

The Truth of Being Beloved

By: Rachel Helton

March 17, 2021. Tonight's testimonial comes from Rachel Helton, who shares with us the idea that finding the truth can be complicated. Some things that are not true can sound and almost feel true. And some things are so absurd that they sound like lies, but are actually true.

Reading: [John 8:12-20](#), [John 3:16](#)

*** Transcript ***

Have any of you ever played the game Two Truths and a Lie? So I've played this game both as a kid in the middle of the night at slumber parties, and as an adult as an icebreaker activity. And so if you haven't played it, here's how it works: you tell the group of people that you're with two true statements (usually about yourself) and one that's a lie, and then the group has to try and figure out which of the things you're saying is the lie. So if it were my turn, it might go something like this: as a kid I used to ride my bike to my grandma's house almost every day; I once had a pet goat; I learned to drive a tractor before I learned to drive a car. Okay, those are my three things. And depending on how well you know me, and how much you know about my life as a kid growing up on our family's farm in rural Illinois, you may or may not be able to pick out which one of those is the lie.

So interestingly when you're playing this game, the more absurd your truths are, the more complicated it is to tease out which one of your statements is the lie — because they all sound suspiciously untrue, right? So if I were to say: I once rode an elephant through the streets of a city in India; I once came within 20 feet of a leopard shark while snorkeling in the Great Barrier Reef; and I once walked on a suspension bridge made of rope above the rainforest canopy in west Africa. Now which one of those is the lie? It gets a little bit trickier, right? Because they all sound somewhat far-fetched and untrue, right?

And on the flip side, if your lie is really close to the truth, it makes it hard to spot. So this is my last example, I promise — and if you want to play this game on your own later, you are welcome to do that. So, here are my last three statements: today is the birthday of a kid who's pretty special to me; on my next birthday I'll be 45; next Sunday is the baptismal birthday of one of my own kids. It might be hard to find the lie, because those three statements probably all sound like they probably could be true.

So all that to say: finding the truth can be complicated. And that's maybe why I've struggled to put down into words the reflection that I wanted to share tonight. The more we know about the subject or the person, the easier it is. But sometimes, it requires us to trust that something that sounds completely absurd, just might actually be true. And sometimes it requires us to question whether something that sounds "mostly true" might in fact be a lie.

So when our son Isaac was a baby, Easter fell on the same date as it does this year. So I've been thinking a lot lately about Lent from the year 2010. The first time we ever took Isaac out in public, we took him to the Ash Wednesday service at our church — and he wasn't even a month old yet then. When I went forward to be marked with ashes, our pastor reached out and marked the cross on my forehead with ashes, and then without even a moment's hesitation he reached down and traced the cross on the forehead of the baby who was sleeping in my arms.

I remember thinking wow, this kid hasn't even been baptized yet. He hasn't even received a blessing at communion. For goodness sakes, his belly button hasn't even healed. He had just arrived to the world,

and here we were marking that he would one day return to dust — that his life on earth, just like mine and yours, would someday end. And the truth of that felt so very heavy to me. And it wouldn't be hard for me to get stuck in the weight of that truth — the truth that we are sinful and mortal.

A good friend recently reminded me though that the ashes that mark our foreheads on Ash Wednesday are mixed with the oil that anoints us at our baptisms, so that that mark of our mortality is also the promise of life, the promise of being chosen and beloved — not because of anything we do or don't do, but because of who God is.

The truth of being beloved, no matter who I am or what I do or don't do, is almost too absurd to sound true. The lie that I sometimes hear myself saying to myself is that I can earn God's love, maybe even that I *should* somehow earn God's love — because that almost sounds true by the standards of the world.

But there's another lie that sometimes sneaks in — that because I am freed by grace, because I am given it without having to earn it, that I am also freed from any responsibility. And that part is simply not true.

In tonight's reading, Jesus says in John 8:12, "I am the light of the world... the light of life." And in Sunday's reading from John chapter 3 we heard that God so loved the world that God sent his only Son into it, not for the sake of wagging an accusing finger at us, but to bring about justice and to put the world right again. And I really think that we have a responsibility to be a part of that ongoing work of bringing about God's justice and love in the world.

So in a world of uncertainty, of indistinction where sometimes it's hard to tell the truth from the lies, in a world where we do not need to look hard to be reminded that we will one day die, the truth that I'm holding onto right now, no matter how hard it is sometimes to believe, is that I am beloved — beloved by a God who is life. And being loved by the God of life frees me from trying to earn God's love. It frees me to focus on loving others, and to participate in bringing about God's justice. That is my responsibility.

And just for the record: I've never driven a tractor, and I'll be 44 (not 45) on my next birthday, and I've never snorkeled the Great Barrier Reef. And as far as those truths go? Well, if you're watching, happy birthday Xavier!

*** Keywords ***

2021, Christ Lutheran Church, Webster Groves, testimonial, podcast, transcript, YouTube, video, Rachel Helton, John 8:12-20, John 3:16