

In Spirit and In Truth

Psalm 95:1-7

Let us pray: Lord, and we're here because we're thirsty. We're thirsty. We're thirsty for you. Grant to us that living water. Teach us your Truth, fill us with your Spirit. Meet us at the well.. Amen.

John 4:3-26

Truth. It's a concept that has intrigued and fascinated us
ever since the human mind began to wonder...

Greek philosophy was particularly interested in exploring Truth
and John's Gospel—grounded as it is in Greek culture—holds up Truth as a centerpiece
of who Jesus is, from the opening chapter clear to the end:

"And The Word dwelt among us, full of grace and truth..."

"You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free..."

"I tell you the truth..." Jesus says

"I am the way, and the truth, and the life..."

"When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth..."

"Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth..."

"For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth..."

And Pilate will ask this question on behalf of all of us come Good Friday:

What is Truth?

Jesus never actually defines the term... so I went to my dictionary, which told me
Truth: honesty

So Jesus meets this woman at the well....

at high noon, the burning heat of the day...
when no one else would be there...
for she was a woman living in adultery...
having had at least five "husbands" before ...

Truth! She is ashamed of the truth...

She has learned to hide from it - flee from it -
shove it down and keep it hidden from the world...
wrap her cloak around it ... keep it hidden from herself...

Truth! Jesus told her everything she ever did.

Yes, Jesus knows...
Jesus sees inside the human heart...
How many of us could stand to expose our souls
in the white hot light of the desert noon
before the One who sees us
as we are?

and does not condemn us?

Truth.

Jesus never actually defines the term... so I went to my dictionary, which told me

Truth: accuracy.

A strange commodity these days... caught somewhere between
the severe literalism of our analytical, scientific, technologically precise world
and the convenient, pragmatic, prevaricating marketplace
where everything from vitamin water to the Next New Deal is up for sale.

So, Jesus meets this woman at the well,
at high noon, in the burning heat of the day...
and asks her for a drink...
and given the circumstances...
a man alone with a woman!
a Jewish man drinking from the cup of the half-breed renegade!

Are you crazy?

You ask a drink of me?

.....If only you knew... Jesus says...

If only you knew the gift of God
and who it is asking,
you would have asked him
and he would have given you living water...
water that is never stagnant, bubbling up, overflowing,
raining down,
refreshing
life-giving
baptismal water...
and you will never be thirsty again.

Truth! How many of us are that kind of thirsty?.....

How many of us recognize Jesus
when he stands before us
and offers us
the Living Water?

Truth. Jesus never actually defines the term... so I went to my dictionary, which told me
Truth: In accordance with fact.

We're pretty proud of how we know the truth these days.
We've got it all defined and figured out and nailed down and boxed up.
And we like it that way.
We want it all lined out for us...
defined and delineated and crystal-clear...
And the more uncertain and anxious life is,
the more we crave the answers.
Tell me the Truth.
Just like the woman at the well who said to Jesus,
"Give me this water, so I will never have to come back to this well again."
And how does Jesus answer her?

He doesn't.

He tells her to go find her husband and come back,
which unravels a whole string of dialogue—none of which appear to answer her questions.

Pretty frustrating for the definition writers,
the rule-makers, the line-drawers and the box-tapers.

Truth. It's a concept that has intrigued and engaged us
ever since the human mind began to wonder...

Way back in the 8th Century BC,
ancient Greeks would climb Mount Parnassus to consult the Oracle at Delphi.
As a pilgrim to Delphi, you had to prepare yourself physically and spiritually,
and the vital part of the pilgrimage
would be to frame the right question to ask of the Oracle.
You had to come with a question, but also with an open spirit to receive the Oracle's wisdom.
Now the interesting thing about this whole process is that
the Oracle's response was most frequently obscure—
it came in cryptic form, usually as a riddle.

It was up to you to engage the riddle,
to wrestle with the wonder,
to enter into the mystery.
You had to do this.
If you didn't you could not find the answer....

Jesus is the Prime Oracle ... I tell you the Truth, he said...

I am the way, the truth and the life... he said...

But he never defined it...
instead, he answered questions with questions—
he drew pictures in the sand—
he made the blind to see and the deaf to hear—
he told stories.

He spoke in parables—Matthew says he didn't say anything that was not a parable

lifting up
poetic multi-faceted gems of beauty and wonder
that shimmer
and show
a different side
each time you turn them...

What is your question?

Once upon a time, a sower who went out to sow...
Once upon a time, a woman knocked down the judge's door...
Once upon a time, a son ran away from home ...
Once upon a time, a man sold all he had to buy a field...
Once upon a time, a woman came to a well...

Did they happen?

I don't know whether they happened or not
but I know they are true ...

Frederick Buechner said¹: They are true because they are your story and they are my story.
They are true because they are alive in the same way that Jesus is alive,
so alive that when Pilate asks him

What is Truth?.....

he does not answer
not in words
but with his face,
with his being,
with his life.

if you only knew the Gift of God...
Jesus IS the Truth.

Truth. Jesus never actually defines the term... so I went to my dictionary, which told me
Truth: fidelity to a standard.

So, Jesus meets this woman at the well
who's good at dialogue
who parries and thrusts
queries and questions
She takes on the Worship Wars—what is right worship?
here or in Jerusalem?
In this church or that church?
facing east or west?

with hymns or praise songs?
on pews or on chairs?
But Jesus says,
no...
here, there or anywhere
Worship God in Spirit and in Truth...
Come, in Spirit—which means to inhale
the breath of the living God who gives you life ...
Come to sing to the Lord,
to make a joyful noise to the rock of your salvation!
Come, with your whole selves to participate in mystery
to engage the riddle
to live into the questions
to experience the wonder...
Come, to meet the One who sees inside your heart and loves you anyway.
Come
just come
bring your thirsty selves to worship God in Spirit and in Truth.

¹ Buechner, Frederick. Secrets in the Dark. Harper, San Francisco. 2006. 132.