

We are living in a world where real truth and facts are no longer important. I'm a Facebook user, and over time my feeds receive additional adverts from other sources. One in particular that I will get is Football news. So in the past couple of weeks it would say things like 'Messi close to signing for Man City'. Now all that is is speculation, but suddenly it appears in headlines to make you believe that Lionel Messi is about to sign a contract. I think in recent years we've all seen the incredible fabrications made by Donald Trump in order to win voters – and there's a man that will go to any lengths to convince people that he is telling the truth. You might remember how he claimed that the previous President Barack Obama was not actually worthy of his American citizenship. And even though the facts showed him to be a liar, there was a swathe of Americans who believed in conspiracies that actually it was time to remove Obama from their country.

This morning I typed into google as an experiment the phrase 'Who is Jesus?' and lo and behold there were 1.7 billion pages of results waiting to answer that question for me. And we are to think therefore that everyone of those pages is full of truth.

Truth has now become an individual thing – I can believe one thing, but another person has the right to believe another thing. This loss of objective truth has permeated so far that it's now starting to have serious consequences for the way we run our society. Unfortunately it now seems that whoever shouts the loudest, or whoever has the most influence, or whoever has the most power will win the day rather than objective truth.

The gospel of Jesus Christ stands in stark contrast to this situation. The gospel is itself a claim to objective truth. And it's a truth that stands above us all. It's a truth that humbles us, disciplines us, and severely limits our designs on power. We are all held accountable to this truth. And we can hold others accountable to the same truth. It's not that there's one truth for me, and another truth for you. There is a truth for us all. This means, of course, that there are lies. And Christians, says Paul, are people who don't tell lies. They tell the truth. Especially to one another from our reading today in verse 25. *'Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbour, for we are all members of one body'*.

In Ephesians, the fundamental "truth" is the truth of the gospel. Close to the start of his letter, Paul describes his readers as those who have heard and believed "the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation" (Ephesians 1:13). The gospel is the message about Jesus Christ. It proclaims that through Jesus' death and resurrection, God has saved us from sin, death, and judgment. The gospel tells us that we've been humbled by God's grace and can be confident in his love for us. This fundamental truth teaches us the truth about God, the truth about the world, and the truth about ourselves. So it changes everything about our lives—particularly our lives together as believers. Being a Christian means holding on to this truth and living it out. Rather than following false teachings, we need to be "speaking the truth in love" to one another, as members of Christ's body (Ephesians 4:15). We are to learn and teach this to one another (Ephesians 4:21). We are also to change and grow, as we seek to live righteous lives, devoted to God, all based on this truth (Ephesians 4:24)

Truth, then, is foundational to who we are as Christians. That means that truth must permeate our relationships with one another, and especially our speech with one another. Paul says here: "speak the truth—each one of you—with your neighbour". Paul is quoting here from the Old Testament book of Zechariah. Zechariah chapter 8 is a vision of God's people as a community of truth. God promises that he will dwell with his people in a "true city" (verse 3) and that he will be their God "in truth and in righteousness" (verse 8). So

God's people should each "speak the truth" to their neighbour (verse 16) and "love truth and peace" (verse 19). If this is the case in Zechariah's vision, how much more is it the case for those of us who are members of Christ's body today. As Paul puts it here, "we are members of one another". We belong to Christ—together. So truth is to permeate our lives and our relationships – and that includes within the church family.

Our boys have been taught that honesty is the best policy as eventually they will be found out, but sometimes they try their hand. And I wonder why in all of us we have a propensity to not just be honest in certain issues. Do we think that bending the truth will achieve a better outcome for ourselves? And in the Church it can be so easy to not tell all the facts in order that it makes us look more impressive. But we are really deceiving our role in God's Church and his purposes for us. He ultimately has a plan for what he wants us to do, and our exaggerations or making more of our position by massaging the facts doesn't bring glory to him.

Rumours or Gossip however in the Church are the one thing that I hate. A few weeks ago I was in visiting someone in hospital and they told me something about another church member. What astounded me was how they had heard about it while in a hospital bed. It all starts with a little bit of information, and then it's passed on, and before you know it everyone and his mother knows about it. We too easily talk *about* each other, without talking *to* one another and listening to one another. Gossip is one of the most insidious forms of self-deception around. It makes us feel like we're speaking "the truth" to one another when we're actually speaking lies.

As a Church family we need to take time out to reflect about how we need to be filled with the truth of the Gospel in every situation we face. Our habit is to use our words, not primarily to speak the truth, but to achieve other goals: to increase our own prestige, to get people to do things for us.

But as followers of Christ we are to be people who believe in the greatest truth of all: the word of truth, the gospel of our salvation. And that gospel teaches us—demands, even—that we must speak the truth in every situation. So how do we get more truth into our conversations? I think we need to immerse ourselves more and more in scripture. I think we need to decide when we need to speak and what it is we are going to say. Is it worth saying? Is it truthful? Is it a word of encouragement? Does it bring glory to God? Does it even need to be said? What does scripture say about the issue? And maybe then this will help you decide what to say and actually whether it needs said at all.

Ultimately all of this reading today is about imitating God and therefore this is no small task. We must be determined to walk in truth. Therefore as a community we all need to work together with a collective desire to be more like him, in love, in truth, in honesty, reminding ourselves of the beginning of Chapter 5 to follow God's example, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.