so much, but their understanding of it all was limited. They would not be able to entirely comprehend the fullness of God’s love for sinful men until Jesus had carried out the work which He had come to do.

Jesus hadn’t come solely to teach us the truth about God, as God’s Old Testament prophets had done and as all the prophets and seers of the rest of the world’s religions claimed to do. Jesus is God, and He had come to fulfill the truth of God. He came to achieve perfection as our substitute and pay the full penalty for our estrangement from God by offering His life for us, rising in victory over death, and taking His seat as the King of Creation.

On Maundy Thursday, as they sat with Jesus in that upper room in Jerusalem, that would have been a lot for the apostles to process. And yet, while He did not reveal everything to them that evening, He left them with a promise, **When He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide**

you into all the truth. He will not speak on His own; He will speak only what He hears, and He will tell you what is yet to come. He will glorify Me because it is from Me that He will receive what He will make known to you. All that belongs to the Father is Mine. That is why I said the Spirit will receive from Me what He will make known to you.

God the Holy Spirit gives us the truth which Father has known from eternity and which Son came to share and to fulfill. As a person of the Trinity, He knows the truth, like the Father and the Son He has known it from eternity and so the message He communicates to us is no different than that of the Father or of Son because they are one God. He communicated the truth to the apostles through the miracle of inspiration, breathing into them the words of truth just as Jesus had promised and guiding them to write it down clearly so that they could pass it on to others. Their writings have been preserved for us in the Holy Scriptures so that the truth—God’s truth—is not something untenable or something we are blinded to and left wholly in the dark about. God’s truth is readily available to us in His Word, the means through which He communicates to us the seriousness of our sin and the fullness of His grace.

In a world of confused and searching people, multi-faceted opinions, and a glut of ideas and ideologies, do we need to be uncertain about the answers to those key questions, *What is truth?* and *Who is God?* Are we left like the blind men trying to learn about the elephant? No. We can be certain of the truth and of who God is because He has come to us and given us His Word through which He reveals both who He is and all that He has done and will yet do for us. The Holy Scriptures, the Word of God Himself, are the only way to the truth and they are a sure way to the truth.

Praise the Lord. Let us bless the Father, the Son, and the Spirit for the salvation they have won for us and let us gladly give heed to the gift they have given us, the source of certain truth in the matters of God and eternity.

Amen.