

You Can Handle the Truth!

A sermon based on John 14:5-11.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

All eyes were fixed on him. Something fishy had gone on with the troops under Colonel Nathan Jessup's command, and Lt. Daniel Kaffee was determined to get to the bottom of it. It had all the makings of a massive cover-up. So, again, as Jessup sat on the witness stand being peppered with question after question from Kaffee, each one digging dangerously closer and closer to what really happened, Jessup, he just, he snapped, "You want answers?"

"I want the truth," Kaffee demanded. And, then one of the most famous lines in cinema history..."You can't handle the truth."

I'm sure many of you are familiar with that line from *A Few Good Men*, starring Tom Cruise and Jack Nicholson. But whether you've actually seen the movie or not, the line itself presents an accurate portrayal of our culture today.

In a culture where *truth is whatever you want the truth to be or whatever you feel the truth should be, and who is anyone to ever disagree with you*, Jesus today speaks to the most divisive truth of all -- religion. And he isn't so wishy washy.

Take a look at that. In our gospel, Jesus' disciples had just asked him to show them the way to God. Jesus responded, "***I am... the Truth...No one comes to the Father, except through me.***"

Notice the definite article on Jesus' predicate nominative. I am THE Truth. He didn't say "I am a truth." He didn't say, "I am one of the truths." He didn't say, "I feel like I am the truth. If you feel that way too, awesome!"

The definite article is one letter in Greek and it's a very important letter. It means Jesus considered himself to be THE only Truth and THE only way to know God...there is no other way.

If you're ever in Philadelphia, if you're hungry, of course you've got to try some Philly Cheesesteak (much better than even the Food Factory!). Have you ever been there? I've heard when you get downtown, you run into Geno's--an awesome Philly name. It smells delicious. The moment you open up your car door, the smell of thick, roasted, peppery meat fills your nostrils. There's a sign next to the window that says "Best Cheesesteak in Philly" and you believe it. You order a ½ pound sandwich. Wolf it down and smile. It's delicious.

But then, you look across the street. In bright neon, obnoxious, flashing light is a sign: "Pat's – Best Cheesesteak in Philly." So, you do your civic duty. You loosen your belt and you order another ½ pounder.

So, which is true? Which is better? Which is really the best? It's really subjective, isn't it? Subjective means it's your opinion. When it comes to subjective truth, the truth can literally be whatever you want it to be.

But that's not the kind of truth that Jesus is speaking about here. Jesus isn't saying "I think I'm the best god." He isn't saying, "My words are pretty valid."

Jesus says, "***I am the truth.***"

That's not subjective truth; it's objective truth. It's not opinion; it's fact. Objective truth is truth because it is the truth. Like, my hair is brown. I have two eyes. The color of our Pentecost banners is green --- it's still green, no matter how much you'd like it to be purple polka dotted. It's green.

The problem, though, is that society has confused objective truth with subjective truth. Have you heard the saying, "Perception is reality"? It means that how I perceive things...how I look at things is what the truth is for me.

Take our congregation for example. Before we changed our name several years ago, I remember a short conversation I had with a bartender where he asked where I was pastor at, I said, "Syndoulos Lutheran Church," and the look I got was along the lines of "what kind of creepy cult are you?" That's not at all what we were, but if that's what he perceived, "You must be the leader of a weird group of people who've drunk the Koolaid and have a lot of strange rituals," if that's what he thought, then his reality might have been, "This is not the place for me."

Or one of the first things I've had people ask me is, "Are you the church that doesn't like homosexuals?" The truth is we love homosexuals...love them enough to tell them homosexuality is a sin. But that doesn't mean we don't like them. But teaching homosexuality is a sin is perceived by many as us hating homosexuals, which becomes their reality and so, again, "This isn't a place for me."

Objective truth is fact. Whether it's the color of my hair or what day of the week it is. Objective truth is truth for all people of all time. It isn't determined by popular vote, emotional response, or moral majority.

Jesus' statement is objective. He is THE TRUTH. His Words are the Truth. The Bible is The Truth. Jesus as God is The Truth

The problem, though, is that our culture doesn't want the Truth. Again, our society has confused objective truth with subjective truth. That's the cultural norm today. Every person has their own reality – their own truth – and so, there is no such thing as absolute truth.

Now, I know we harp on the media for being partly to blame for the way our culture thinks and acts today, but it's fair, isn't it? They reach the widest audience, and with people having this insatiable thirst to know what's going on, they have a ton of influence.

And it's all about the ratings, so them spinning the truth, distorting it, it's not uncommon. And it's been going on for years. How does the song in the musical "Newsies" go? **"If I hate the headline, I'll make up a headline, and I'll say anything I have'ta."**

For instance, here's a headline that appeared in the Anchorage Daily News a little over a month ago, **"Hundreds gather in Anchorage to protest family separations at US-Mexico border."** You're familiar with the story. Perhaps you even felt the same way as the protesters. But did you know that these protests were happening days after President Trump changed the policy to allow families to remain together. That's objective truth. That's fact. The policy had already changed. But to so many people, their reality was distorted truth, "These families are being unfairly treated by being separated."

Do you understand? And again, it's been going on for years. In Jeremiah's day, the big news was "God's enraged with your idolatry, willful disobedience, your lack of repentance. A day is coming when you will be swept up by your enemies into captivity." But then the false prophets strolled into town and allayed the fears of the people, which the Lord described this way, **"They dress the wound of my people as though it were not serious. 'Peace, peace,' they say, when there is no peace. Are they ashamed of their loathsome conduct? No, they have no shame at all; they do not even know how to blush."**

But let's take it one step further...to areas of morality.

Are you familiar with the Common Core Curriculum? It's an educational initiative that started back in 2010, detailing what K-12th grade students across the US ought to know about English Language Arts and math. I don't

know a lot about it. But I read an eye-opening article a while back. It examined the way children were taught TRUTH and OPINION. In the article were real examples from a Scantron test where students were given a statement and then they had to mark if the statement was FACT or OPINION.

Let's see how you do. Fact or Opinion. It's wrong to cheat on a test. – Did you say Fact? That's wrong. Morality is only an opinion.

Fact or Opinion. Lying is wrong. – Did you say Fact again? How foolish that's your opinion.

Fact or Opinion. All men are created equal. – The correct answer is opinion. Popular, yes. But not fact. Only opinion.

Of course-- and this is my question-- if the creators of the Scantron are saying that those statements are Opinions, then how do we know it's Fact? Isn't that just their opinion?

But let's keep going. Fact or Opinion. All Christian churches basically believe the same thing, so it's not such a big deal which church I become a member at. If only I had a nickel for every time I heard that. I would hope you would say that's opinion...that's not true, but that would mean you're only a small percentage of people who actually believe that.

Fact or Opinion. Homosexuality is ok because Jesus never talked about it. You would say that's false, but I had a guest at church once who made that statement to me, as if the rest of God's Word didn't apply. But how many today agree with that? Are you tempted to agree with it?

Fact or Opinion. If I don't like what the President is doing, I have every right to make derogatory statements about him. Again, you would say opinion, but others would say, "Isn't that my 1st Amendment right?" How many of you have done that?

And we could walk through every area of morality, and your culture will tell you, "There is no fact. There is no absolute truth. There is no absolute right or wrong. It's all your opinion. Believe whatever you want. Speak my truth and I won't judge you, and you can't judge me or tell me I'm wrong." Even when it comes to God's Word, "That was written by a bunch of men, full of mistakes, contradictions, opinions...not truth."

Our culture can't handle the truth, which is, ***"All have turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one."*** ***"All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."*** ***"The wages of sin is death."***

And that's the truth for us as well. Except...except for one more truth...one our culture can't handle, but, by the grace of God, it's ours. And that is, again, ***"I am the Truth...No one comes to the Father except through me."***

Step into a different courtroom. You hear the detractors screaming outside the walls. Their allegation was serious. This man claimed to be king of the Jews. And through his extensive questioning, Pilate discovered, ***"You are a king, then!"*** ***Jesus responded, "You are right in saying that I am a king. In fact, for this reason...I came into the world, to testify to the truth."***

And then Pilate's famous line, ***"What is truth?"***

We know. Again, it's Jesus, and the truth is he's the only way to heaven.

How serious is God about the truth? He sent Jesus to testify to it. He sent Jesus die for it.

The truth is Jesus lived...a perfect life. The truth is Jesus endured lies, corruption, miscarriages of justice, all so he could die on the cross...for every sinner, including you and me...for every sin, including all of ours. The truth is

Jesus is alive; he rose from the dead to complete his work of saving us from sin and eternal death in hell...to open the way for us to come to the Father in eternal glory.

And if you ever wonder, "How do I trust that, Jesus? How do I know that what you are speaking is the truth?" Then listen to his words in verse 11 here, ***"Believe me when I tell you that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe based on the evidence of the miracles themselves."***

He performed miracles in plain sight of tens of thousands of people (we have their eye-witness accounts here). He used those to back up his message of truth. Jesus did things only God can do, to validate that he is the True God, full of grace and truth.

And this is key for you. Because now others truths that he spoke about you are also true: You are children of God through faith. Whoever believes in Him will be saved. In Jesus, we become the righteousness of God.

What is truth? You know. Jesus even prayed to his Father, ***"Sanctify (make them clean) [them] by the truth; your word is truth."***

We have the truth...right here. And you, you can handle it. You can handle the truth. In fact, God wants you to handle his truth. So, how do we do that? How can we properly handle the truth of God's Word? I give you four ways today, love it, learn it, live it, and look after it.

First, love it. Psalm 119 says, ***"Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long."*** Yes, God's Word tells us the harsh truth about our sins and what we deserve. But God's Word also shares the soothing truth of Jesus and his love for us. We love to hear it!

Secondly, learn it. Psalm 119 continues, ***"Your commands make me wise than my enemies; I have more insight than all my teachers, for I meditate on your statutes."*** 2 Timothy 3 reminds us, ***"From infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus."***

There is only one way to the Father...it is the Truth. Our culture would much rather us follow the theology of the 'feels,' that what you feel is right is truth...or "I feel this is what God would say or what he would think about this situation." We don't have to feel or think...we know exactly what God says, so don't be lax in opening your Bible and listening to God's voice instead of your own.

Thirdly, live it/listen to it (don't just hear it). Right? James 1 says, ***"Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says."*** Our attitude in life gets to reflect that of Psalm 119, ***"Direct me in the path of your commands, for there I find delight."***

Finally, look after it. Guard the Truth. Guard God's Word. Colossians warns, ***"See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ."***

Be a defender of the truth of God's Word. Do not allow the lies of the world to penetrate your faith. Stand on your truth. Hold up God's Word as the truth.

Friends, our culture wants to create its own truth. They can't handle the truth. But we can. The Truth is powerful. The Truth has saved us. Praise God for the Truth. And now, love it, listen to it, live it, look after it. Amen!