

2-9-20

I Would Be True

By Sheryl Stewart

Summary: The Truth is not hidden from us, nor are we hidden from the Truth. The challenge, then, is to be true and to be seen to be true.

Dt. 30: 15-20

1 Corinthians 3: 1-9

Matthew 5: 21-37

RR: Psalm 119: 1-8

I had a little adventure preparing this sermon: an adventure I've had before and will again, one which I am sure is familiar to every minister, choir director, and Sunday School teacher. I read the lectionary scriptures and, right away, a hymn came to mind. It was that familiar children's hymn we sang at the start of worship, "I Would Be True." It had everything I wanted to say, but it isn't in our new hymnal. I thought it might be in the older hymnal – and it was – but I didn't have that on hand. I went through six or seven other hymn collections (not there) and finally drove down to church to find it in our older hymnal.

Why is such a hymn, a simple, beautiful song from my childhood, missing from so many collections? Was it too old fashioned, too simple, or overlooked as a children's melody when fancy and erudite appealed to the editors? I'll never know, but it sings the truth and deserves to be heard.

The lectionary theme is God making the truth known, along with the joyful consequences of living true lives and the pain and disaster of choosing other priorities, other gods. “Behold, I have set before you the ways of life and death, blessing and curse; so, choose life! Why would you die, my children?”

Paul’s point is much the same. Why have divisions and factions, some claiming authority from Paul and others from Cephas or Apollos? All those authorities are servants of the same God; it didn’t matter whose baptism someone was from so long as it was baptism unto God through Christ.

Matthew offers a collection of Jesus’ teachings about being true to God’s character. It is not enough to simply not go around killing people, anger itself violates the God who loves and forgives. Saying, “You’re a worthless fool” is emotional abuse with identical consequences as murder – for all parties involved.

The same radical responsibility applies to adultery – even desire leads everyone astray, breaks families, and makes homes into war camps. It is not so much a matter of my hands, eyes, or any other fleshly part which I must cast off, it is doing things “my way” and not “God’s way” which must change.

Early in my transition, right after surgery, I went to a “New Women’s retreat” in Massachusetts. One of the other women was something of an outspoken advocate for transgender rights. She had this rubber stamp which read

“Transsexual Money!” and she would stamp paper currency (ones, fives, tens, twenties) to make her point that it’s all the same. When I saw that, I just had to say: “It really isn’t transsexual money unless you pay in change.”

Well, it isn’t really God’s way unless we all pay in change, too. That’s why Jesus taught that we should “let our yes be yes and our no be no” without any fancy oaths. We are, simply, to be true as God is true. The Truth is not hidden from us, nor are we hidden from the Truth. The challenge, then, is to be true and to be seen to be true. Let us, then, go forth and make God visible!