

## **WELCOME 24<sup>th</sup> March 2019 – 3 Lent '19 C**

Luke 11:37-54

Good morning! Welcome to worship today! We are so glad you are here doing what we were made to do...offer God all that we are among his people... Please stay with us through to morning tea & beyond...all sorts of good things...

*"The truth. The whole Truth. And nothing but the truth."* In the witness box that's our job. In fact that's our job wherever whenever...the truth.

The truth is...we *EXPECT* it...from our children our spouses our workmates...we'd *like* to get it from our politicians & media outlets...just tell me the truth.

But sometimes the truth hurts...sometimes the truth holds us accountable for our worst...sometimes the truth points us in the direction of changes that need to occur in our lives. Today at the table, Jesus is **that** guest, the one who tells the truth & makes the meal one the host & other guests will never forget...

Jesus said of himself, *"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me."* Jesus is the truth that our lives in this often wonderful often pain-filled world are not yet what God intends for us. He is the truth that we are separated from that for which God designed us. Yet at the same time, Jesus is the truth that God loves each one of us & desires all of us come to know him & experience the fullness of life through his Son.

But in that we have to face the truth that our lives need to be transformed & the One who promises to carry out that transformation in love in truth...is Jesus.

We'll explore & experience that together today...as Jesus speaks a hard word; a word that may even offend, a word that takes aim at all who take refuge in ritual, rote, resources or routine rather than finding real love in the only real relationship that matters.

Let's pray...

### **PRAYER OF THE DAY**

*Num 23:19 - God is not human, that he should lie, not a human being, that he should change his mind. Does he speak & then not act? Does he promise & not fulfill?*

*Father we often say what we don't mean & mean what we don't say. Forgive us, Lord & give us the tongue of the wise. Grant us words that encourage & heal & reveal your love. Let your word be in our hearts & bear fruit in all we say & do. Let our words have power to give life, to multiply hope & to spread joy to your glory. Cause our hearts to cling only to your truth, for the sake of Jesus Christ who is the way the truth & the life for us and for all...Amen.*

### 3 LENT '19 C – AT THE TABLE: A PLACE OF TRUTH

#### FAITH CHAT:

1. Are there times you find telling the truth difficult?
2. Have you ever regretted telling someone the truth?

I am the stereo-typical male shopper. I go in. I get what I came for. I go home. Can I get an “Amen”? I understand the shopping centre is a place I *need* to go. It is not necessarily a place I *want* to go. Which is why when we're in Canberra or Sydney or one of those American monstrosities...I immediately look for one of these. In a large or unfamiliar shopping centre...those are gold...the sat-nav of the shopping experience. And the most important piece of info on those store maps is...? That little “you are here” marker. The “big picture” is great, but if I don't know where I am on the map...the map is high useless. Just like the sat-nav in the car starts with your current location...that little “U R Here” makes all the difference.

That's true about many things in life...I have 2 weddings on the books for next year. Almost every couple I marry goes through a pre-marriage inventory: Prepare/Enrich Bride & groom each answer 150 questions...family, life experience, work, school, things they do *AND* about their expectations of marriage & their intended. It creates a wonderful snapshot of the movement of their lives up the point they've decided to get married & helps us project toward their future. It's that big mall map...you get a bunch of information to talk about in preparing to become a husband/wife. But more importantly it says right now “U R Here”...& if you're looking to get 50-60 years down the road together here are some paths to take to get there & here's some places you want to avoid.

The wonderful thing about mall map & P/E...they tell you the truth. Just the facts. No embellishments, no maybe/not, just the facts...just the current state of affairs. Neither is predictive, doesn't account for the unpredictable, can't replace the voice of the Spirit telling you yes/no. That kind of truth is a good thing...it's necessary essential...And, like I noted earlier we *EXPECT* it...from our children our spouses our workmates...we'd *like* to get it from our politicians & media outlets...just tell me the truth. But sometimes the truth hurts...sometimes the truth holds us accountable for our worst...sometimes the truth points us in the direction of changes that need to occur in our lives. Which is where we find Jesus...again at a meal table again telling the truth.

You'd think eventually the Pharisees would learn...just don't ask Jesus over for dinner But one of these guys can't pass up the opportunity to have the hottest thing in town over to his place so there Jesus is & as he takes a place at the table the host notes Jesus hasn't properly washed his hands. This isn't the careless hurry of a 6 year old digging into the plate of spaghetti having just been playing with the dog & a frog...this isn't hygiene. This is custom, tradition made up requirements...this is what Pharisee means...text book definition.

Let's go there for a bit...What exactly is a Pharisee...? When the 2 kingdoms of God's people were destroyed Nth Kingdom (Israel) first in 722 BC & then again the Sth Kingdom (Judah) in 587 BC the prophets had said, God's voice was clear: God's people had broken the covenant he made with them when he brought them out of Egypt & gave them the land he had promised Abraham. Violated the Sabbath. Broke the commandments. Refused to offer proper sacrifices. Worshipped other gods...*IN THE TEMPLE NO LESS*...on & on. For their rebellion God told them exile & destruction would follow...It did. But God loves his people & restored them, & after God brought them back to their land from exile a group of very devout laypeople emerged who said “never again.” They were committed to stopping that widespread disobedience before it started. They were devoted not only to the written law but all of the teaching & oral tradition that had grown up around it. They were sure that if they could all just behave themselves their nation would rise to the power it had had under David & the Messiah would come & from Jerusalem God would rule the world forever.

Pharisees were not bad guys...They were faithful to the OT Law - scrupulous about the traditions & customs of their people that protected the Law - deeply committed to seeing Yahweh's name honoured & praised throughout the land. You wanted your kids marrying into those families. You wanted that guy for a neighbour. They remembered that it was interaction with foreign nations that had introduced idolatry to God's people & therefore they believed in strict separation of Jews from non-Jews

Oddly enough *THAT'S* the handwashing thing...A tradition emerged that when you came from the market or from being out in public, before you sat down to eat you “washed ceremonially”...poured water over your food & your hands not to wash germs off but to remove the defilement that came from contact with a sinful world. You reestablished your separateness – your specialness – your holy eliteness at the handwashing basin...Anybody remember catching cooties when you were in Kindergarten? This is like that. *His host was amazed to see that he sat down to eat without first performing the hand-washing ceremony required by Jewish custom.* His host was amazed (seems he has said nothing to Jesus) that Jesus didn't seem to care that he still carried those marketplace street level cooties...still “dirty” from being around all those “dirty people” out there. Because when you are special – when you are the holy & elite - when you are the high/mighty...the world down there's pretty grubby...

And the sad...I do mean tragically sad thing is...He's off the map & he doesn't even know it. He's lost & he thinks he's not. He's in the wilderness & thinks it's Paradise. So Jesus redraws the map...& says "U R Here" which is a looong way from where God would have you to be...and I want us to see that map first...**BIBLES**... Because before we hear Jesus unload both barrels...we have to back up & understand this is the problem all along...that somehow I can act my way into God's love – that I can behave myself into being accepted by the Father – that I can get clean enough to be holy...that I can do enough certainly more than you & then God will smile favourably on me & my life & these guys who were so scrupulous they completely **MIS**understood the prophets...Micah had asked a bunch of rhetorical questions...

*What can we bring to the Lord? Should we bring him burnt offerings?  
Should we bow before God Most High with offerings of yearling calves?  
Should we offer him thousands of rams & ten thousand rivers of olive oil?  
Should we sacrifice our firstborn children to pay for our sins?*

**No, O people, the Lord has told you what is good, & this is what he requires of you:**

**Live justly. Love mercy. And walk humbly with your God.** (Micah 6:6-8)

Live justly. Love mercy. Walk humbly with God. That you don't get by washing your hands in disgust for all the people you might have bumped into down at the marketplace. That doesn't happen by rushing home to wash off the dirt from a dirty bunch of vagabonds, miscreants & ne'er-do-wells you had to interact with out there. The heart of the loving Father is not revealed to the world by looking down your nose at that world...by treating other people as if they are a problem that has to be solved...by looking at folks who aren't like you as if they smell bad.

So Jesus said to him...*"You Pharisees are so careful to clean the outside of the cup & the dish, but inside you are filthy—full of greed & wickedness! Fools! Didn't God make the inside as well as the outside? So clean the inside by giving gifts to the poor, & you will be clean all over."* At another point Jesus says *"It's not what goes into your body that defiles you; you are defiled by what comes from your heart."* How is that? Well...it's from your heart that you look at your neighbour like he's something you need to wipe off your shoe. Instead go to your neighbour with your heart your hands & your wallet open...generosity, hospitality, compassion...instead of washing your hands of your neighbour get your hands dirty in serving your neighbour. Engage those whom you see as less-than...Can't be a light to the nations if you have no contact w/ the nations.

*"What sorrow awaits you Pharisees! For you are careful to tithe even the tiniest income from your herb gardens, but you ignore justice & the love of God. You should tithe, yes, but do not neglect the more important things. All talk & no walk. All hat & no cattle...You're all about obedience but where's love...justice...The bone he picks with the Pharisees & lawyers is not a theological dispute but a moral one. They look after their own good but ignore the plight of people all around them. They worry about religious & ritual purity but fail to realize those are only appearances, nothing in relation to God's fundamental command to care for the neighbor in need.*

*"What sorrow awaits you Pharisees! For you love to sit in the seats of honor in the synagogues & receive respectful greetings as you walk in the marketplaces. Yes, what sorrow awaits you! For you are like hidden graves in a field. People walk over them without knowing the corruption they are stepping on."* *"Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves."* *Php 2:3* Their pride would be the death of them...Their integrity was non-existent. They lived a lie & passed it off as truth.

Too often we have this picture of Jesus as a meek & mild gentle as a lamb butter wouldn't melt in his mouth sort of guy. Took his licks & never broke a sweat or said a strong word. Nothing could be farther from the reality of who Jesus genuinely is. Jesus is the visible expression of God & God's love for all people. As God made flesh, Jesus raged against everything & everyone who would rob from us, God's most precious creations, the love life & joy God intends.

He saved his harshest critique for those who used religion to manipulate or ensnare people in lives that were devoid of joy - filled with dread – mired in rote & routine & absent of real love...He called them hidden graves (look fine outside but filled with death) He named their religion a crushing burden. He rebuked them for their lack of love justice & mercy...for stepping on the necks of the weak - small - easily overrun. *"What sorrow also awaits you experts in religious law! For you crush people with unbearable religious demands, & you never lift a finger to ease the burden... What sorrow awaits you experts in religious law! For you remove the key to knowledge from the people. You don't enter the Kingdom yourselves, & you prevent others from entering."* *Mt 23:15 Rom 8:3*

American author Mark Twain once said, "Having spent considerable time among religious people, I can see why Jesus preferred the company of tax collectors & sinners." Jesus said: *"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that you may have life, and have it to the full...I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me."* *Jn 10:10 & 14:6* Jesus is the truth that our lives in this often wonderful often pain-filled world are not yet what God intends for us. He is the truth that we are separated from that for which God designed us. Yet at the same time, Jesus is the truth that God loves each one of us & desires all of us come to know him & experience the fullness of life through his Son. The truth is...Jesus came to free us from being trapped by anything that prevents us from enjoying a full & life-

giving relationship with the Father. He died to the highest form of religion the world has ever seen & rose from the grave to give not more religion but life – a real relationship with the Father & an eternity of real love secure in the Father's presence.

Let's pray with that in mind... ***Heavenly Father, rescue us not just from sin, death & the devil: but save us from ourselves. Deliver us from pride. Release us from greed. Free us from hypocrisy. Hand us over to the work of your Spirit so our hearts become like yours. Bind us to our neighbour in your love. Yoke us to your Son so we welcome, & serve, & give without restraint. Fasten us to you in love, mercy, justice, humility & joy. Now and forever, we pray in Jesus' Name. Amen.***