

“Our Testimony” A sermon by Lee Ireland  
Cathedral City Community Presbyterian Church  
May 13, 2018 Seventh Sunday of Easter  
1 John 5:9-13, John 17:6-19

Let us pray together: Open our eyes to see your Spirit in our life. Open our hearts to receive the blessings you send each day. Guide us with your wisdom so that through us Christ may walk on the earth once again. Amen.

Testimony! There are various kinds of testimony, aren't there? When the word testimony is mentioned, as it is in the scripture today, most of us probably think of a testimony in court. But there are other types of testimony.

This past week, we certainly heard plenty of testimony from the nominee to head the CIA. Did any of you watch the proceedings on television or read about the hearing in the newspaper? Since it is the Senate's responsibility to approve or disapprove Gina Haspel as director of the CIA, the Senate's hearing was to determine if the person nominated was indeed qualified for the position. Indeed, this hearing's main purpose was to get to the truth about the President's nominee's involvement with the use of certain torture techniques the CIA used after 9/11. Those questioning Gina Haspel were seeking the truth. Is it possible to determine the truth when each person questioning Gina Haspel had his or her own agenda?

Perhaps the trial court is a bit less biased in getting to the truth – mostly because of the judge. Yes, those representing each side are biased, but the judge is supposed to see through the bias and discern the truth. Of course, the witnesses who are testifying are supposed to be telling the truth. They take an oath to tell the truth. I remember those courtroom scenes from Perry Mason. Raymond Burr would often remind witnesses that they were to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

And we are interested in who is telling the truth; if today's courtroom reality TV shows are any measure. How many of you watch Judge Judy or The People's Court? Those are only two of the many presently on TV. Wikipedia lists over 20 such courtroom reality TV shows. Listening to the testimony of the witnesses, seeing through falsehoods and lies and getting to the truth make for interesting TV viewing!

But not all truth is logical, fact-based, objective is it? Every Sunday I say, “The truth of the Lord” after I read the scripture. The bulletin has the scripture reference, John 17:17. **Make them holy by your truth; teach them your word, which is truth.** (The New Living Translation). Are the words I read from the Bible the ‘truth’? Courtroom truth, Senate hearing truth? Or another kind of truth?

Jesus says in today's Gospel lesson from John: **for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me.** Jesus says the truth is that he came from God. Is that something you can objectively ‘prove’ by logic and fact – or is

the term 'truth' used here and the word 'truth' I say each Sunday – is there something else involved here besides fact and logic?

Truth. You may remember the exchange Jesus and Pilate had, again from the Gospel of John, Chapter 18, Jesus says: **“You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.”** Pilate asked him, **“What is truth?”**

What is truth? We believe we know that the results of a trial reveal the truth of that situation. We believe that we may get closer to the truth after listening to a congressional hearing. Many of you believe, as I do, that you know the truth – that Jesus is the son of God and that by believing in him you have eternal life. Verse 13 from today's scripture from 1 John: **I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.**

So why is the author of First John talking about testimony? Is he trying to reveal to his readers some truth? Why do these first century Christ-followers need explanation of something that is so obvious to us. Why does John have to testify?

Many scholars believe that the community to which John was writing was questioning Jesus' humanity. There was confusion. How could Jesus be both God and human at the same time? Some folks just wanted to forget about Jesus' humanity and emphasize his divinity. You could see how they would be confused. If Jesus was divine, how could Jesus die a criminal's death on the cross. The first century Jews found Jesus' death on a cross to be a stumbling block to their understanding of Jesus as both divine and human.

Are things really that different today? It's not uncommon to hear someone deny the humanity of Jesus and to reject Jesus' death on the cross. In April 2014, a woman in North Carolina called the police having noticed a homeless man sleeping on a bench outside of a church that she drives by on the way home from work. The woman and the police discovered that this 'homeless man' was actually a statue of a humble Jesus, commissioned by the church and sculpted by Canadian artist Timothy Schmalz.

The woman was scandalized by this statue, finding it an offensive portrayal of Jesus. She remarked to reporters: “Jesus is not a vagrant, Jesus is not a helpless person who needs our help.” This woman evidently didn't believe the Bible when Jesus said: **“Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.”** Clearly, this person was rejecting that Jesus was a human.

How was John to overcome those who have this first century Jewish mindset that Jesus wasn't both divine and human? What are we to do when we encounter someone who has the same belief? John appealed to God's testimony. God is a good place to start. **The testimony of God is greater; for this is the testimony of God that he has testified to his Son.**

What proof does John provide that God's testimony is true? John was among those who walked with Jesus while Jesus was on this earth teaching and healing. John was also among those who walked and talked with the resurrected Jesus. And John believed Jesus' words about being the son of God.

Of course, the most compelling testimony is the gift of eternal life revealed in God raising Jesus from the dead.

How do each of us know that we have eternal life? John lays it out earlier in this book of First John. John testifies that you know you have eternal life when the community cares and loves each other. You know you have eternal life when one lays down his life for another. You know you have eternal life by sharing your worldly goods with those who are in need. You know you have eternal life when you are obedient to Jesus' commandment to believe in his name and love one another. That is John's testimony.

Loving, sharing, caring, obeying – these are also our testimony to the world that reveal the truth that Jesus is God's son and those who believe in the name of the son of God have eternal life.

Loving, sharing, caring, obeying – are these objective, factual, logical testimony that will hold up in court as the truth and nothing but the truth? John is not speaking of human testimony, but of human hearts, our spiritual place. Facts and figures speak to the mind. But loving, sharing, caring, obeying speaks to the heart. As I read, and John wrote: **Those who believe in the Son of God have the testimony in their hearts.**

Once you have Jesus' testimony in your heart, what are you to do? Did you notice that all the ways that John testified that we know we have eternal life involve being in community with other Christ-followers?

What are we to do? In our Gospel lesson for today, Jesus prayed to God: **As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.** Jesus was sending the disciples into the world to share God's truth about Jesus, to testify that Jesus is the son of God, that Jesus brought us God's gift of eternal life.

Are you Jesus' disciple? I hope so! The time has come for us to come together as disciples, individually and as a community, to testify from our hearts to the truth about what we have seen and know. Are you ready to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth?

May we be like trees planted by streams of water.