
The Truth...

The Whole Truth



Message by Pastor Tom, Interim Lead Pastor
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Scripture Passage Exodus 20:16
Vancouver Chinese Baptist Church Vancouver, Canada



We begin with the words of a prayer.

Let the words of my mouth

And the meditation of my heart

Be acceptable in your sight

O lord, my rock and my redeemer.

Let me tell you a story so that we will see what happens when lies and deceit run amok in a family and when people live in the turmoil of dishonesty.

We find the story in Genesis 27 for us. It is a story of a dysfunctional family, a story about what happens when deceit and lies take over.

Here is the setting, the context: Isaac is married to Rebekah and they have twin sons, Jacob and Esau.

Jacob is his mother's favourite. Jacob is also the schemer, never buy a used camel from Jacob!

One day Esau sold his birthright to Jacob for a bowl of stew. It is a great story about people who sell their future for instant gratification today and who will be hungry again tomorrow. But that is a story for another time.

In our story, Isaac is getting old, his eyes are failing and it is time for him to pass on the blessing to his eldest son, Esau. To get

ready to give his blessing, Isaac tells Esau to go and prepare some tasty meat, the kind of dish he really likes.

But Rebekah gets involved in the scheme. (remember Jacob is her favourite) She tells Jacob to get in there first and he will get the blessing of the father. Jacob says that's not going to work. Esau is hairy. While he has smooth skin, Rebekah says, get some goat skins and put them on your arms. The old man will never know.

But Isaac is not sure. He hears the voice of Jacob but feels the skin of Esau. He starts to question him.

20 Isaac asked his son, "How did you find it so quickly, my son?" "The LORD your God gave me success," he replied.

21 Then Isaac said to Jacob, "Come near so I can touch you, my son, to know whether you really are my son Esau or not."

22 Jacob went close to his father Isaac, who touched him and said, "The voice is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau."

23 He did not recognize him, for his hands were hairy like those of his brother Esau; so he blessed him.

24 "Are you really my son Esau?" he asked. "

Jacob has a moment in which he can tell the truth, get out of this charade. He can end the pretence and the lying, but instead he say, I am," he replied. That is the final nail is the deception.

But Isaac blesses him. Then Esau returns. He hears what has happened and he is furious.

Verse 35 Isaac realizes what has happened. He cannot believe it. He is beside himself. He is ready to kill him.

35 But he said, "Your brother came deceitfully and took your blessing."

Rebekah tells Jacob to get out of town because Esau is ready to kill him. She arranges for him to go away for a few days to her brother Laban in Haran. Laban is another piece of work. There Jacob meets in Laban someone who is trickier and more deceptive than he is. Again another story for another time. Rebekah says to Jacob, it will just be for a few days. It actually turns out to be 20 years. That is the high price of deception.

This is a story of a dysfunctional family and the dysfunction is exaggerated and fuelled by lying and deceit. It is a story of a

family riddled with duplicity and falsehood. It tells us what happens when one lie is piled on top of another. One dishonest statement leads to another. There is exponential growth in deception and cheating.

It sets the stage for us as we think about this word from God. Not to bear false witness and with that. The necessity of telling the truth. We all know this – the issue is do we live it?

So while we do see an emphasis in the commandments which are negative. Do not ... we can learn a great deal as we turn them inside out and move from the negative to the positive.

God's people do not murder ... because they believe in the sanctity of life.

God's people do not commit adultery ... rather they nurture a healthy marriage.

God's people do not steal ... they live with honesty.

God's people do not lie ... rather they speak the truth.

One of the great words in the Christian faith and life is **GRACE** we want to be touched by grace. We sing about amazing grace. We pray for grace to come and touch our lives. We need grace.

But we need to recognize that when grace comes into our life, grace brings a friend. Grace has a companion. Her name is **TRUTH**.

John 1:17 says, grace and truth were realized by Jesus Christ. Jesus brings grace and truth hand in hand. They are like Siamese twins. They are welded together. You cannot understand one without the other.

GOD'S GRACE CALLS US TO BE TRUTHFUL WITH OURSELVES.

Now that sounds strange. Aren't we always truthful with ourselves. The truth is, no we are not!

One of the most common and dangerous games we can play on ourselves is the game of self-deception. Before we deceive anyone else, we have deceived ourselves. Before we lie to anyone else, we have lied to ourselves. Here is some of the most basic psychology you will find in the word of God.

7 tricks of self-deception. 7 ways in which we can lie to ourselves. These are headings, you have to fill in the details. Think about them in your own life.

1. If we think we won't reap what we have sown we are deceiving ourselves.

Galatians 6:

7 Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows.

One of the most common acts of self-deception is to think that consequences are not connected to choices. We think that we can choose one thing and not have to accept the consequences that go with that. We are always free to choose. We are never free to choose the consequences that accompany the choices we are making. They are welded together.

If we think otherwise, we are kidding ourselves we are lying to ourselves.

2. If we think that hearing God's word is sufficient and we are not obligated to practice it, we are playing the game of self-deception.

James 1:22

22 Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.

Spiritual growth does not happen when we read the Bible or come to church. It happens when we take a truth and new begin to put it to work in our lives. Our maturity is not defined by what we know. It is defined and determined by what we do.

3. We are deceiving ourselves if we think we can say all the right things in worship and then say harsh and unkind things.

James 1:26

26 If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless.

4. If we think we can give equal billing to God and materialism in our lives at the same time, we are conning ourselves.

Mark 4:19

18 Still others, like seed sown among thorns, hear the word;

19 but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful.

5. If we think we are Christians are born again and yet continue in a sinful lifestyle, we are living in deception.

1 Cor 6:9

9 Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders

10 nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.

6. If we think that we can run around with the wrong crowd and not be influenced by them we are kidding ourselves.

1 Cor 15:33

33 Do not be misled: "Bad company corrupts good character."

When we think about peer pressure, our tendency is to think of that only in the context of young people. Peer pressure is also an adult issue. All of us are influenced by the company we keep.

7. If we think that we have arrived and don't need anymore growth or change, we are deceiving ourselves.

1st John 1:8

8 If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.

Remember the story of the prodigal son. Perhaps the best known story that Jesus tells. It is the timeless story of the young man who left home to find freedom and enjoy the good life of wine, women and song. So he heads off to the bright lights of the big city. Pretty soon he is in the gutter, morally and physically. As he throws up one

more time he think to himself as he is binning for food, trying to find some cold pizza in the garbage. Imagine as he lines up outside some downtown church to get a meal on a cold rainy night. He thinks, so this is the good life that I wanted!

The person he was lying to the most was really himself, a great line in the story which is really the turn-around line. **He came to himself.** His problem was not with his father and all his rules or the chores that needed done. His problem was not with his obnoxious self-righteous goody-two-shoes brother. His problem was that he was lying to himself.

So grace enters our lives. Grace comes arm in arm with truth.

GOD'S GRACE CALLS US TO BE TRUTHFUL WITH ONE ANOTHER.

Ephesians 4:15

15 Instead, speaking the truth in love, [lit. Truthing in love] we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ.

Ephesians 4: 25

25 Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body.

That sounds so simple, yet we have to see that in many of our day to day conversations we falls short.

Sometimes our speaking in love falls short of the truth. Sometimes are speaking the truth falls short of love.

We are called to truthful love and to loving truth. Not always easy! Some rungs on a ladder that we may help us that bring love and truth together in communication. Again these are headings, you have to fill in the details.

1. Communication that is loving and truthful does not hide behind excuses.

We so quickly say, it wasn't my fault. The foundation to good communication always lies in truth and truth begins with the reality that we will not hide behind excuses.

If we have made a mistake, we need to own up to that. We need to accept responsibility for our own actions and decisions. This is where honesty begins.

2. Communication that is loving and truthful does not set traps for people.

We can engage with people in ways that set traps for them. Sometimes we say, we set them up. Or we dig holes for them to fall into and we are delighted

when they do or we stab them in the back.

All of this destructive.

Once again the Scriptures are instructive for us.

Mark 10:2

Some Pharisees came and tested him by asking, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?"

They are trying to trick Jesus.

1st John 2:10

10 Whoever loves his brother lives in the light, and there is nothing in him to make him stumble.

The key word is stumbling. The Greek word is scandalon from which we get our English word scandal. However this was a word that mean the part of a trap to which the bait was attached that sprung the trap. It is the trigger that springs the trap.

Communication that is gracious and truthful does not set traps for people. Rather it nurtures health, even allowing healthy disagreement.

3. Communication that is loving and truthful does not give mixed messages.

Sometimes we can give off coded messages.

Our yes = sometimes means no

Our no = sometimes means yes.

We say one thing and our entire body language shouts another message.

When our children were small used to ask me about going somewhere I often answered "we'll see". Then they learned what that really meant, even before I figured out what I meant.

"We'll see" meant, when I decide and tell you, the answer will be no but I have not told you that yet.

We need to learn to say what we mean and mean what we say.

Sometimes we say, I don't care, when we really do care. We say it doesn't matter to me when it really does matter.

Story about husband and wife driving. She sees a sign for a restaurant up ahead. She says. would you like to stop for a cup of coffee?

He says, no thanks.

The restaurant comes into view and he keeps on driving. They drive past it.

It gets real quiet in the car. It starts to feel cold. He thinks the

heater is not working, eventually he says, what's wrong?

She replies, nothing!

What was she really saying, I want to stop for a cup of coffee.

Why was it so hard to say what we really would like?

4. Communication is loving and truthful is based on honesty.

To be honest does not mean that we have to tell everything to everyone all the time. Rather it means that we say what is needed to be said to the right person at the right time.

Dishonesty is not only altering the facts about what we are saying. Exaggeration, distortion, misrepresentation, it can also include failing to say what needs to be said at that time.

Sometimes people share too much with too many people too often. They need to develop the ability to carry their own load. Others share too little with too few infrequently and they suffer in silence like martyrs. They need to let others share and carry their burden.

When we hide behind a mask of dishonesty, we are preventing the flow of healing truth.

When our lives are touched by grace we realise that we have nothing to lose and when they

are touched by truth, we realise that we have nothing to hide.

5. Communication that is loving and truthful addresses issues promptly – it does not let them build up.

I have shared this truth with you before – but here goes again.

Ephesians 4:

26 "In your anger do not sin" : Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry,

27 and do not give the devil a foothold.

The word for anger at the beginning of this thought is orge – which gives us our word orgy.

Then the word for anger at the end of the verse is the same word but with a prefix which makes it stronger. It intensifies the word. There is more anger. It has built up a head of steam.

It is teaching us something that we all know. When we let anger build up, when we leave things unaddressed and not dealt with, anger builds up.

The answer is to deal with things promptly. Communication that is living and truthful will do all it can to deal with things when they are in their infancy.

6. Communication that is loving and truthful will address the issue directly with the person involved. .

Matthew 18

15. "If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over.

When we get drawn into triangles, we are involving people who are neither part of the problem nor part of the solution. It is guaranteed with the issue will go off the rails and any hope of good communication that is marked with honesty and love is out the window.

#7 Communication that is loving and truthful requires good listening skills.

Many times we are not listening at all. We are just waiting for our turn to talk! Some of us do not even wait. Have you ever been introduced to someone and a few seconds later, you realise that you cannot remember their name?

Communication that is bathed with truth and love requires exceptional listening, not just to the words but to meaning, to emotion, listening with the heart to the heart.

What will it mean for you this week to practice good communication, which means communication that is full of grace and truth?

Think of a conversation you had this week in which at least one of these communication skills was broken. Now think ahead to next week, how can you do better to tell the truth.

Postscript:

The satire of this command. The paradox of this challenge, not to give false witness against someone but to do the hard work of good and truthful communication, is that we are called and summoned to live lives that are truthful by someone who was tried and sentenced on the testimony of false witnesses, who was condemned by false accusations.

Yet in his heart Jesus was open and transparent before everyone and everything. When we look into the life of Jesus, we find grace and truth delicately intertwined, like dance partners who cannot be separated. They call us to be a people who will live out of a deep well of truthful grace and gracious truth.

We stand and live before the prayer of David more than we know.

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