**Do We Belong to the Truth?**

“Are you the King of the Jews? It’s a simple question and Pilate wants a simple answer, a simple truth. Yes or no. You either are or you aren’t. Which is it?

That’s the kind of question I always try to ask when I’m questioning a witness as a lawyer or a child as a parent. Yes or no? This or that? I want a clear question and a clear answer. I want to eliminate any wiggle room. I want to get to the truth. If I can do that, then I can establish some power, control, and security. I then have a better chance of creating the outcome my client and I want.

Even if you’ve never questioned a witness or a child, I’ll bet there have been times in your life when you too wanted a clear answer and the simple truth. I understand that. I want to possess the truth too. Pilate also wanted to possess the truth. I think we all do things to try and possess the truth.

However, there can be a dark and dangerous side to claiming we have possession of the truth. When we claim to be the sole custodians of the truth, we put ourselves in the position of being the king of the truth. We promote and impose our truth on others. Lines are drawn and walls are built. Conversations are reduced to rhetoric, and relationships give way to either isolation, or domination. And pretty soon violence arises in the words we speak and the actions we take. It is that violence that wounds the **human soul, theirs and ours.**

At some level, claiming possession of the truth is at the heart of all conflict and violence. Let me give you some examples of what that looks like:

* It looks like thirty-one governors and the House of Representatives declaring Syrian refugees unwelcome in the United States.
* It looks like racism and the murder of nine black men and women in Charleston, South Carolina.
* It looks like a 53-year-old Sikh man on his way to the grocery store hearing shouts of “Terrorist!” “Go back to your country!” and then being beaten because he wore a turban and had a beard.

In each of these situations, someone, or some group is claiming to be the sole possessor of the truth.

If I learned anything from my time as a judge is that both sides of a dispute only possessed a piece of the truth. Neither side ever possessed the whole truth. I remember a personal injury case where one witness testified the light at the intersection was green. Another witness was confident that the light was red. Honestly, I think they both were telling the truth. It was simply a matter of perspective, timing, and their interpretations of what they saw. This also happens in our private lives, our faith lives, and our personal relationships.

I wonder if that’s why Jesus does not give Pilate a straight answer. Maybe that’s his way of telling us that truth is never as simple as we want it to be, never as absolute as we think, and never as exclusive as we claim it to be. Jesus knows that truth is more than a fact, an answer, or an experience, and that it cannot be possessed. Rather, Jesus knows that the truth is a life to be lived.

The truth to which Jesus testifies about is the God who is beyond the circumstances of this world, and yet always present to us. Jesus came into the world to tell us about that truth, to show us what it looks like in a human life, and teach us how to be a part of, and belong to the truth.

That’s a lesson Pilate doesn’t seem to understand. He just wants facts, **“So, you are a King?”** It’s a lesson the world desperately needs to learn. It’s a lesson I am still learning. Maybe you are too. To seek and claim the sole and exclusive possession of the truth is the way of Pilate and the way of the world, but it is not the way of Christ. Jesus never asks us to possess the truth ourselves. Instead, he asks us to **belong** to the truth, to let ourselves be possessed by his truth, and listen to his voice.

So, here’s my question. Do we **belong to the truth,** or do we live and act as if the **truth belongs to us?** How we answer that question will determine whose voice we listen to, the choices we make, the priorities we establish, the words we speak, and the actions we take.

**“Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice,”** Jesus said. Whose voice do we listen to when we act as if the truth belongs to us? Our own! When we listen to our own voice, it becomes difficult if not impossible to hear another’s voice, human or divine. When we make ourselves custodians of the truth, when we believe that the truth belongs to us, we listen to our own voice and the voices of those who think and act like us. We listen to the voice of our fear and insecurity. We listen to the voice of our prejudice, our experience, our individual needs and desires.

I know those voices. I’ve heard and listened to them. I can’t tell you how many times I thought I could live my life listening to my own voice. I know these voices are real. They remind me that the world is not always a safe place and life is not always easy. But I also know this, there is another voice, a voice that speaks from a Kingdom not of this world. The voice of the King of the Universe.

In the midst of our uncertainty and fear, Jesus tells us, **“Remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”** (Mt. 28:20) And in the darkness of death, Jesus says, **“I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live.”** (Jn. 11:25).

This is the voice I want to listen to. This is the voice of truth that I want to belong to. This is the life I want to live. What about you?

Will we **belong** to the truth, or will we live and act as if the truth belongs to us?