

This Pandemic has brought us many things, including some knowledge. It has educated us on what viruses are, and we continue to learn more about what this one is and how it travels. We've learned that it is persistent and doesn't care that we're tired of it (even, though, I am very tired of it). We've learned that it continues to spread whenever we are close to other people without masks, and that we can't tell by looking who has the virus.

We've also gained other knowledge. This pandemic has required many of us to stay home more often than usual. Last spring and this summer, many of us learned more about our children who were with us more often. We learned more about our spouses, some of it wonderful discovery and re-discovery. Some of it perhaps learning things we didn't know annoyed us. But proximity has given us knowledge, and has sometimes revealed our truer, messier, more real selves to one another. We've learned more about what is true about one another by being so close. It reminds me of when you first find a new friend or a new love interest, someone with whom you just click, you begin finishing one another's sentences.

I saw an old interview recently of the late actor Gene Wilder who starred in Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory, and Young Frankenstein, and many comedies with Richard Pryor. And Conan O'Brien was asking Wilder about what it was like to work with Richard Pryor. And Gene Wilder said they just clicked. On their first movie together, Stir Crazy, they were filming a scene where they were tearing things apart, and at the same time during filming they both started humming the same thing, the theme to Laurel & Hardy. They hadn't planned it, but somehow these two actors and comedians, when they were working together, were on the same wavelength. They experienced a working relationship that was true. They found something true in each other.

We live in an age that is uncertain. We live in a time that scholars call postmodern, and some would say we're in a post-postmodern age. What this means is that there was a time called the Modern Age when most people agreed on what was true about

society. Many people generally agreed on what could be counted on in government and in our culture. Postmodern thinkers came along and challenged some of those deeply held convictions, some of which needed to be challenged, such as the idea that some people are second-class citizens because of their skin color. This is an idea that is false.

But part of what happens in an age where each person is claiming their own truth, even if it contradicts what we can see and hear, when each person says, what's true for me isn't true for you, what happens in that reality, at worst, is that we do not agree on what Truth is.

We can see this everywhere we turn today, especially online. Our culture no longer has a few trusted sources of news, but we have diversified our "news" and entertainment so that if we like, we never have to hear a differing opinion. Competing cable networks and websites, in the pursuit of profits, will project news which their viewers want to see and hear, in order to gain more revenue, and as a result, what is agreed upon as true has gotten lost in the broadcast. The truth seems to have slipped down somewhere in between the many sources of information that surround us.

And sometimes people cannot find the truth because their Facebook feeds, and the websites they visit are filled with outright lies: conspiracy theories and unprovable ideas which are presented as "truth." These ideas are presented and reposted without looking into where the information came from. By the way, as a former English teacher, I urge everyone to cite your sources to what you post. There's a reason teachers ask you to cite sources: it's so that everyone has a way to follow up to see if what you post has any shred of truth.

It is dizzying to live in an age when we aren't sure what to trust as truth.

Today we celebrate Reformation Day when Martin Luther challenged the "truth" of his day. He challenged the church by saying that the indulgences which were being

sold to ensure a loved-one's place in heaven was not the way that salvation works. Using our reading from Romans today, and the Gospels, Luther demonstrated to the church that paying your way to heaven just isn't true. Luther wanted to get at what was true: that we are saved by grace through faith in Christ.

And today we read how Christ tells his disciples if you want to know what is true, if you want to know how to live as a free person, apart from sin, and living in God's way, live in me. The scripture today says "if you continue in my word you are my disciples." The word translated as "continue" is the same word that is elsewhere translated "abide" or "live" or "stay" or "remain."

Jesus is saying if you want to know what is true, live as if I'm living with you during a pandemic lockdown all the time.

Live like Jesus is that friend or family member, or co-worker who you're on the same wavelength with. Jesus says, "Get on the same wavelength as me." Because the love, and life, and freedom found in Christ is the Truth.

Jesus says, "When you continue to abide, when you live continually, when you live as though we are the best of friends who never betray one another, who always have each other's backs, when you live as if I'm your friend who completes your sentences, and you complete mine, and we hum the same tune at the same time, if you live like this, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, because you're friends with the truth, because you've been living with the truth, and knowing me, being in real relationship with me, living as if I am next to you always in love, this will set you free."

You don't have to earn Jesus' favor in order for him to want to be in relationship with you. Jesus' life, death and resurrection have already done the work of salvation. Christ invites us to live in, with, and through him.

In this uncertain time, I urge you to cling not to politics, (though I encourage you to vote), not to take everything you read on Facebook as truth, not to cling to what you find on the internet that will really “own” somebody else. I urge to cling to the truth found in Jesus who is the Way the Truth and the Life. I urge you to cling to the relationships we have with one another as we continue to support each other with phone calls, visiting safely, reassuring words, and to cling to the truth that we are set free from competition, from earning salvation, set free from political parties, and find unity in the Word: the Word of love and peace that surpasses all understanding in and through Christ.

The love of God in Christ is the Truth. May we all continually abide in Christ.

Amen