

# “The Truth of Christ”

November, 6, 2022  
Remembrance Service

Josh Bennett  
Wall Street United Church

## **John 14:1-7** NIV

*“Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going.”*

*Thomas said to him, “Lord, we don’t know where you are going, so how can we know the way?” Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really know me, you will know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.”*

War is the worst aspect of humanity. It is literally hell on earth. It destroys societies, rips people apart, and destroys life itself. It brings out the worst in us. And yet, very sadly, war is sometimes necessary. St. Augustine, writing in the 4<sup>th</sup> century established the conditions for what he termed a “just war” from a Christian context, to reconcile Christian pacifisms with the reality of the world. As Christians we seek to live in a peaceful society where everyone is equal before God, where the values of truth, justice, and hope prevail. But if such a country is threatened by a force that is opposed to those values, and the choices are: be persecuted and enslaved by a dictator who is opposed to everything we believe in, or go to war — then, again sadly, war is necessary to preserve our values and to stand up for what is right.

And because we sometimes need to go to war, we are eternally thankful and grateful for those men and women who put on a uniform and serve, and sometimes sacrifice their very lives so that we can be here this morning, free to worship God in community.

But how do we know when war is just? War is a very confusing thing. Pretty much everyone can get behind why we went to war in WWII. WWI; not so much. For the war in Vietnam our society was extremely divided, as with the second Iraq war.

Today we are living in very confusing and disturbing times. It’s hard to make sense of everything that is going on these days. War has once again broken out in Europe. Canada is not technically at war with Russia, but our military is engaged in supplying Ukraine with military equipment and supplies. As Putin continues to threaten an escalation we are standing at

the precipice of a wider war — a war that could involve the use of nuclear weapons.

There is another war that we're fighting globally that is connected to the war in Ukraine. There is a **war on truth**. We are now living in what many describe as a "post-truth" era, where objective facts don't matter to people as much as their own personal feelings. If something feels true, then it is.

We see it in the extreme right wing. Roughly 30% of Americans believe that Trump really won the 2020 election, even though there is clear evidence to the contrary. There's even clear evidence that Trump himself knew there was no mass voter fraud, and yet he continues to push the big lie that the election was stolen. This resulted in the January 6<sup>th</sup> attack on Congress on the day Congress was to formally declare Joe Biden the President. And as we approach the mid-term elections, we are seeing an escalation of violence in the US.

But this war on Truth is not just on the right wing, it's also seen in the extreme left wing as well. There is a notion on the "woke left" that everyone has their own truth. "That's your truth." "My truth is this. Your truth is that." Again, it's a belief that your own personal emotions take precedence over objective facts. The left wing has also abandoned their traditional roots of bringing the social gospel to politics.

Here in Canada the NDP was founded by ministers and pastors – people like J.S. Woodsworth and Stanley Knowles, both United Church Ministers who founded the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation, the CCF, in the 1930s – the party that would become the New Democratic Party, the NDP in 1961. The NDP's first leader was Tommy Douglas who was a Baptist Minister. Rev. Bill Blaikie who was a United Church Minister, and an NDP Member of Parliament from 1979 until 2008, died this past fall. He was the last remnant of that old social gospel tradition in the NDP.

Today the NDP and the extreme left wing espouse largely secular values, and large swaths of the left have become hostile to the Christian faith.

More and more people on the right and the left are abandoning truth.

Coinciding with this era is a decline in church membership and attendance. I don't think this is just a coincidence. I believe those two are related.

This war on truth is not new. Lies, misinformation, and complete disregard for truth were around when Christ walked on this earth. Truth was a central message of Christ's ministry. Christ often started his teachings with, "I tell you the truth".

In the scripture reading for today, Christ is talking with his disciples, and he says, "You know the way where we are going." And the disciples answer, "Lord, we don't know where we are going!" and Christ answers, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

This is kind of the way it is with Christians today – we don't always know where we are going, and we don't always get it right. And Christian nations don't always get it right. The U.S, is a very Christian country, yet in the 1800's they enslaved black people, and for over a hundred years they have struggled with this fact. Here in Canada, we have treated our indigenous peoples horribly, and atrocities were committed to indigenous children in residential schools.

Part of following Christ is admitting to the truth, and facing up to our ugly past as a country. You can't have forgiveness without truth. You can't have reconciliation without truth. You can't move on and heal until you've met face to face with the truth. And that's part of following Christ. Christ is the truth. He makes us face the truth, and then he helps us to heal, reconcile, and build new relationships and community around us.

Christ tells us to follow him. Christ said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life".

We live in a very confusing world, but when we follow Christ, things start to make sense. There's a clarity that comes with the truth of Christ.

Again, Christian countries don't always get it right. But there are people and governments who have abandoned truth completely, and they really get it wrong. Putin's Russia has abandoned truth. Not only is Russia waging war in Ukraine, lying about everything, the government of Russia has also been fueling lies, disinformation, and conspiracy theories on social media for years.

And here's the thing: When we become untethered from Truth, we become untethered from morality. And when countries are untethered from truth, atrocities tend to follow.

When you look throughout History, the worst atrocities are from atheist countries; countries who have abandoned God, abandoned truth, and ultimately abandoned morality. The Soviet Union and Nazi Germany are obvious examples. They committed mass genocide the likes we've never seen before or since. And in dictatorships around the world today, human rights violations are rampant.

In scripture there's no greater example of the battle on truth than the famous conversation between Christ and Pilate. This was when Christ was on trial the day of his crucifixion, when Jesus says to Pilate, "In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me." To which Pilate scoffs and says, "What is truth?"

*The truth is we need more world leaders who believe in truth. We need more world leaders who have faith.*

When I think of world leaders of faith, one shining example is the late Queen Elizabeth II. The Queen was a devout Christian, and she made her faith an integral part of her everyday life. Her Christian faith really came out in her annual Christmas speeches. Her Christmas speeches were one of the few speeches that she wrote herself every year. In her first Christmas speech as Queen she said, "Pray for me ... that God may give me wisdom and strength to carry out the solemn promises I shall be making, and that I may faithfully serve Him and you, all the days of my life."

In her Christmas broadcast in the year 2000, she said, "For me the teachings of Christ and my own personal accountability before God provide a framework in which I try to lead my life."

What I found amazing about Queen Elizabeth was that she was the head of state, and the head of the military for 32 sovereign states in her lifetime. Every day people bowed to her. Can you imagine every day, everyone around you bowing to you? Even Prime Ministers and Presidents would bow their knee to her. She was a counsellor for Prime Ministers and Presidents for over 70 years. And to top it all off, she was one of the wealthiest people in the world! And yet everyday she bowed her knee to Christ. Her personal model for leadership was a Servant King, who came to this world to testify to the truth.

A few days before Christmas in 1939, when she was only 13 years old, she could see the anxiety that her father, King George VI, had in his eyes. Another World War had broken out. Elizabeth had just read a poem. Not a famous poem, and not a famous author. But the poem moved the 13-year-old Princess of Wales, and she gave the poem to her dad, hoping that it would lift his spirits. It did — So much so that he quoted the poem a few days later in his Christmas radio address. The poem is called “The Gate of the Year” by Minnie Louise Haskins, and it goes like this:

*And I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year:*

*"Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown".*

*And he replied:*

*"Go out into the darkness and put your hand into the Hand of God.*

*That shall be to you better than light and safer than a known way".*

*So I went forth, and finding the Hand of God, trod gladly into the night.*

*And He led me towards the hills and the breaking of day in the lone East.*

The outbreak of World War II was a confusing and scary time. Like today, lies, misinformation and conspiracy theories were everywhere. And it took strong leaders to stand up for the truth. King George VI was one of those leaders. So was Winston Churchill, who had been exposing the lies of the Nazis for years leading up to the war.

But it also happened at the community level as well. In Canada and the U.S., the 1920's and 30's saw a decline in church attendance, but when war broke out in 1939 church attendance went up. People looked to the church for meaning. They looked to the church for truth. And knowing and understanding that truth, the truth that can only come from Christ, the allied countries went to war knowing exactly what they were fighting for. They were fighting for truth.

So, to come back to my question at the beginning of this sermon – how do we know when it's a “just war”? We know when we follow Christ. When we follow Christ, truth is like a shining light, and morality and meaning come sharply into focus.

I hope and pray the war in Ukraine does not escalate. I hope that we don't have to go to war as a country. But I do know that if war does come our way, we will be on the side of truth.

But let me close with this bit of truth. The War – the war on truth – has already been decided. We are winning the war. When Christ died on the

cross, he descended into hell, defeated the devil, defeated lies, defeated despair, and defeated death itself, and Christ rose from the grave victorious, bringing truth into the world like a beacon. The war isn't over; but that victory on the cross assures us that we will win.

It's similar to how historians and military strategists view D-Day in 1944. Everyone agrees that once D-Day happened – once the Allies invaded France, and held the beach, victory was assured. It was only a matter of time. The war wasn't over, and the bloodiest battles were yet to happen, but victory was ours. We had more of everything – at that point in the war, when Germany lost a tank, they were lucky to replace it, and even luckier if they had someone who could drive it. When we lost a tank, there were 10 more being unloaded on the beach. D-Day was the turning point of World War II.

That's what Christ's victory on the cross did for the cosmic battle for truth. We are still fighting the lies, the deception, and the despair from the enemy, but we are on the winning side and victory is assured.

Christ has died.

Christ is risen.

Christ will come again.

Thanks be to God. Amen.